

CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

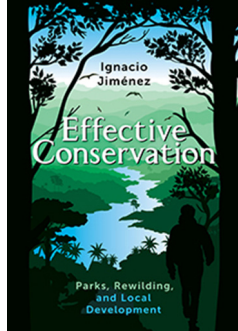
Effective Conservation: Parks, Rewilding, and Local Development

By Ignacio Jiménez. 2022. Island Press. 280 pages and 39 illustrations, 45.00 USD, Paper. Also available as an E-book. First published in Spanish, 2018.

The author of *Effective Conservation*, Ignacio Jiménez, has an extensive background in conservation. In 2005, he began working with The Conservation Land Trust (CLT) Argentina, a project initiated by the co-founder of The North Face and Esprit, Douglas Tompkins. Tompkins had purchased and preserved 810 000 ha (more than 2 million acres) of property in Chile and Argentina in the early 1990s, establishing a series of parks. At CLT Argentina, Jiménez worked on endangered species recovery in the Iberá wetlands, a region of northern Argentina included in the new parks, and he coordinated one of the largest species reintroduction programs in the Americas. He directed the Iberá rewilding program until 2018.

In *Effective Conservation*, Jiménez promotes a style of conservation that could be described as a business management approach to ecological conservation and wildlife rescue. The book is intended as a user-friendly manual with the kinds of highlighted sidebars and explanatory charts that you might find in a textbook. There is extensive supplementary material—30% more—available to readers online (but not reviewed here). The print version focusses on strategic management (with core chapters on method, promotion, planning, operationalizing, conflict management, and evaluation and renewal) and is both comprehensive and clear. Some of this material may strike the reader as self-evident or overly utilitarian, but Jiménez sees his advocacy as a race against time and pushback against older “conservative” ideas about conservation.

Throughout, what will particularly interest field-naturalists, are very brief descriptions of efforts to restore endangered species and the longer outlines of back-from-the-brink case histories. These include the reintroduction of Black-footed Ferret in the United States (p. 85), Spain’s Lesser Kestrel (p. 90), Mauritius Kestrel (p. 116), Andean Condor (pp. 92, 116), Costa Rica’s manatees (p. 95 and the subject of the author’s Master’s thesis), Golden-crowned Sifaka in Madagascar (p. 96), Bonelli’s Eagle in Spain (p. 100), Hooded Grebe in southern Argentina (p. 103), Iberian



Lynx (p. 117), White Rhino in South Africa (p. 116), and Brazilian Jaguars (p. 131). He also looks at the problem of Eurasian Griffon Vulture collisions with wind turbines (pp. 98–99).

There is very little reference to climate change, considering the book’s theme, although the subject looms in the background. For example, Jiménez agrees that,

On a planetary scale, climate change does have the capacity to trigger the destruction of not only small populations but also even of abundant species and whole ecosystems and complete groups of species. (p. 88)

While that is an unequivocal position found in *Effective Conservation*, concern about climate change from anthropogenic sources seems understated.

Full Nature Conservation

The goal of conservation, the book argues, is to at a minimum slow down any threatening extinction-level crisis. This moral obligation “to put a brake on the current drift toward environmental decline” (from all causes; p. 130) will require concerted breaches of the status quo through human intervention, rewilding, and a “Full Nature” (pp. 13–31) or “institutional ecology” approach (p. 436; Child *et al.* 2012).

The Full Nature approach, Jiménez explains, incorporates a feedback cycle that includes national parks, local development, wildlife ecosystems, and restorative economies. It requires simultaneous actions to address ecological and human community health to fulfil the goal of global wilderness recovery. It may include tools such as community poverty alleviation, job creation through eco-tourism (a major theme throughout the book), and controlled recreational camping and hunting. It also responds to extermination-level hunting frenzies, cattle importation that is destructive of the livelihoods of local communities, and mining company excesses (that can be replaced by more sustainable nature tourism, such as where this has occurred in post-Apartheid South Africa [pp. 1–3]).

Successful outcomes of a Full Nature approach must therefore: establish better natural ecosystems, not utopias; tie-in local social processes (employment, decision-making); engage interdisciplinary organizations and teams (not only biological expertise); coordinate the policy processes affecting both natural and human ecosystems; and effectively communicate to the public. A tall order.

One of *Effective Conservation*'s goals is to reframe the debate away from the reductionist false dichotomy of humans versus nature. Jiménez wants us to understand conservation as an alternative type of production, but also as a more enticing counterargument to those who insist that "a tree should not get in the way of development" (pp. 14–16). This entirely pragmatic argument is necessary, Jiménez says, because in the standoff between people, wildlife, economy, and environment, people and economy always win.

Understanding the policy process as central means learning the skills of message promotion and marketing, activism and mobilization, boycotts and petitions, legal action, diplomacy, and bridging the urban-rural-Indigenous divides. This language is not typically in the biological lexicon. The route to successful conservation is complex, Jiménez argues, and therefore merely conserving biodiversity or promoting sustainable development are goals that are too vague, and likely to only deliver an "occasional pyrrhic victory" (p. 92).

The Science and the Politics

The Canadian Field-Naturalist authors and readers may be disappointed to learn that Jiménez doubts the impact of scientific papers (p. 95). Their value is not denied entirely, but other vehicles (perhaps distantly backed by research) with wider public appeal (for example, comic books and popular publications) are touted as having greater currency among the public and decision-makers.

A scientific paper, unread by most, he argues, is still important because it can be referred to as peer-reviewed, credible evidence. But scientists are often underappreciated because they are seen as early guidance rather than as tools for measurement and evaluation (p. 101). After a problem is clearly defined in a potential conservation or rewilding project, the fallback is on "robust research in population or landscape ecology" (p. 92). But ahead of this, a decision must be made as to "whether or not a species or habitat is of any particular importance to society in general" (p. 92).

This kind of language may rankle readers, but it's central to the book's thesis that some projects are too complicated and costly to be worthwhile while others are worth pursuing despite the price tag (examples include the release of Andean Condors and the restoration of Mauritius Kestrels). The goal of the science is not just to generate documentation; it is to ensure that those "put in charge of drafting the conservation plans" are also the experts in the field for the species-at-risk (p. 111). However, the experts on a particular

species may know nothing about managing a public conservation project, which is essentially a political process that must manage conflicts between conservationists and vested interests (e.g., mining, dam-building, ranching, plantations, and hunting).

Jiménez believes that 90% of conservation is about working with people. Those focussed and trained primarily in the biological sciences may fail at generating "change on the ground" (p. 220). By making conservation relevant to the wider population, he believes "we will be able to avoid—or at least, mitigate—the great Sixth Mass Extinction" (p. 232). This entails assuaging the concerns of wary "conservative" conservation professionals and activists who retain an "aversion to perverting the purity of natural ecosystems with management actions" (p. 244).

Objections to Reintroduction

As becomes clear to the reader, *Effective Conservation* has a particular bone to pick with a segment of the conservation community who at heart believe that nature will resolve existential threats without human intervention. Jiménez vehemently disagrees. He also challenges the idea that reintroduced species are inherently harmful to existing resident species. In his view,

[f]ew cases exist of natural areas (be they public, private, or communally owned) that ever manage to maintain or even restore their natural populations without any [human] intervention. (p.144)

This explains his emphasis on establishing national parks.

Natural restoration, writes Jiménez, is "only possible in certain highly remote regions, untainted by human contact" (p. 144). The exception he offers here—remoteness—may be key, and a place where many field-naturalists and Full Nature conservation advocates meet in significant agreement.

Important points are made throughout this important book, all of which are worth thinking about right now. Many may ring true enough that they will deserve implementation.

Literature Cited

Child, B., H. Suich, and A. Spenceley. 2012. *Evolution and Innovation in Wildlife Conservation: Parks and Game Ranches to Transfrontier Conservation Areas*. Earthscan, London, United Kingdom.

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