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Peer reviewed

Review: Designing Field Studies for Biodiversity Conservation

By Peter Feinsinger

Reviewed by [Elery Hamilton-Smith](#)
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Peter Feinsinger. *Designing Field Studies for Biodiversity Conservation*.
Washington, DC: Island Press, for The Nature Conservancy, 2001. 212 pp.
ISBN 1-55963-878-8. \$US27.50

In the light of my own extensive experience in on-ground assessment of natural values, this is an excellent book. It firmly embeds the practice of field-based assessment in sound scientific conceptualization and process. While doing that, Feinsinger shatters the common myth that science can be defined as what scientists do! Then, simply by setting statistical analysis aside as one of the tools which might be called upon only when it is (a) useful and relevant and (b) we have or can obtain appropriate quality of data, he does away with simplistic recipes. He also emphasizes that statistical significance is NOT biological significance. In summary, it is not only a guide to effective assessment, but also a challenge to genuinely attain exactly that.

More specifically, he commences with a general introduction to the principles of good field practice, then turns to question definition. From that, he demonstrates how the design of data collection must be matched to the question and discusses the potential character of sampling ("Design is a process of compromise").

Feinsinger then proceeds to demonstrate the importance of natural context, including the very different timelines of various species and the remarkable variation in spatial patterns of biotic distribution and behavior. By the end of this discussion, it is clear why he does not even mention the stupidity of relying upon random transect-based studies.

The chapter that discusses the respective roles and values of indicators and targets is at the same time a masterly discourse on issues in the selection of indicators. Feinsinger then moves to the meanings of biodiversity, however measured, and finally to the social dimensions of management (and hence, of assessment).

I find only one omission about which I can express genuine concern-like nearly all works on biodiversity, this book ignores the importance of the underlying relationship with geodiversity. It is this relationship that leads me (more than any other) to give very full attention to the importance of a

hierarchical approach where one systematically moves from the very basic level of the system under analysis to the higher and more dynamic levels.

Excluding this one omission, I do find this a very exciting book-it has challenged my own practice and thus will progressively enhance it.

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