

Finding a balance: applied ecology is not a second-class research

Teresa C. Magro, Cristina do M. Santiago and Maria de J. Robim

Abstract — Nevertheless the recreation ecology research provides answers to current environmental and social problems; we need a challenge to gain social recognition. The consequences of not being positively evaluated in academic circles and in governmental financing agencies is that the research institutions staff who also have charge of protected areas are not being able to request financial support for research.

Index Terms — Applied research, recreation ecology, research financial support

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Research that provides answers to current environmental and social challenges is important and gains social recognition. Nevertheless, we still notice some resistance to valuing applied research in academic circles and in governmental financing agencies. As a result, in some research institutions staff who also have charge of protected areas find it hard to request from their fellow researchers studies aimed directly at solving practical problems.

That is mirrored in the lack of consistent data, skills and tools that would enable adequate management of protected areas. For example, models utilized in Brazil for the management of visitor impact to protected areas are adapted from those used in other countries where environmental and socio-economic conditions are distinct from those found in tropical regions.

Recreation Ecology researchers have difficulty evidencing the relevance of the aspects that may be dealt with in that field of research. We need more botanists interested in studying the effects of visitor activities as we need more ichthyologists studying fishes in water environments where recreational or educational activities are allowed.

Sporadic studies are beginning to be con-

ducted, which may represent an advancing perspective. However, a more careful look demonstrates that part of those studies did not advance with more relevant results mainly due to limited access to financial resources.

Another problem related to that approach to ecology is scientific recognition. Here as well, we find a growing distance between basic ecology researchers and those who work with applied research. We actually need strategies to reclaim part of the former researchers and show them that applied research can be attractive and yield valuable scientific articles.

In order to improve the dialogue between researchers who direct their studies according to the best possibilities as far as financing and scientific visibility are concerned, the Instituto Florestal de São Paulo (São Paulo Forest Institute) has brought part of its team of scientists together for a meeting. The Division of State Reserves and Parks gathered staff who double their function as researchers and managers of protected areas and those who work with basic ecology. The purpose of the gathering was to set guidelines to research and monitoring that will ultimately aid in procedures for planning, development and monitoring recreation in protected areas in the state of São Paulo and that will lead to the creation and implementation of public conservation policies.

Teresa C. Magro got her undergraduate degree in Forestry in 1983. Her Master Degree she received in 1987 and the PhD Title in 1999. As a Professor at Department of Forest Science, University of São Paulo, she works with the environmental and cultural effects of recreation and tourism in Protected Areas.

Cristina de Marco Santiago got her undergraduate degree in Forestry 1986 and is PhD studentship of Human Geography. As a Scientific Researcher at Division of State Parks and Reserves, Forestry Institute of São Paulo, her work is more related to management of protected lawfully areas of importance natural and cultural with focus for the development and evaluation of public policies.

Maria de Jesus Robim got her undergraduate degree in Biological Science in 1981. Her PhD Title received in 1999. As a Scientific Researcher at Division of State Parks and Reserves, Forestry Institute of São Paulo, she works with planning and management of public use and environmental education in protected areas. Now, more specifically, studying the ecological and social impacts indicators of ecotourism. Since 2001 she has worked as a guest Professor at Master of Environmental Science Program, University of Taubaté.