



Humans are animals

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EDITORIAL

Humans are animals

Zoology and anthropology are usually considered as distinct disciplines, with different scientific communities, journals, scientific societies. The Italian Zoological Union (UZI) and its journal, the *Italian Journal of Zoology*, are no exception to this rule. Recently, however, the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research formally united zoology and anthropology within a single scientific sector. Anthropologists are zoologists, just like malacologists and herpetologists. In theory, thus, the *Italian Journal of Zoology* might publish anthropological articles. This does not require any amendment of our aims and scopes, since the journal covers all aspects of zoology and, since humans are animals, anthropology is part of zoology.

So, our zoology colleagues who perform research on *Homo sapiens* and its ancestors now know that our doors are open to their contributions.

This formal change is very timely, because humans used to consider themselves as being very special, in respect to the rest of the animal kingdom. In a way, we are. But not too much. We depend completely on the goods and services that biodiversity makes available to us, and our impact on Nature is turning the world into an increasingly hostile environment just for us. There are many species that we would like to drive extinct (rats, mosquitoes, parasites and pests in general), but they evolve much more quickly than we do, and become so resistant to our poisons that, instead of us poisoning them, they are now threatening us.

Humans have a lot to learn from Nature, for our own good. For instance, species that are at greater risk of extinction are the most successful ones. The success of a species is measured by the number of individuals that it can express. In terrestrial ecosystems we are surely the most successful species of the whole biosphere. We have domesticated some species of plants and animals, and their biomass, in

addition to ours, is an enormous burden on the rest of the biodiversity that, in spite of us, makes ecosystems function. When our weight becomes unbearable to the ecological systems that sustain us, these systems will change and turn hostile against us. This is happening already. Nature's goods and services will be for other species, and we will fade away, like the many dominant species of the past whose existence is witnessed by some fossilized skeletal remains.

It is the flush and crash pattern of species dynamics. But we are an intelligent species, much more intelligent than any other species that ever existed on this planet. We might slow down the flush and crash pattern, avoiding too much flush, so as to prevent the inevitable crash.

This elementary lesson, easily drawn from natural history, is very unfamiliar to most humans. Like all other species we just want to grow, with a careless attitude towards the future.

One of the aims of this journal covers conservation biology. We do not want species to become extinct, especially if this happens due to our action. Well, we want pests to become extinct, but we want to preserve "cute" species. These, in fact, are usually very vulnerable, whereas pests are disturbingly resistant and resilient.

The more we will learn from Nature, the more we will harmonize with it. We have invented a series of laws for our own use, and they have been designed while disregarding that we are just animals who must obey Nature's laws. If our laws are in conflict with the laws of Nature, there is no hope that our laws will prevail. Time is ripe, in this period of rapid change that some of us termed the Anthropocene, to start worrying about one very endangered species: ours!

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Editor-in-Chief