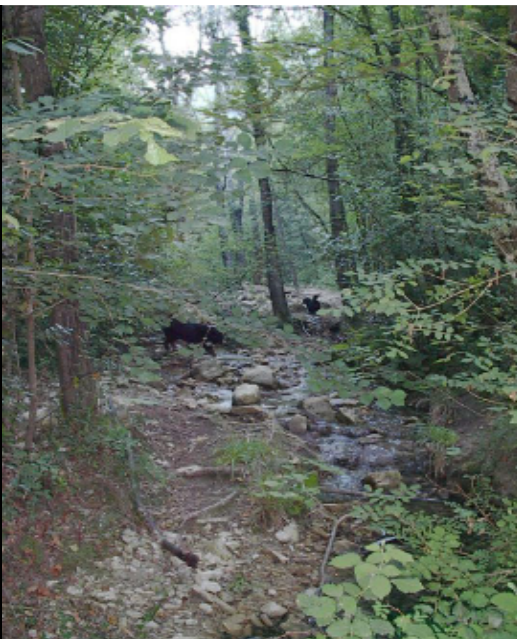


Volunteers and Habitat Monitoring

Hugo Reinert
Durham University



EuMon – EU-wide monitoring methods and systems of surveillance for species and habitats of Community interest – EuMon Conference: 28.- 30. January 2008



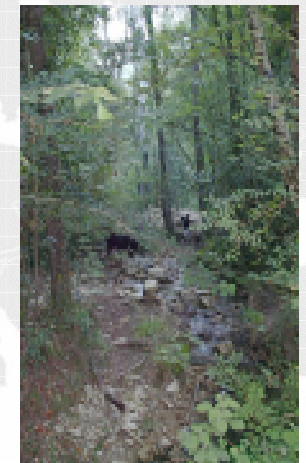
What is a habitat?

'The locality in which a plant or animal naturally grows or lives' (OED)

- **Complex**
 - multiple possible classifications (eg. by vegetation, wildlife species, soil qualities etc.)
 - what to monitor / what is significant?
- **Demanding**
 - expertise / training / ecological understanding
 - commitment over time
 - less 'charismatic' or 'sexy' than eg. dolphins.

Bottom line:

Urgent need for skilled, committed manpower.



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Volunteer care and feeding

Happy?

- Satisfying social interactions (bonding, group spirit etc. - with experts, other volunteers)
- Emotional and aesthetic fulfilment, experiences 'in nature'
- Personal growth, learning, skill acquisition
- Participating in cycles of knowledge exchange (eg. scientific, training other volunteers)
- Scientific recognition (eg. citations)

Unhappy?

- Rigid / hierarchic relations
- Arrogance, being patronised or ignored
- Lack of autonomy or choice, coercion
- Poor communications



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The ignorance of volunteers?

'Tabula rasa' syndrome:

- *Volunteers talked about (//treated?) as **homogeneous** category.*
- **A priori** assumed to be ignorant / unskilled / to be trained 'from scratch'
- *Creates problems for PMNs*

In fact, volunteers may have diverse and potentially relevant knowledge/ skills/ experience, eg.

- Professional training (engineers, chemists)
- 'Folk' ecological understandings
- Indigenous knowledge

Question: Is there any way to *systematically* capitalize on the heterogeneous backgrounds / skills of (some) volunteers?

Relations of expertise:

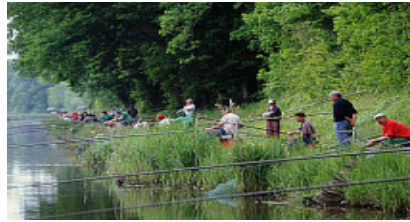
- Assumption that volunteers are 'ignorant' creates serious problems (eg. Lithuania).
- More egalitarian / respectful relations (eg. UK, Denmark) are beneficial to PMN stability, retention etc.



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Enlisting local experts?



Motivation

- Emotional bonds
- Vested interests in habitat

Expertise

- Long-term familiarity with habitat
- Extensive 'field-time'
- Possible 'para-scientific' forms of expertise

Retention

- Regular users
- Personal and emotional investment in habitat

- Mountaineers
- Anglers
- Hunters
- Gamekeepers
- Hikers
- Farmers
- Indigenous people
- 'Closet naturalists'



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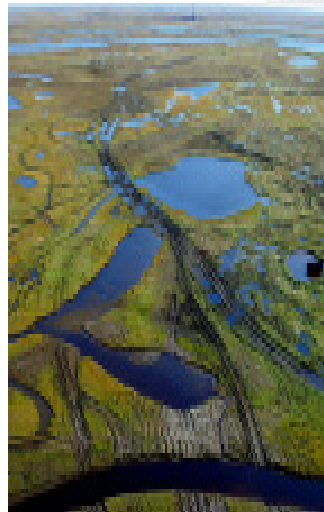
Reindeer Pastoralism



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Ecological change (Northern Norway)



Factors driving rapid change:

- Growth of tourism
- Industrial / radioactive pollution
- New roads, motorization
- Spatial developments (eg. real-estate, windmill parks, hydroelectric)
- Overgrazing
- **Climate change**

Monitoring urgently required.



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'Eskimo words for snow...'

IK / TEK / Local Knowledge:

- Ecologically pertinent: concerns wildlife, vegetation, animal welfare, seasonal cycles, landscape features, weather systems...
 - Personal
 - Orally transmitted, anecdotal
 - Tacit, embodied
 - Contextual, context-specific
 - Often not formally or systematically codified.
 - May be encoded in eg. practices, oral narratives, place-names, linguistic categories, tools and artefacts...

IK <--> Scientific knowledge?



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Herders as Monitors?

Advantages

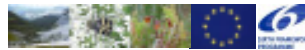
- Profound **familiarity** with habitat
- **Emotional attachment**, vested interests in protecting habitat = long-term commitment
- Extensive **field time**
- 'Alternative' **expert knowledge** (IK / TEK); might enrich scientific understandings? (eg. what constitutes significant change...)

Problems

- **Social conflict**, eg. with
 - conservationists
 - natural scientists
 - non-herders
 - other local users
- **Complex history**, prejudice, discrimination etc.
- **Vested interests**, might affect reliability of data
- Not **scientifically trained**
- Relationship of herder knowledge systems to scientific monitoring systems = not at all clear..



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Egalitarian Knowledge Politics?



EALAT Arctic Vulnerability Study (Kautokeino)

- Herders as salaried knowledge 'co-producers'
- Experimental science-IK dialogue, collaboration
- Emergent new politics of knowledge?



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Questions

- Can 'folk' or 'indigenous' knowledge(s) be incorporated into scientific habitat monitoring – and if so, how?
- Is there space for 'alternative' forms of knowledge in the context of scientific habitat monitoring?
- Are there other ways in which
 - a. existing local 'expert populations' of potential volunteers
 - b. the extent, and heterogeneity, of volunteer skills / knowledge

may be integrated into scientific habitat monitoring efforts?



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