

COMMENTS IN DEFENSE OF SYMPOSIA PROCEEDINGS: RESPONSE TO BART AND ANDERSON

A recent "Opinion" in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* (Bart and Anderson 1981) made a case against publishing symposia proceedings because (1) papers of non-refereed symposia often lack credibility and, therefore, harm both the authors and the profession, (2) proceedings are not readily retrievable, and (3) some symposium reports are not appropriate for publication. Although some proceedings may be disorganized and include poorly written papers, Bart and Anderson's generalization unnecessarily downgrades what can be an excellent tool for technology transfer. In this rebuttal opinion we give examples of outstanding symposia and proceedings and discuss advantages to symposia not mentioned by Bart and Anderson.

EXCELLENT SYMPOSIA PROCEEDINGS

Bart and Anderson object to publishing papers in symposium proceedings primarily because of the "nearly universal lack of peer review before acceptance." Peer and editorial review, however, does not necessarily guarantee the accuracy or quality of a published paper. As the editor of *The Auk* recently pointed out, "reviewers are not infallible or unbiased, and errors or inconsistencies do pass by their scrutiny, more often than we might wish" (Wiens 1981). Thus, all printed articles, regardless of publishing outlet, must be carefully and critically read.

Many symposia proceedings are published through refereed journals and receive editorial reviews as extensive as journal articles. In-house reviews also are required by most governmental research agencies. Symposium papers submitted by USDA Forest Service researchers, for instance, must have cleared vigorous peer review followed by thorough biometrical and editorial reviews. Most scientists appreciate the value of peer reviews, whether they are required or not.

An example of a refereed journal that publishes excellent symposium papers on a quarterly basis is *The American Zoologist*. Speakers invited to the symposium meetings are recognized

nationally and internationally for their contributions in fields ranging from avian oology to zoogeography. Examining the bird literature alone we found many symposia proceedings that produced high quality, refereed papers. For example, the International Ornithological Congress (IOC) holds a symposium every 4 years on all aspects of avian biology, including conservation, management, ecology, evolution, behavior, physiology, development, and genetics. The IOC proceedings are read and cited by ornithologists throughout the world. The Cooper Ornithological Society's *Studies in Avian Biology* provide additional examples of high-quality symposia proceedings.

The quality of symposia proceedings in wildlife management is variable, but examples of some edited and polished proceedings include the *Transactions of the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference*, the *Cold Springs Harbor Symposia Proceedings*, the recent symposium proceedings on endangered birds (Temple 1977), and several *USDA Forest Service General Technical Reports* dating from the 1st symposium on habitat management of nongame birds (Smith 1975).

ADVANTAGES OF SYMPOSIA PROCEEDINGS

The wildlife profession should encourage productive and open communication among all levels of research and management, and symposia are an excellent medium of exchange. A major argument not considered by Bart and Anderson is that symposia are much more likely to draw wildlife managers and other practitioners than are professional meetings. These practitioners are not only *users* of research information but are also valuable *suppliers* of information on management applications. They are critical links in the technology transfer process.

An excellent case in point is the *Mitigation Symposium: A National Workshop on Mitigating Losses of Fish and Wildlife Habitat* (Swanson

1979). Not all of the 100+ papers presented received thorough peer review, but the organization of the symposium and selection of invited and contributed papers guaranteed a worthwhile product. An initial supply of 8,000 copies of the 684-page proceedings was quickly exhausted, as was a 2nd printing of 3,000, and requests continue from all over the world for the practical information on how to solve real-world wildlife problems.

Because symposia typically focus sharply on topics of current importance, they fulfill the function of synthesizing information from many sources into a single volume. Both researchers and practitioners can refer to the proceedings, rather than tediously search the literature for information on 1 topic.

One of the major problems in the wildlife management profession—as in most others—is the lack of communication between managers and researchers. In this respect, papers that review and emphasize application of previously published data are appropriate for some symposia if the intended readers would not normally be expected to read the original publications. Bart and Anderson do not take into account the need for a variety of outlets to reach different audiences when they suggest that dual publication of similar information is unethical. Of course, if the author wants to reach different audiences, and is not merely concerned with “a more respected citation,” he must be willing to make the professional effort to rewrite his manuscript into a form most suited for those he wants to inform.

Contrary to Bart and Anderson’s belief, proceedings often are published within 1–1½ years (less time than many journal articles) and are readily citable and available. In fact, the current trend is to trade off the slick appearance of a typeset format for speed and quick availability. Authors are provided explicit instructions on how to prepare final copy ready for offset printing, and a hard-nosed editor—who can be most effective if he attends the symposium—enforces strict deadlines to resolve problems and meet publication goals. Including the editor in initial symposium planning can result in professional-looking proceedings within 2 or 3 months after the symposium. Publishing costs are normally

split among symposium sponsors and attendees. Symposia proceedings can be published in the agency’s numbered series so that they are available, citable, and subsequently retrievable in libraries. Announcements of agency publications can be found in journals, abstract supplements, and reviews of recent literature (e.g., *The Wildlife Review*).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The proceedings of some wildlife symposia contain papers with (1) typographical errors, (2) variable typography, (3) statements with no supporting data, (4) lack of supporting references, and (5) poorly analyzed data. While we support Bart and Anderson in recognizing these negative aspects, we also think that critical scientists and managers should be able to distinguish good papers from bad, and that such details as typographical errors and typography can sometimes be traded for rapid dissemination of information. Authors can improve manuscript organization, style, and table and figure format by referring to “Information for Contributors” sections of journals, the set of manuscript suggestions published by The Wildlife Society (Gill and Healy 1980), or agency symposium instructions. Reviewing and correcting papers are the responsibilities of the symposium coordinator and editor, and Bart and Anderson list methods for rectifying manuscript problems. In our opinion, symposium coordinators and editors should (1) review papers before acceptance, (2) solicit reviews from outside sources, (3) request revisions, and (4) refuse to publish low-caliber papers. The time these steps take must be recognized and allowed for early in the planning process. We recommend that The Wildlife Society publish a set of standardized guidelines specific for symposium proceedings. Proceedings can then be judged not only on the intrinsic quality of each paper, but also on whether planners, authors, and editors used these guidelines.

In conclusion, we support some of Bart and Anderson’s contentions, but believe they overgeneralize in their negative evaluation of symposium papers. Symposia are important forums

for exchanging new and provocative ideas, and are learning centers for students and professionals of all ages. The opinion that papers in proceedings often mislead readers is in itself misleading because symposia are highly varied in subject matter, scope, quality, and audience. The readers of published proceedings are at liberty to evaluate and choose which papers are most profitable to remember, cite, and apply in their own work.

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PUBLISHING SYMPOSIA PROCEEDINGS: ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

In the "Opinion" of Bart and Anderson (1981, *Wildl. Soc. Bull.* 9:201-202) publication of symposia proceedings may be a disservice to the wildlife profession and to authors who submit papers for such proceedings. Their contention is based partly on a perception that these publications are regarded as a "lesser among equals" option to publishing scientific papers in refereed journals. Indeed, most of their arguments against published proceedings are supported by comparisons with scientific journals. It is my opinion that symposia proceedings should have, and usually do have, objectives and purposes which differ from those of refereed journals; that symposia proceedings do benefit the profession; and that most problems with such proceedings can and should be remedied.

Published proceedings of special meetings are usually 1 of 3 types: proceedings of annual con-

ferences, proceedings of periodic meetings of specialized research workers, or 1-time conferences on selected topics. My opinions are directed toward the 3rd type, which was also the apparent target of Bart and Anderson.

SYMPOSIA PROCEEDINGS VS. SCIENTIFIC JOURNALS

The breadth of the wildlife profession is apparent to anyone who reviews a recent issue of *The Journal of Wildlife Management*. Topics range from blood chemistry, to time-series analysis, to hunter surveys. Readers of this journal, and others of comparable quality, probably recognize also that journal papers today are usually concise reports of specific scientific inquiries, with only a few paragraphs allocated to reviewing previous work, describing study procedures,