

Genetic Diversity and its Role in Ecosystem Resilience

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Introduction

The variety of life is referred to as biodiversity. The concept of biodiversity encompasses the entire biological hierarchy from molecules to ecosystems, or the entire taxonomic hierarchy from alleles to kingdoms, as well as all of the logical classes that exist between individuals, genotypes, populations, species, and so on, and all of the various members of all of those classes. It also includes the variety of living interactions and processes at all of these organisational levels. This is such a broad description that it has left the definition of "biodiversity" ambiguous and ensured that its measurement remains arbitrary. Both issues are widely acknowledged among conservation biologists, but little is being done to address them.

Description

As a result, it is still difficult to apply the term for practical purposes such as influencing public policy or incorporating biodiversity protection into land use planning and management strategies. For those purposes, a much more precise definition is required. Planners and policymakers must understand what they are aiming for. In this paper, we review some recent developments in biodiversity conceptualization and use them to try to add some precision to the concept of biodiversity, making quantitative assessment for policy and planning applications more feasible. This is accomplished first by relocating the discussion of what biodiversity means from the abstract space in which it has recently occurred to the specific historically contingent context in which it originated [1,2].

This is the context in which short-term human needs and desires led to widespread destruction of the planet's biological inheritance, giving rise to a movement to protect that inheritance. This movement's implicit goal is to protect the diversity of life, which is distinct from the equally legitimate goal of preserving specific species, though the two are not mutually exclusive.

When biodiversity is considered in this context, two interesting conclusions emerge, as will be demonstrated below. First, contrary to theorising that glorifies generality and de-contextualization, assessments of biodiversity and conservation strategies cannot ignore the fact that biodiversity is rooted in place – specific points on Earth at specific times. Second, while social (including economic) constraints frequently prevent biodiversity conservation goals from being fully met, it turns out that social constraints can frequently be incorporated into policy decisions with little negative impact on biodiversity conservation [3-5].

This forum convened only a few months after the establishment of the US Society for Conservation Biology. A clearly synergistic interaction between the use of the term "biodiversity" and the development of conservation biology as a discipline resulted in the re-configuration of environmental studies that we see today, with biodiversity conservation emerging as a central focus of environmental concern.

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Conclusion

Natural and semi-natural forest loss, primarily due to agriculture, is a major concern for biodiversity. Against this trend, the area of intensively managed plantation forests expands, and the implications for biodiversity are hotly debated. We present a comprehensive review of the function of plantation forests as habitat in comparison to other land cover types, investigate the effects on biodiversity at the landscape scale, and synthesise context-specific effects of plantation forestry on biodiversity. Natural forests are typically better suited as habitat for a broader range of native forest species than plantation forests, but there is abundant evidence that plantation forests can provide valuable habitat, even for some threatened and endangered species, and may contribute to biodiversity conservation through a variety of mechanisms.

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Conflict of Interest

Not applicable.

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