

Letter from the Editor

The growing business of human–wildlife conflict management



IN 1999, I was asked to present at the annual meeting of the International Biodeterioration and Biodegradation Society. The Society was formally established in 1969 as an international, multidisciplinary organization concerned with the biodeterioration of commercially important materials. The session I was asked to present in focused on wildlife damage management. The paper I presented was published in 2000 in the official journal of the Society, and it remains my most highly cited, downloaded, and read paper.

The paper was titled, “The emergence of human–wildlife conflict management: turning challenges into opportunities.” In the paper, I described the changing dynamics of the field of wildlife management. The basic thesis of the paper was that as wildlife populations increase in response to protection and management, so will human–wildlife conflicts. Concomitantly, human populations are also increasing, and as such, complicating this equation. In 2000, the world population was also increasing by 12% every decade and was estimated at 6 billion. As I pen this letter, the world population now is estimated at 7.5 billion and still growing at rate of 9% every 10 years. By 2050, >10 billion people will live on the planet.

In the past, rural residents, especially agricultural producers, bore the brunt of wildlife damage. More recently, urban residents and other wildlife stakeholders are increasingly experiencing wildlife damage. The phrases “animal damage control,” “problem wildlife management,” and “wildlife damage management” have been traditionally used to describe actions taken to reduce economic losses

to agricultural produce caused by wildlife. Now the phrase “human–wildlife conflict management” is being universally applied to these and other situations that involve any negative interactions between humans and wildlife. These conflicts can be either real or perceived, economic or aesthetic, social or political. Human–wildlife conflicts also may encompass damages to the individual that result from federal, state, or local legislation, regulations, or policies that are designed to protect or conserve wildlife, public benefits, and individual property rights.

Human–Wildlife Interactions is the only published journal that is devoted to better managing human–wildlife conflict with the specific purpose of enhancing human–wildlife interactions. The key word in both phases is “human.” Humans have the capability of making choices. These choices reflect our values, our needs, and maybe our ignorance.

Recently, a flock of bats (Chiroptera), made the headlines with an unscheduled and unnerving appearance at a U.S. National Basketball Association (NBA) basketball game. The bats descended from the rafters of Dallas Mavericks stadium and flittered among an unsuspecting crowd and players. Their appearance resulted in a suspension of the game as officials tried to net and remove the animals. One NBA basketball player joined the fray and snatched a bat that was flittering around him out of the air with his bare hand and deposited it in a garbage can off court.

The bat vs. basketball player action was featured on every major U.S. network news

show. One announcer lauded the player for his bravery in capturing a bat with his bare hand. Usually, those lauded for bravery—soldiers, firefighters, and law enforcement officers—are awarded a citation or a medal denoting their actions. However, for his actions, the NBA player was not recognized for his bravery, but rather he received a rabies vaccination because of his ignorance.

Human ignorance seems to be at the source of most human–wildlife conflicts and thus is society’s greatest challenge to wildlife management. The purpose of *HWI* is to help managers identify how public and private wildlife conservation agencies and organizations can better work with stakeholders to turn the new challenges into opportunities and ultimately increased support for professional management.

To aid in this massive communication effort, *HWI* is now a completely open access journal starting with our 2019 volume, which can now be accessed globally and viewed on cell phones anywhere there is an internet connection—including at NBA basketball games. Daily, *HWI* now has >100 articles viewed and read as well as articles downloaded in nearly 175 countries. Along with our publishing format change, we will also embark on a new marketing effort to engage a wider audience to better manage human–wildlife conflicts through research and education leading to increased awareness. We thank our contributing authors, associate editors, reviewers, and sponsors for making this possible.

Terry A. Messmer, Editor-in-Chief

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