**EDITORIAL**

**Why Earth Optimism?**

A focus on conservation in this issue of *Science* appears on the eve of Earth Day, which is being celebrated by scientists in meetings and public events worldwide. Conservation professionals, who have long condemned attacks on the environment, will gather for Earth Optimism events to highlight conservation achievements. Separately, but simultaneously, marches for science will highlight science’s achievements but also decry that science, scientists, and evidence-based policy-making are under attack. Although distinct in emphasis, these events speak with the same voice.

Science is an intrinsically optimistic endeavor, and many of its achievements have dramatically improved human well-being. This is why support for science remains strong. Nature conservation should be optimistic too (why bother otherwise?), but it often is not. Conservation has been called a crisis discipline, and Earth Day in the United States was born of crisis—the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill. Since then, doom and gloom have become the norm in conservation messaging, which is why focusing on conservation’s achievements, including those benefiting people as well as the planet, represents an important shift. In the end, support for both science and conservation depends on the accumulation of small-scale advances...”

“...much of conservation depends on the accumulation of small-scale advances...”

Another key ingredient for major change is hope. After all, Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, “I have a dream,” not “I have a problem.” Studies show that presenting people with huge problems without solutions leads to disengagement. Without examples of conservation succeeding, hopelessness could itself emerge as a driver of extinction. Directing more effort toward identifying, understanding, and celebrating conservation success, drawing on insights from the natural and social sciences, is key to securing the knowledge, time, and public engagement needed to reverse the tide of loss.

–*Andrew Balmford and Nancy Knowlton*
Why Earth Optimism?
Andrew Balmford and Nancy Knowlton

Science 356 (6335), 225.
DOI: 10.1126/science.aan4082