

# Kent Academic Repository

## Full text document (pdf)

### Citation for published version

Jari , Ivan and Courchamp, Franck and Gessner, Jörn and Roberts, David L. (2016) Data mining in conservation research using Latin and vernacular species names. PeerJ, 4 (e2202). pp. 1-9. ISSN 2167-8359.

### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.2202>

### Link to record in KAR

<http://kar.kent.ac.uk/56562/>

### Document Version

Publisher pdf

#### Copyright & reuse

Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

#### Versions of research

The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version.

Users are advised to check <http://kar.kent.ac.uk> for the status of the paper. **Users should always cite the published version of record.**

#### Enquiries

For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact:

[researchsupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:researchsupport@kent.ac.uk)

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at <http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html>



# Data mining in conservation research using Latin and vernacular species names

Ivan Jarić<sup>1,2</sup>, Franck Courchamp<sup>3</sup>, Jörn Gessner<sup>1</sup> and David L. Roberts<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biology and Ecology of Fishes, Leibniz-Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries, Berlin, Germany

<sup>2</sup>Institute for Multidisciplinary Research, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

<sup>3</sup>Ecologie, Systématique, and Evolution, Univ. Paris-Sud, CNRS, AgroParisTech, Université Paris Sud (Paris XI), Orsay, France

<sup>4</sup>Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, School of Anthropology & Conservation, Marlowe Building, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, United Kingdom

## ABSTRACT

In conservation science, assessments of trends and priorities for actions often focus on species as the management unit. Studies on species coverage in online media are commonly conducted by using species vernacular names. However, the use of species vernacular names for web-based data search is problematic due to the high risk of mismatches in results. While the use of Latin names may produce more consistent results, it is uncertain whether a search using Latin names will produce unbiased results as compared to vernacular names. We assessed the potential of Latin names to be used as an alternative to vernacular names for the data mining within the field of conservation science. By using Latin and vernacular names, we searched for species from four species groups: diurnal birds of prey, Carnivora, Primates and marine mammals. We assessed the relationship of the results obtained within different online sources, such as Internet pages, newspapers and social media networks. Results indicated that the search results based on Latin and vernacular names were highly correlated, and confirmed that one may be used as an alternative for the other. We also demonstrated the potential of the number of images posted on the Internet to be used as an indication of the public attention towards different species.

Submitted 17 March 2016

Accepted 10 June 2016

Published 19 July 2016

Corresponding author

Ivan Jarić, jarić@igb-berlin.de

Academic editor

Seabird McKeon

Additional Information and  
Declarations can be found on  
page 7

DOI 10.7717/peerj.2202

© Copyright  
2016 Jarić et al.

Distributed under  
Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0

OPEN ACCESS

**Subjects** Biodiversity, Conservation Biology, Environmental Sciences, Human–Computer Interaction

**Keywords** Internet, Common name, Social network, Vernacular name, Data mining, Scientific name, Latin name

## INTRODUCTION

Analyses of the Internet provide a rich source of information and contribute considerably to conservation activities and evaluation (*Wilson et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2014*). Internet search engines, web-based data assessments, and social network mining approaches are increasingly used to assess public awareness regarding nature conservation (*Funk & Rusowsky, 2014; Arts, Van der Wal & Adams, 2015*). Internet-based research reduces costs and time, while at the same time it avoids some of the problems commonly encountered

in large physical surveys, such as systematic sampling bias and a lack of insight in temporal trends (*Edwards et al., 2013; Do et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2014*).

In conservation science, assessments of trends and priorities often focus on species as the management unit (e.g., *Wilson et al., 2007; Sitas, Baillie & Isaac, 2009; Muter et al., 2013; Žmihorski et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014; Roberge, 2014*). Given that the online media represent one of the major routes through which information related to conservation issues reaches decision makers, interest groups and the public, it is considered that the media coverage intensity has a direct influence on public opinion (*Barua, 2010; Jacobson et al., 2012; Proulx, Massicotte & Pépino, 2014; Bombaci et al., 2015*). Thus, it is assumed that species coverage by online media indicates public perception of conservation issues and potential biases in public interest, and represents popularity of a species and its public appeal (*Sitas, Baillie & Isaac, 2009; Žmihorski et al., 2013; Roberge, 2014*). At the same time, species coverage in scientific publications and databases is considered to represent available knowledge and scientific attention (*Sitas, Baillie & Isaac, 2009; Jarić, Knežević-Jarić & Gessner, 2015; Fleming & Bateman, in press*). Data mining within different databases and the Internet in general based on species names is increasingly recognized as a valuable tool in conservation research.

Studies on species coverage in online media commonly focus on Internet pages, newspaper articles, social media networks and different Internet search engines, while the search is commonly conducted by using species vernacular names (*Barua, 2010; Jacobson et al., 2012; Bhatia et al., 2013; Muter et al., 2013; Žmihorski et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2014; Roberge, 2014*). However, use of species vernacular names for web-based data search is problematic. Firstly, numerous different names for the same species exist in different languages. Secondly, even within the same language there can be multiple vernacular names for the same species. Thirdly, some vernacular names are used for multiple species or are vague, for example wolf, lynx, elephant, or imperial eagle. Fourthly, some vernacular names are often used in ways that are not specific to species, for example company names, articles dealing with sport teams (often named after a charismatic animal), machines and military equipment, toponyms (names of mountains, rivers, settlements), and personal names. In addition, species from certain groups, such as amphibians and insects, may also lack English vernacular names (*Sitas, Baillie & Isaac, 2009*). Use of vernacular names in bibliographic analysis therefore has the potential to lead to biased results, or at least a considerable amount of effort will be expended identifying the relevance of research results.

Latin names, on the other hand, have the advantage of being universally used, irrespective of language, and overlaps in names among species are comparably less frequent. Nevertheless, they have been only rarely used for data-mining in scientific studies (e.g., *Wilson et al., 2007; Sitas, Baillie & Isaac, 2009*), probably because it is unclear whether a search using Latin names will produce unbiased results as compared to vernacular names, as one may expect them to be used predominantly in the scientific community. For example, press articles using Latin names are expected to be rare. To our knowledge, this issue has yet to be addressed.

Here we assessed the potential use of Latin names as an alternative to vernacular names for data mining within the field of conservation science. We assessed the relationship of search results based on Latin and vernacular names of species from different species

groups. This relationship was assessed within different online sources, such as Internet pages, newspapers, social media networks and images posted on the Internet.

## METHODS

Species lists, with their Latin and vernacular names (specifically English common names), were obtained from the IUCN Red List database (IUCN, 2015). We focused on four charismatic and endangered animal groups: diurnal birds of prey (i.e., members of the order Accipitriformes, Falconiformes and Cathartiiformes), Carnivora, Primates and marine mammals (i.e., cetaceans and pinnipeds). Within each of the four species groups, 20 species were selected for the analyses by stratified random sampling, namely by sampling randomly within two subgroups that comprise species receiving high research attention and those of low scientific focus. Research focus was defined as the number of scientific publications per species (Jarić, Knežević-Jarić & Gessner, 2015; I Jarić et al., 2015, unpublished data). This was conducted in order to ensure that both charismatic and neglected species were included in the sample. During the sampling, only the species with vernacular names not likely to produce mismatches and those without overlapping names were selected for the analysis. The exclusion of species that are likely to produce substantial amount of mismatches in the results may potentially represent a source of a bias. Nevertheless, a reliable assessment of the media coverage regarding such species would not have been possible.

Assessment of media coverage for each of the selected species was carried out within five different sources. The number of Internet pages containing the name of each species was estimated using the Google search engine, and the presence of each species was also evaluated within each of the two major social networks, Twitter and Facebook, as well as within the websites of selected major newspapers from different countries—The New York Times, The Guardian, Le Monde, Washington Post, and Asahi Shimbun (i.e., analyzed together). Furthermore, the number of pictures posted on the Internet on each of the studied species was also estimated, as an indication of public interest and species appeal. Search within the two assessed social networks, newspapers and pictures was conducted through the Google search engine, with the following search queries: (1) Twitter –[“*species name*” site:twitter.com]; (2) Facebook –[“*species name*” site:facebook.com]; (3) Newspapers –[“*species name*” (site:nytimes.com OR site:theguardian.com OR site:lemonde.fr OR site:washingtonpost.com OR site:asahi.com)]; (4) Photographs –[“*species name*” (filetype:png OR filetype:jpg OR filetype:jpeg OR filetype:bmp OR filetype:gif OR filetype:tif OR filetype:tiff)]. For species with recognized vernacular synonyms (IUCN, 2015), all names listed in their IUCN Red List assessments were used to conduct the search. Since there were no date ranges established for collected data, all results dating prior to the time of the assessment (in December 2015) were included in the analysis.

Statistical analyses were conducted using the R programming language (R v.3.0.2). For R scripts see [Supplemental Information 2](#) (also available in the online repository, <https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3381073.v2>). Since the variables were not normally distributed (Lilliefors (Kolmogorov–Smirnov) test,  $p < 0.001$ ), nonparametric tests were applied. Relationship between the search results based on vernacular and Latin species

**Table 1** Coefficients of correlation between search results based on vernacular and Latin species names, conducted within the four studied species groups and the five assessed search types (Spearman's non-parametric correlation test,  $p < 0.01$  for all assessed groups).

	Internet pages	Twitter	Facebook	Newspapers	Pictures
Birds of prey	0.854	0.738	0.773	0.833	0.905
Carnivora	0.889	0.835	0.880	0.851	0.919
Marine mammals	0.930	0.790	0.836	0.817	0.900
Primates	0.824	0.799	0.856	0.836	0.916

names, within each of the four studied species groups and the five search types applied, was assessed using a Spearman's Rank test.

## RESULTS

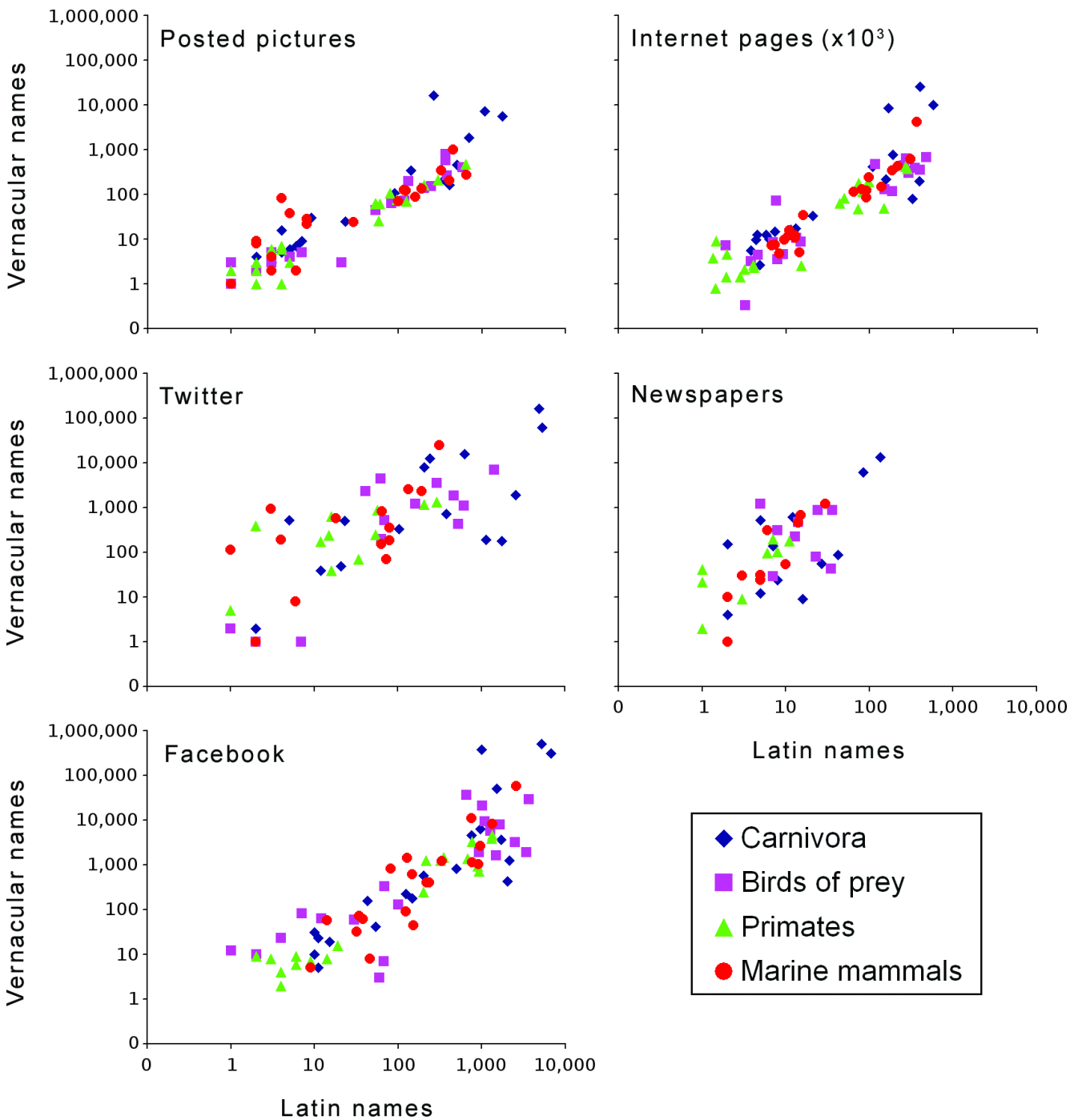
All of the searched sources produced more results when vernacular names were used, especially newspapers (Fig. 1). Average proportion between the coverage for Latin and vernacular was the lowest for newspaper articles (0.04) and highest for posted pictures (0.85).

The results indicated strong positive correlations between the number of search results based on Latin and vernacular names, in each of the four assessed species groups and for each of the five used search types (Fig. 1 and Table 1). The strongest correlations were observed for posted pictures, followed by Internet pages.

## DISCUSSION

Results indicated that searches based on Latin and vernacular names were highly correlated, and confirmed that one can be used as a general proxy for the other. There are however three caveats that should be emphasized. Firstly, the results are only applicable when looking at quantitative data, such as the amount of coverage of different species in online media, since the similarity of the actual media content obtained by the two assessed search types was not the object of this study. Secondly, use of the Latin names may be less adequate in studies that analyse Internet search behaviour, for instance by using the Google Trends search engine, as the number of searches based on Latin names may be insufficient to obtain data (Kim *et al.*, 2014). Lastly, very low species coverage in newspapers based on Latin names, as compared to vernacular names, indicates that Latin names are only rarely used by journalists. Consequently, assessments of species coverage within newspaper articles based on Latin names should be interpreted with due caution.

We assessed the two search methods within the five different online media categories that are commonly used by the scientific community for data mining. Twitter and Facebook currently represent the two most popular social networks and powerful research tools (Miller, 2011; Naaman, Becker & Gravano, 2011; Roberge, 2014; Papworth *et al.*, 2015). News media are a common venue for broadcasting science topics to the general public, which makes them suitable to reflect public attention and popular attitudes (Muter *et al.*, 2013; Verissimo *et al.*, 2014; Papworth *et al.*, 2015). Besides the online media types that are commonly assessed by the scientific community, we also demonstrated the use of the



**Figure 1** Relationship between search results per species based on vernacular and Latin species names, conducted within the four studied species groups and the five assessed sources; axes represent logarithmic scales. Presented data were transformed using  $x \leftarrow x + 1$ , in order to allow presentation in log-plots of results with the value of zero; for the original dataset, see [Supplemental Information 1](https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3381073.v2) (also available in the online repository, <https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3381073.v2>).

number of images posted on the Internet as an indication of the public attention towards different species. While the value of image sharing through social networking sites as a data source was recognized by previous studies (Barve, 2014), to our knowledge this is the first illustration of the use of web-based images as a search tool within conservation science. Suitability of this method for data mining was also indicated by high similarity in the coverage of posted images based on Latin and vernacular names (Fig. 1), especially when compared with the coverage within other sources.

Although the assessment was focused only on species with vernacular names that were not likely to produce mismatches, they were nevertheless still observed during the analysis. At the same time, results based on the Latin names were much more consistent, which indicates better reliability of their use. Search within social networks was especially problematic, as many social network users assigned some species common names as personal usernames (Latin names seem to be rarely used as usernames), so any post or tweet made by such person will be recognized as a matching result for that species. It is nevertheless possible that the use of different and more detailed search criteria than those presented here could resolve this problem to an extent. Problems encountered by the appearance of unrelated results, produced by online media search with species vernacular names, were also recognized by other authors. In a study on media coverage of Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*), Jacobson et al. (2012) detected mismatches based on vernacular name search, such as sport team names. Presence of irrelevant material within newspaper articles obtained by searching with a vernacular species name was also observed by Barua (2010). In a study by Roberge (2014), Twitter results based on the vernacular names search contained various mismatches such as names of sports teams, trademarks or product names, artist or character names, metaphors, and place names.

Many species are referred to in media by multiple vernacular synonyms and spelling variants. However, as stated by Aksnes & Browman (2016), practice of using only the most well-known vernacular name to conduct search is a potential source of bias, and may make such species underrepresented in results. Assessment of vernacular names based on a single language in the regions where multiple languages are used is also problematic, given that processes occurring in different media outlets may differ substantially (Bhatia et al., 2013). The use of English search phrases does not necessarily reflect worldwide patterns and might be therefore misleading (Funk & Rusowsky, 2014). This is especially important when bearing in mind that the areas of high species diversity are often characterized by a high level of linguistic diversity (Gorenflo et al., 2012).

As stated by Wilson et al. (2007), the species Latin names are the same in every language, and they are widely used by non-scientists. It is important to emphasize, however, that due caution is needed when using Latin names for data-mining purposes, due to their instability over time (Lepage, Vaidya & Guralnick, 2014). For instance, substantial numbers of species of birds of prey assessed in the current study are disputed regarding their taxonomic status or nomenclature. Our intention was to use the assessed species groups merely as an illustration of the presented method and to address the question we discussed here. In addition to the IUCN Red List database, other relevant databases and sources such as Avibase (Lepage, 2016) should be also consulted to resolve the status of the assessed species.

Our results indicated that Latin names may be used as an alternative to vernacular names. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the results presented here support search by Latin names only for assessments of the relative species coverage in media, i.e., either in time or when comparing among different species or species groups, since the use of absolute results could lead to large underestimations of the actual coverage.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND DECLARATIONS

### Funding

The authors were sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Federal German Ministry for Education and Research, as well as the Invacost research program, and the Project No. 173045, funded by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

### Grant Disclosures

The following grant information was disclosed by the authors:

Alexander von Humboldt Foundation.

Federal German Ministry for Education and Research.

Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia.

### Competing Interests

David L. Roberts is an Academic Editor for PeerJ.

### Author Contributions

- Ivan Jarić conceived and designed the experiments, performed the experiments, analyzed the data, wrote the paper, prepared figures and/or tables, reviewed drafts of the paper.
- Franck Courchamp, Jörn Gessner and David L. Roberts conceived and designed the experiments, analyzed the data, wrote the paper, reviewed drafts of the paper.

### Data Availability

The following information was supplied regarding data availability:

Figshare: <https://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.3381073.v2>.

### Supplemental Information

Supplemental information for this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.7717/peerj.2202#supplemental-information>.

## REFERENCES

- Aksnes DW, Browman HI. 2016. An overview of global research effort in fisheries science. *ICES Journal of Marine Science* 73(4):1004–1011 DOI 10.1093/icesjms/fsv248.
- Arts K, Van der Wal R, Adams WM. 2015. Digital technology and the conservation of nature. *Ambio* 44(Suppl. 4):S661–S673 DOI 10.1007/s13280-015-0705-1.



- Barua M. 2010.** Whose issue? Representations of human–elephant conflict in Indian and international media. *Science Communication* **32**(1):55–75  
DOI [10.1177/1075547009353177](https://doi.org/10.1177/1075547009353177).
- Barve V. 2014.** Discovering and developing primary biodiversity data from social networking sites: a novel approach. *Ecological Informatics* **24**:194–199  
DOI [10.1016/j.ecoinf.2014.08.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecoinf.2014.08.008).
- Bhatia S, Athreya V, Grenyer R, MacDonalds DW. 2013.** Understanding the role of representations of human–leopard conflict in Mumbai through media-content analysis. *Conservation Biology* **27**(3):588–594 DOI [10.1111/cobi.12037](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12037).
- Bombaci SP, Farr CM, Gallo HT, Mangan AM, Stinson LT, Kaushik M, Pejchar L. 2015.** Using Twitter to communicate conservation science from a professional conference. *Conservation Biology* **30**(1):216–225 DOI [10.1111/cobi.12570](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12570).
- Do Y, Kim JY, Lineman M, Kim DK, Joo GJ. 2014.** Using internet search behavior to assess public awareness of protected wetlands. *Conservation Biology* **29**(1):271–279  
DOI [10.1111/cobi.12419](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12419).
- Edwards A, Housley W, Williams M, Sloan L, Williams M. 2013.** Digital social research, social media and the sociological imagination: surrogacy, augmentation and re-orientation. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* **16**(3):245–260  
DOI [10.1080/13645579.2013.774185](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2013.774185).
- Fleming PA, Bateman PW. 2016.** The good, the bad, and the ugly: which Australian terrestrial mammal species attract most research? *Mammal Review* In Press  
DOI [10.1111/mam.12066](https://doi.org/10.1111/mam.12066).
- Funk SM, Rusowsky D. 2014.** The importance of cultural knowledge and scale for analysing internet search data as a proxy for public interest toward the environment. *Biodiversity and Conservation* **23**:3101–3112 DOI [10.1007/s10531-014-0767-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-014-0767-6).
- Gorenflo LJ, Romaine S, Mittermeier RA, Walker-Painenilla K. 2012.** Co-occurrence of linguistic and biological diversity in biodiversity hotspots and high biodiversity wilderness areas. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* **109**(21):8032–8037 DOI [10.1073/pnas.1117511109](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1117511109).
- IUCN. 2015.** The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2015-4. Available at <http://www.iucnredlist.org> (accessed on December 2015).
- Jacobson SK, Langin C, Carlton S, Kaid LL. 2012.** Content analysis of newspaper coverage of the Florida panther. *Conservation Biology* **26**(1):171–179  
DOI [10.1111/j.1523-1739.2011.01750.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2011.01750.x).
- Jarić I, Knežević-Jarić J, Gessner J. 2015.** Global effort allocation in marine mammal research indicates geographical, taxonomic and extinction risk related biases. *Mammal Review* **45**:54–62 DOI [10.1111/mam.12032](https://doi.org/10.1111/mam.12032).
- Kim JY, Do Y, Im RY, Kim GY, Joo GJ. 2014.** Use of large web-based data to identify public interest and trends related to endangered species. *Biodiversity and Conservation* **23**:2961–2984 DOI [10.1007/s10531-014-0757-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-014-0757-8).
- Lepage D. 2016.** Avibase. Available at <http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org> (accessed on May 2016).

- Lepage D, Vaidya G, Guralnick R. 2014.** Avibase—a database system for managing and organizing taxonomic concepts. *ZooKeys* **420**:117–135  
[DOI 10.3897/zookeys.420.7089](https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.420.7089).
- Miller G. 2011.** Social scientists wade into the tweet stream. *Science* **333**:1814–1815  
[DOI 10.1126/science.333.6051.1814](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.333.6051.1814).
- Muter BA, Gore ML, Gledhill KS, Lamont C, Huveneers C. 2013.** Australian and US news media portrayal of sharks and their conservation. *Conservation Biology* **27**(1):187–196 [DOI 10.1111/j.1523-1739.2012.01952.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2012.01952.x).
- Naaman M, Becker H, Gravano L. 2011.** Hip and trendy: characterizing emerging trends on Twitter. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* **62**(5):902–918 [DOI 10.1002/asi.21489](https://doi.org/10.1002/asi.21489).
- Papworth SK, Nghiem TPL, Chimalakonda D, Posa MRC, Wijedasa LS, Bickford D, Carrasco LR. 2015.** Quantifying the role of online news in linking conservation research to Facebook and Twitter. *Conservation Biology* **29**(3):825–833  
[DOI 10.1111/cobi.12455](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12455).
- Proulx R, Massicotte P, Pépino M. 2014.** Googling trends in conservation biology. *Conservation Biology* **28**(1):44–51 [DOI 10.1111/cobi.12131](https://doi.org/10.1111/cobi.12131).
- Roberge JM. 2014.** Using data from online social networks in conservation science: which species engage people the most on Twitter? *Biodiversity and Conservation* **23**:715–726 [DOI 10.1007/s10531-014-0629-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-014-0629-2).
- Sitas N, Baillie JEM, Isaac NJB. 2009.** What are we saving? Developing a standardized approach for conservation action. *Animal Conservation* **12**:231–237  
[DOI 10.1111/j.1469-1795.2009.00244.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-1795.2009.00244.x).
- Veríssimo D, MacMillan DC, Smith RJ, Crees J, Davies ZG. 2014.** Has climate change taken prominence over biodiversity conservation? *BioScience* **64**(7):625–629  
[DOI 10.1093/biosci/biu079](https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biu079).
- Wilson JRU, Proches Ş, Braschler B, Dixon ES, Richardson DM. 2007.** The (bio)diversity of science reflects the interests of society. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* **5**(8):409–414 [DOI 10.1890/060077.1](https://doi.org/10.1890/060077.1).
- Żmihorski M, Dziarska-Pałac J, Sparks TH, Tryjanowski P. 2013.** Ecological correlates of the popularity of birds and butterflies in Internet information resources. *Oikos* **122**:183–190 [DOI 10.1111/j.1600-0706.2012.20486.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0706.2012.20486.x).