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Rebuttals, retractions, and the peer-review process: clarifying *HWI* policies

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HUMAN–WILDLIFE INTERACTIONS (HWI) exists as a forum for professionals and engaged stakeholders to publish original contributions on all aspects of contemporary human–wildlife interactions. We seek to publish scientific research and management case studies that identify and report innovative conservation strategies, technologies, tools, and partnerships that can enhance human–wildlife interactions by mitigating human–wildlife conflicts. Our intent is to promote a dialogue among wildlife professionals and their stakeholders concerning contemporary management issues. In doing so, we hope to provide a repository for wildlife management science and case studies that document and share management experiences and lessons learned with stakeholders.

To ensure the papers *HWI* publishes are unbiased and based in the best available science, we have implemented a double-blind peer-review option, where neither the authors nor reviewers (referees) know each other's identity unless they choose to include identifying information. Our peer-reviewers are volunteers from the *HWI* database or other established scholars who we attempt to match to a paper based on their knowledge of the subject and/or the methods used. Thus, we hope the process will subject an author's scholarly work, research, or ideas to the scrutiny of others who are recognized experts in the same field.

The *HWI* editors assign manuscripts that have been accepted for review to an associate editor and 2–3 qualified referees to review the paper. We ask our referees to complete their reviews within 3 weeks. If they cannot, we attempt to recruit new referees. Our review process is further outlined in the *HWI* guidelines at <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/hwi/styleguide.html>.

The peer-review process, however, is not infallible. Referees can also have biases. Some

may be prejudiced against papers that contradict their research, beliefs, or perspectives. For this reason, we often allow authors to request or recommend referees or to request that certain people not be asked to review their paper. We evaluate each author request to ensure the purpose is not to try and avoid legitimate critiques of their submission.

Because the peer-review process is not perfect, most journals allow and even encourage readers who may have concerns about a published paper or new information relative to the content of published research to submit a letter to the editor or commentary to share their concerns. This level of transparency is essential to ensure scientific rigor.

Rebuttal to published papers

Given the limitations of the peer-review process, *HWI* has implemented a formal policy to encourage responses to published manuscripts that may question the results and/or add new information or insights to the subject matter. For these responses to be considered, they would have to be submitted using the *HWI* submission portal (<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/hwi/>) as a commentary, along with a cover letter describing the concerns and why the published paper may warrant further dialogue. The submissions would be reviewed by *HWI* editors for publication consideration. If selected for publication, the editors would notify the authors of the published manuscript in question and offer them the opportunity to formally respond or refute the commentary. The authors would be provided a copy of the commentary, and if they choose to respond, their response would also be reviewed for publication consideration. Our goal would be to publish the rebuttal or commentary as well as the response from the original author(s) in the same issue.

If the authors of the original article choose not to respond, the submitted response to the original manuscript would be published along with an editor's note referring to *HWI* policy and that the authors of the original article were given the opportunity to respond.

Retractions of published papers

Editors of *HWI* will not retract a previously published manuscript in response to submitted comments or a rebuttal requesting an article be retracted due to perceived errors or omissions in scientific process or conclusions. Instead, we will offer the opportunity for readers to comment on or refute the manuscript in question using the *HWI* rebuttal process described above. If the original authors of the published manuscript in question desire to retract their article, *HWI* editors will acknowledge their decision in an editor's note published along with the rebuttal commentary.

The editors also will not remove or unpublish the retracted paper from the journal; rather, the paper will be marked as retracted. The retraction will be noted in the journal metadata as well.

Notices of retraction will:

- be linked to the retracted manuscript in all online versions
- clearly identify the title and authors in the retraction heading or citation of the retracted manuscript
- be published promptly to minimize harmful effects
- be freely available to all readers
- clearly state who requested the retraction and why
- be objective, factual, and avoid inflammatory language

In this issue of *HWI*, you will find a commentary titled, "Tolerance of bearded vultures to human activities: response to Comor et al. (2019)." This paper was submitted to address reader concerns about Comor et al. (2019). Because of logistical reasons, Comor et al. (2019) were unable to provide the answers requested by Duriez et al. (2020) regarding the protocols, the quantitative data, or the small and unbalanced sample sizes. They did, however, request that their published article, Comor et al. (2019), be

retracted from the journal. We have complied with their request.

Literature cited

- Comor, V., N. Poulin, and M. Boos. 2019. Similar breeding success of bearded vultures in disturbed and undisturbed areas shows evidence of adaptation capabilities. *Human–Wildlife Interactions* 13:459–473.
- Duriez, O., A. Margalida, L. Albert, B. Arroyo, V. Couanon, H. Loustau, M. Razin, and J.-B. Mihoub. 2020. Tolerance of bearded vultures to human activities: response to Comor et al. (2019). *Human–Wildlife Interactions* 14(3): in press.

TERRY A. MESSMER (photo unavailable) is the editor-in-chief of *Human–Wildlife Interactions*.