

Another turn of the wheel

Conservationists, like most travellers, are apt to stride ahead on their path, without checking their bearings – or baggage. Is there not a choice of several paths, and almost as many destinations? Conservation is not a monolith; we easily forget that we are not all alike; we do not all want the same thing. The contributions that follow point up such a diversity. They remind us of some of the axes of thought and of emotion linking and also dividing us. Oversimplifying them as ‘isms’, I think one can discern such axial poles as parochialists or globalists (attention to one’s doorstep, or to such issues as climate change); selectivists or inclusivists (whales and orchids, say, or ‘biodiversity’); masters or lovers (I mean, roughly, anthropocentrists or ecocentrists); scientists setting the agenda, or (let’s call them) romantics; and professionals (and academics) being the main force, or the laity. Although these can be presented as polarisations, they are better thought of as ranges – and maybe some readers will not see them at all. We can’t, individually deal with everything, and worrying about The Whole Damn Thing is, unfortunately, an unhealthy state of mind. And yet, as Pete Raine emphasises, we certainly are able to understand and show concern for, in his example, resource consumption and puffin populations at the same time.

In 30 years, many things change, not least ourselves. Three decades on, a seasoned conservationist now views his wanting to “save the planet” as grossly conceited. At the beginning of his career, Andrew Harby notices how his values are already becoming more pragmatic and understanding of local people’s perspectives. These are not atypical – yet one can find the reverse personal evolutions too. We are neither all alike nor (most of us!) individually unchanging. But we are inclined to take things for granted.

A conservationist – not least a nature conservationist – attitude may sometimes be a mirage. For instance, in meetings of the local Transition Town initiative I met a familiar language, discussing familiar problems; and yet one of the activists pointed out my misconception: *“It is about social and economic change and action... I don’t see Transition as a conservation movement at all. Nor environmentalist. Nor Green.”* The ensuing conversation was stimulating, though inconclusive. I hope it will continue and be productive. Likewise *ECOS*. Perhaps our main purpose is to allow a diversity of voices to say a variety of things; to allow old things to be remembered – and some of them to be cast aside – and new things to be heard and cultivated; *and* for misconceptions to be pointed out and debated. The 29 volumes on the shelf have done this tolerably well at times; how well or better it continues depends on all of us, the readers...

Martin Spray