

Fluid Ecologies and Plural Ontologies: Breaking Apart Biodiversity to Reimagine Conservation

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Abstract:

Biodiversity conservation has a long history and primary place in environmental governance practice. Its role in shaping governance regimes and prioritizing particular species and places makes it critical to interrogate and ask the question of what such efforts make visible, and likewise invisible, for environmental governance. Drawing on literature from conservation practice, ecological science, critical scholarship, and ontologically-attuned ethnographies, we examine the roots of the biodiversity concept and its dominant framings and enactments; what is rendered visible and invisible across these fields; how an ontological perspective and approach might conceive of biodiversity otherwise; and what this might mean for the pursuit of environmental governance. While biodiversity conservation still largely emphasizes charismatic, and now so-called umbrella, species, and places a primacy on ecological science and Western knowledge systems, there is increasing attention to the need to respect and engage other knowledges; recognize the political effects of conservation efforts; and see biodiversity as intertwined within larger landscape scale and human-inclusive and -synergistic ecological relationships. We build on this history and work to ask how different ontologies conceive biodiversity and complicate human-animal and human-nature dichotomies, how ontological thinking can open new ways of relating to and with the world, and what a conservation governance concept that takes such fluidities, hybridities, and plural ontologies seriously might look like.

For the complete paper, see “Environmental Governance: Broadening Ontological Spaces for a More Livable World” submitted by Laura German.