**Practitioner and scientist perceptions of successful amphibian conservation**

Meredith HM, St. John FA, **Collen B**, Black SA, Griffiths RA. (2018) *Conservation Biology* 32: 366-375

Amphibians need all the help they can get. Over 40% are threatened with extinction, and over half of all species are in decline. Having worked with Ben on the EDGE of Existence programme at ZSL since 2006, I was aware of his fondness for small, troubled and overlooked creatures. In 2011 I asked Ben if he would consider being my primary PhD supervisor at the Institute of Zoology for a project entitled “Improving the impact of amphibian conservation”. I did not have a great deal of confidence in this new venture, and would have understood completely if Ben had not wanted to take on my PhD, but he was enthusiastic and encouraging, and instantly set my mind at ease.

The paper “Practitioner and scientist perceptions of successful amphibian conservation” was born out of a genuine need to understand how success is defined in the amphibian conservation community. Achieving successful conservation outcomes greatly depends on how conservation practitioners and scientists perceive “success”, so it seemed like a good place to start my PhD research. However, research projects (like all lengthy and complex endeavours) don't always run smoothly despite our best efforts. In my case, I collected the data by early 2013 and then life outside of my PhD got rather complicated. I was dealing with a difficult family situation as my brother was very unwell. I was extremely worried about him and my parents were struggling to cope. I went to Ben to tell him I was having difficulty concentrating on my work and didn't know what to do. Ben was immensely kind to me and helped me realise that I did not need to worry about the PhD and should focus entirely on my family. He was off to UCL soon and said he would arrange a desk for me when I was ready to return to work so I could have a much needed change of scene. This made me feel greatly supported. When I returned to work a couple of months later I went to Kenya on a field trip and promptly contracted dengue fever. Ben told me not to worry and to focus on my health. At this point I thought he must be regretting his decision to take me on with my varied problems, but he never wavered in his support and upbeat interpretation of my predicaments.

A month later I was finally recovered, family life had settled down, and I returned to work (again!). Under Ben's calm and supportive mentorship in partnership with Richard Griffiths, I managed to progress through my PhD, successfully defended my thesis in 2015, and secured a role as Executive Director of the Amphibian Survival Alliance in 2016. Then came a polite email from Ben, with characteristic good humour, asking if I had made any progress with preparing the success perceptions manuscript. I was really busy with my new job, but it was the gentle reminder I needed to get on with it, and work with my co-authors to finally unleash our findings upon the world. The paper went through a lengthy and complicated review process, and Ben was instrumental in helping us navigate the many steps leading to publication. During the final stages of this I was heavily pregnant (summer of 2017) and thought I should alert everyone as I was running out of time leading up to my due date. Ben sent me a couple of very thoughtful emails telling me to rest and make sure that I didn't stress out. He actually said “Don't overdo it. What you don't manage to do before you leave will be handled by someone else, or isn't pressing and will be there when you get back”. He also said “I hope you are sleeping a lot and if ever you find yourself eating in your own house, ask yourself whether you could in fact be going out for a meal instead. Don't stress about this”. I really appreciated this last piece of advice!

Many times during the development of this paper (from its inception to its publication), Ben's patient, thoughtful and compassionate nature kept me going. He understood that it was very

important to look after the people behind the research. He was a friend to the amphibians (and to all biodiversity), and he was a friend to me. I know a great many others have similar stories to tell of Ben. The development of this paper just highlights a few of the huge number of kindnesses he extended to those around him on a daily basis. He made a profound contribution to this world - not just in the science and conservation projects he developed, but in the lives he helped to shape and propel. I will always remember the positive influence he had in my life with gratitude and admiration. He set a wonderful example that I will always try to follow.

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