



# Ethics & nature conservation

Why do we do what we do & who decides?



# Strapwort

## *Corrigiola litoralis*

Slichter 2010



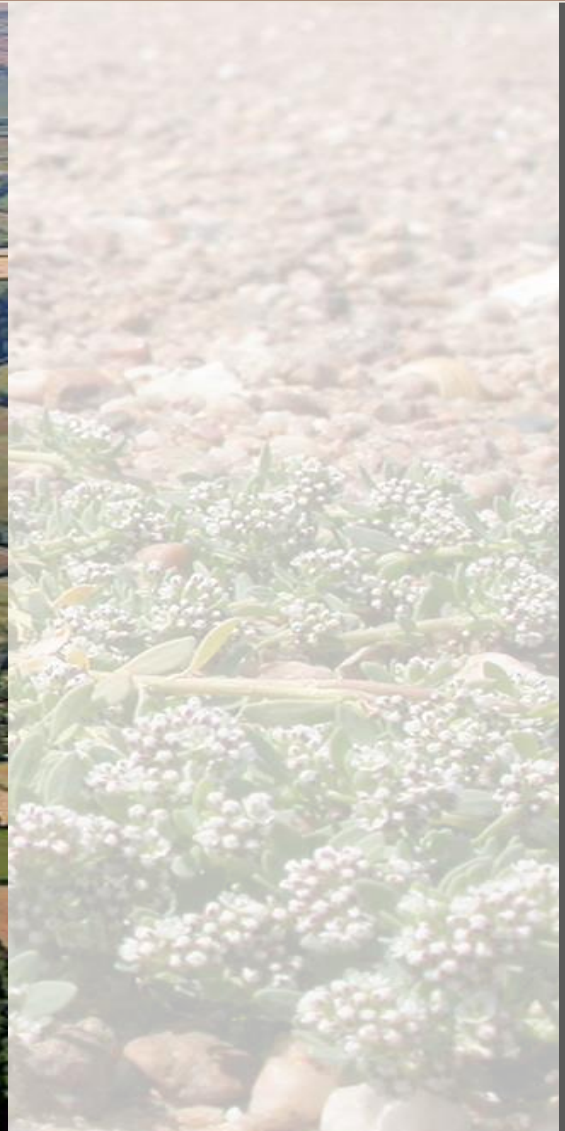
Found in:

- Mediterranean
- Russia
- Asia Minor
- Africa



UK

Found only on shores of Slapton Ley, Devon



Introduction



# Strapwort

## *Corrigiola litoralis*



- Does it matter if strapwort goes extinct in the UK?
- Why should we care about a fairly boring plant with a highly restricted local distribution?
- How much money should we invest in conserving it in the UK?

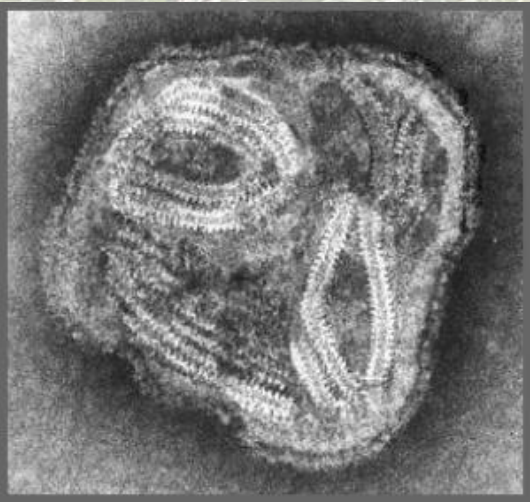
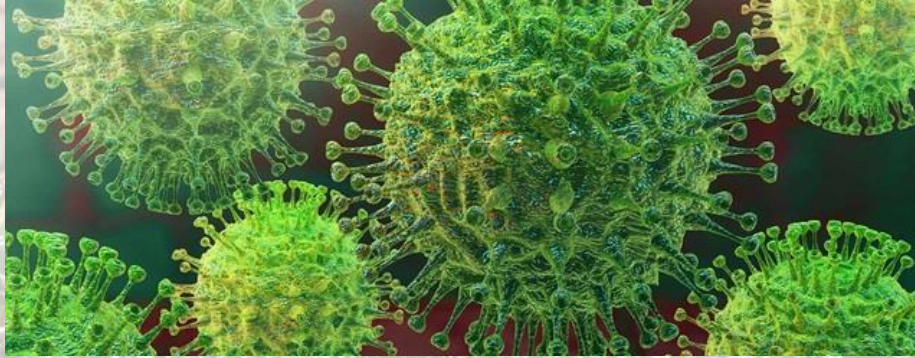
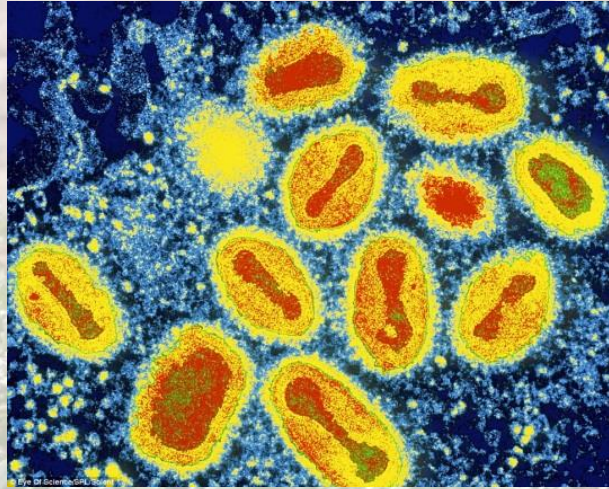


If we don't care about strapwort,  
what do we care about (& why)?  
What goes next?  
How do we decide what to keep?  
Who makes the decisions?  
Does it all come down to  
money?  
What are the wider  
consequences?





# Which bits of biodiversity do we want to save?



What do we care about & why?



# Functional Redundancy



What goes next?



Do we have moral responsibilities as  
'stewards' of the earth?

Religious duties towards nature, or  
nature as a religion?



How do we decide?



# Various ethical statements....

- Maintain the integrity and complexity of systems for sustained use. Aldo Leopold (1887-1948)
- Strive for the greatest good for the most people for the longest time. Gifford Pinchot (1865 -1946)
- Forests, mountains, waterfalls etc have a spiritual value greater than material benefit from their exploitation. John Muir (1838-1914)





The precautionary  
principle

It's irreversible

How do we decide?



# Conservation triage

From medical approach:  
the assignment of degrees of urgency to  
wounds or illnesses to decide the order of  
treatment of a large number of patients  
or casualties.

Conservation: improve decision-making and focus priorities  
Controversial: is it pragmatic (limited funds, make best use of them)  
or defeatist (we need to fight for enough money to save the things  
that are important)?

How do we decide?



# Species rights, individual rights, welfare, conservation

How do we decide?





# What gets saved?

- Value judgements
- Whoever shouts loudest?
- Policies and politics can be important
- Easier if the organisms are appealing (furry, cute, big brown eyes)
- Has the most money (see above)?
- Sometimes no decisions made and the situation plays out....



Who decides?



# Does everyone agree about which bits should be conserved?

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## Wild Boar Britain: How hogs are taking over our countryside as population explodes

In 2013 people living in and around the Forest of Dean said they were increasingly uneasy about the number of wild boar nearby.

What are the consequences?



# Does everyone agree about which bits should be conserved?



What are the consequences?





VS



What are the consequences?



“For example if a tribe needs to hunt the last remaining individuals of an endangered animal to maintain its way of life, environmental protection would demand real sacrifices from that tribe. In such a situation, the need to preserve a species from extinction arguably should trump all other considerations”

Primack Essentials of Conservation Biology

What are the consequences?



# Are indigenous people natural conservationists?

- Perception that goals of indigenous peoples retaining rights to their land are the same as those of conservationists wanting to conserve biodiversity
- Tends to assume that indigenous peoples are primitive, 'noble savage' living in harmony with nature

Who is 'indigenous' – often disputes over land rights between people of different ethnic identity

What are the consequences?



# Things to consider....

- All about value judgements about what we conserve (or don't or actively "remove")
- Need to watch out for death-by-a-thousand cuts (→ shifting baseline syndrome)
- Extinction is irreversible; future generations have rights too
- Can people and wildlife coexist?
- Actions have consequences for people too
- Conservation of species vs rights of individual animals



# Background reading

- Primack: Essentials of Nature Conservation – Chapter 1
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# Photo credits

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[Mateusz Włodarczyk](#)

[Richard Bartz](#), Munich aka [Makro Freak](#)

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