Letter to the Editor

Psittacine reintroductions and IUCN Guidelines – Response to Seddon

In his letter (Seddon 2013), Philip Seddon noted that a recent article by White et al. (2012) on Psittacine reintroductions stated that “current” (i.e., 1998) IUCN Reintroduction Guidelines did not adequately address issues related to selecting high-quality release sites. Seddon (2013) then introduced the “new” Guidelines which were adopted in September 2012 – which he acknowledged was a full year after our submission of White et al. (2012) – and in which the concept of reintroduction site selection and associated habitat quality is now more robustly addressed. We are glad that the IUCN has improved and strengthened the new Reintroduction Guidelines in this critical area.

However, Seddon (2013) also takes issue with our use of certain terminologies; namely, our use of release site without distinguishing it from release area, as well as our definition of reintroduction “success”. First, we believe that Seddon has misinterpreted our criteria for reintroduction success. A careful reading of White et al. (2012) reveals that our success criteria were for analytical purposes, as stated twice in our article. While we certainly agree with Seddon that reintroduction success must be assessed over longer species-specific timeframes than that of our criteria, the quantitative analyses of multiple reintroductions involving a wide variety of species and habitats required assigning a uniform and basic metric by which all could be compared, and for which sufficient data existed. Importantly, our success criteria also combined survival and reproduction – both fundamental parameters for population establishment and persistence (see, e.g., Seddon 1999) – which further allowed us to analytically “deconstruct” reintroduction success relative to the influence of specific factors on component parameters (see White et al. 2012). At no point did we suggest or imply adoption of our analytical criteria as programmatic criteria for assessing success of individual reintroduction programs.

In our article, it was not our intent to “misquote” Seddon or be otherwise critical in the context of citing the four definitions of reintroduction success listed in Seddon (1999). Rather, we used these as an example of definitions which, although varying in their specific parameters, all share a common requirement: the need for effective long-term monitoring. This important point is also reiterated both by Seddon (2013) and the new Guidelines, and on which we are in full agreement (see White et al., 2012).

The new Reintroduction Guidelines also explicitly distinguish between release area and release site, as stated by Seddon (2013). In our article, we choose to simply use release site. Indeed, substituting the word “area” for “site” throughout our article would change neither the findings nor the attendant conclusions and recommendations. This was not merely an accident of semantics. In selecting release sites and areas, the new Guidelines recommend assessment of such factors as candidate species’ habitat-related biotic and abiotic needs, size of overall release areas, landscape composition and connectivity, spatial or temporal variations in resource availabilities, as well as other factors such as risk of diseases and parasites. All of these factors and more can be incorporated and addressed as part of comprehensive environmental SWOT (for the categories of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analyses, as recommended in our article (see White et al., 2012). Among the four categories, SWOT analyses consider a broad array of suitability factors (termed indicators) such as size of release areas, landscape connectivity, resource availability, disease threats, competition, predation, logistical and security issues, funding, infrastructure, as well as human socio-economic issues such as ecotourism potential or risk of conflicts with landowners. Temporal and spatial variations in specific indicators are also considered in the analyses, allowing for incorporating relative differences in specific factors as seasonal food availability, habitat composition, or atmospheric phenomena (e.g., probability of droughts, hurricanes, etc.) in the site selection process (as also recognized in the new Guidelines). For example, reintroduction sites for a second and third population of Puerto Rican parrots (Amazona vittata) were selected based on SWOT analyses which incorporated a total of 31 and 37 indicators, respectively. In such case, selection of a release site occurs within the total context of the attributes of the area in which it is embedded, making an explicit distinction between them unnecessary in terms of our article.

We are grateful to Seddon (2013) both for bringing to our attention the new and improved IUCN Reintroduction Guidelines, as well as for providing us with an opportunity to clarify some of our key points and further advocate the use of SWOT analysis as a powerful, versatile, and effective tool for selecting optimal reintroduction sites.

References


Seddon, P.J., 2013. Letter to the Editor: The new IUCN guidelines highlight the importance of habitat quality to reintroduction success – Reply to White et al. Biol. Conserv. 000, 000.


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