
How people make sense of invasive species: values, attitudes and (shared) understandings

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Abstract

Invasion biology is a firmly established field of biological and ecological research, but what does its subject – invasive species and their management – actually mean to a non-expert public? This talk presents an overview of qualitative and quantitative empirical insights into the ways in which people conceptualise and evaluate invasive and/or non-native species. It illustrates, first, the value basis of people's reasoning about species, drawing on key values such as balance, harmfulness, naturalness and – of lesser importance – nativeness. The talk goes then on to show how such values and associated beliefs inform attitudes towards species and their management, and how these, as shared understandings, are embedded in wider social contexts. Finally, a comparison between the views held by experts and non-experts suggests that ways of reasoning about invasive species are essentially similar, with greater compatibility than commonly thought. This implies that that a more open, transparent and inclusive debate between invasive species managers, scientists and the general public could help to prevent dispute over invasive species control.

Keywords: social sciences, invasive species, non, native species, values, social representations, attitudes

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