



Toward More Equitable and Inclusive Spaces for Primatology and Primate Conservation

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Professional societies, especially international ones, are strengthened by including a diversity of members from a variety of communities. The International Primatological Society as well as other societies have recognized the importance of these strengths by forming new committees dedicated to issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity. Yet it is imperative that such efforts move beyond checking the boxes for how many different groups of people we have in our membership toward institutional changes that transform the society and create safe inclusive spaces where everyone who wishes to join can fully engage in the work of the society. For many communities, their engagement will require that societies recognize and address how those communities have been or continue to be marginalized from the society. It will mean questioning the institutional systems and structures that continue to reflect and privilege Western worldviews over others. It will mean decolonizing science and practice.

I am a primatologist who focuses my research and practice on primate conservation efforts. While I enjoy my work and find it rewarding, I have often felt divided between my professional and personal selves in spaces where primate conservation occurs or is discussed and planned. Although I work and have been educated at elite research institutions in the United States, I have an indigenous ethnic background that is very distant from these institutions. My extended family are Saami nomadic reindeer herders who live north of the Arctic Circle in Sweden and Norway. Saami livelihoods are threatened by climate change as well as infrastructure development for vacation homes, energy plants (wind/water), mines, and petroleum terminals within traditional herding grounds. As Saami are stewards of pastoral tundra ecosystems, their interests may be in line with the goals of many biodiversity conservation projects. However, the Saami, like many other indigenous peoples, have experienced systematic oppression and forced assimilation, as well as dispossession of land and livelihood not only for

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development but also in the name of conservation. For the Saami, any new conservation efforts are embedded in this history.

And, we are not alone. The experience of the Saami with conservation mirrors the experiences of many indigenous peoples as well as other populations and communities marginalized by imperialism or colonialism. Many of these communities are also ones that primate conservationists and primatologists work with or around, or are communities that primatologists like me may identify with. My Saami ethnicity is a part of who I am and the worldview I carry, which informs the way I approach scientific theory, the research questions I ask, and the process by which I conduct my research and conservation practice. Just as conservation cannot be separated from its oppressive history for the Saami, I cannot be separated from my ethnic heritage when I step into professional settings. I am acutely aware of instances when primate research and conservation projects may be perpetuating colonial dynamics, yet often I cannot find space to discuss this with my colleagues. The cultural and historical worldview that I hold is not detrimental, but rather is an asset for the primatology field. Myriad other people have multifaceted perspectives like mine, and our unique worldviews and histories as people can make us better primatologists and primate conservationists.

Other professional scientific societies such as the Ecological Society of America, the American Fisheries Society, and the Society for Conservation Biology have supported the work of their diversity, equity, and inclusion committees by including training at leadership levels for the board and executive officers. Some have also conducted an audit of the current status of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the society to then develop goals and a plan to improve, with associated metrics to measure progress toward those goals. Explicit accountability for the plan is established at leadership levels, for example, through a dedicated officer or staff person, or transparent reporting. Expanded programmatic efforts within these societies also contribute to this work, such as dedicated grants and fellowships, long-term mentorships, and partnerships with organizations and programs that already serve communities of interest (Foster *et al.* 2014). Of course, all of these efforts require time and funding, so another key role of a professional society is to encourage donor investment to support all of these actions and transformations. The International Primatological Society has taken the first step by establishing a committee and I look forward to the development of plans and actions specific to improving diversity, equity, and inclusion in our community, following the example of these other societies.

These transformations are not only essential to more fully engage all of the primatologists already in our community and new members as they join, but will also improve our research and primate conservation endeavors. Co-creation of research with local communities and more inclusive processes for conservation can lead to new and more holistic research questions (Blair *et al.* 2017; Sterling *et al.* 2017) and more site-specific, sustainable, and cost-effective conservation outcomes (Tauli-Corpus *et al.* 2018). Knowledge from indigenous and local communities is crucial to improve our understanding of many complex issues that we face today in primate conservation such as climate change and wildlife trade (Thạch *et al.* 2018).

Transforming our institutions and practices to be more inclusive and equitable will only benefit our field and our community as a whole, not just by enabling all of its members to fully engage in the work that we do, but also by improving and advancing primatology itself.

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