

A NEW VIEW OF REGIONAL ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSERVATION: REJOINDER

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Dr. Craig's call for a "business plan" to set global priorities for bird conservation would make perfect sense if there were a fixed amount of money for conservation that could be allocated anywhere in the world. This would be true, for example, if there were a worldwide conservation foundation that could purchase natural habitat wherever biological diversity is threatened. The best strategy would be to grant the highest priority to areas where biological diversity is greatest, where there are many globally threatened species, and where land is inexpensive. Protection of natural habitats in Connecticut would not rank high by any of these criteria. Even the deciduous forest birds that Dr. Craig considers a high priority for conservation in Connecticut could be protected more easily and inexpensively in northern New England, upstate New York and northern Pennsylvania. People who are interested in local bird conservation in Connecticut might obtain funding for protecting the Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*) colony on Falkner's Island and the nesting areas for Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) at the mouth of the Connecticut River, and that would be about all.

Fortunately for those who are interested in saving natural areas near their homes, this is not how effective conservation strategies work. Protecting a forest in Connecticut or a marsh in The Netherlands does not subtract from the amount of conservation funding for the East African savanna or the Peruvian rainforest. Over the long term, the consequences are just the opposite; local conservation efforts often lead to regional and then global conservation efforts. Children who learn about nature in a meadow in Connecticut or a riverine woodland in Nebraska often grow up committed to saving natural diversity not only in their local area, but also in other parts of the world. Someone who first discovered the intricacy and elegance of nature in a New England meadow surrounded by a rich variety of wildflowers and butterflies, and the songs of Bobolinks (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) and meadowlarks (*Sturnella* spp.), may later work and donate money not only for prairie conservation in the Great Plains, but also to save large blocks of forest in northwestern Connecticut or tropical dry forest in Costa Rica. From this perspective, some of our most important

natural areas are places like Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge in Queens and Oi Bird Park in Tokyo where thousands of people become interested in birds and in protecting natural habitats.

Clearly, we must set some priorities for conservation, but these should be geared to different scales - local, regional, national and global. Protecting the full range of natural habitats in each region is a perfectly rational policy. Most people experience and learn about nature in their local area, and they deserve to experience a diverse landscape, not just a single habitat that has been designated as a regional specialty by globally minded planners. There is nothing wrong with preserving a rare habitat—a black spruce bog, coastal grassland or pitch pine stand—in southern New England even though these habitats are more extensive and easier to protect in other regions. The effort to protect and restore local examples of these habitats can only help with efforts to protect the best examples of the same habitats in other parts of the world.