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Ecological Solutions and Evidence

DATA ARTICLE

An open-contributions platform for evidence on forest conservation

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Abstract

1. Effective decision-making in the protection of nature should be informed by science. Yet, decision-makers often choose conservation strategies without consulting all relevant evidence. This is partly due to evidence being hidden behind paywalls, presented in overly technical language, and scattered across various journals.
2. To facilitate direct use of evidence, we developed an interactive platform designed specifically for practitioners, allowing them to explore a wide range of questions. A key innovation we describe in this article is the platform's transformation into a system open to contributions from any scientist or practitioner. We analysed how evidence has accumulated under this new system for the strategy 'Reforestation and Forest Restoration'.
3. We found that over 1 year of community contributions, 27% of publications found during a more systematic search were added to the platform, indicating a promising trajectory.
4. The future success of the platform will depend on encouraging individual contributions and documenting, as well as mitigating, potential biases.
5. *Solution*. By transferring the responsibility of sharing the evidence on what works in conservation from a select group of experts to the broader science and practice community, we contribute to addressing the issue of evidence underuse that is still prevalent in conservation, ultimately making it more effective and transparent.

KEYWORDS
community science, conservation strategy, evidence map, evidence-based conservation, forest restoration, sustainable forestry, tropical forests

1 | INTRODUCTION

1.1 | The use of evidence in forest conservation

Smart decision-making in the protection of nature should be anchored in solid scientific evidence (Game et al., 2018; Redford et al., 2013; Sutherland et al., 2004; Sutherland & Wordley, 2017). However, many conservation organizations still select forest conservation strategies based on trends, personal experience, anecdotal evidence, or inertia—often without consulting the available scientific research or acknowledging gaps in the evidence base (Redford et al., 2013). Whereas a certain degree of 'evidence complacency' may be at play (Sutherland & Wordley, 2017), organizations or individuals might rely on anecdotal evidence or personal preference for various reasons, including ease of access to evidence (Sutherland, Taylor, et al., 2019). For example, the evidence on reforestation—currently a highly popular nature-based climate solution (Hua et al., 2016; Seddon, 2022)—in peer-reviewed publications is often inaccessible due to paywalls, difficult to search for, or too technical for general readers to easily comprehend. For example, according to the database OpenAlex, 53% of publications yielded by searching for 'Reforestation' are open access (https://openalex.org, search implemented in September 2024). Decision-makers or consultants have limited time to locate, interpret, and integrate disparate scientific evidence, which must then be considered alongside societal values, public opinion, opportunities, and numerous other factors that shape inherently political conservation decisions (Game et al., 2013; Martín-López et al., 2009). Communities suddenly given the option to manage their forests, or collaborate with NGOs or industry in reforestation projects, may have even less capacity to navigate the fragmented, incomplete, and scattered body of evidence.

Increasingly, scientists are encouraged to communicate their findings to audiences beyond academia, which could help alleviate this problem (Bombaci et al., 2016). More media outlets now have environmental sections, and conservation issues are featured more often (Deutsch & Fletcher, 2022; Mangani, 2021). This raises awareness about new conservation solutions or evidence supporting them (Côté & Darling, 2018). Yet, this may not be enough for policymakers, funders, and communities to make informed conservation decisions: new evidence must be carefully weighed against existing evidence, in light of the strength of individual studies and their relevance to the situation at hand (Salafsky et al., 2019; Sutherland, Taylor, et al., 2019). Simultaneously, media coverage and even the likelihood of publishing the results in the first place is lower for local case studies, or those reporting neutral effects (Buxton et al., 2021). Such studies are, however, fundamental to forming an overall conclusion from an evidence base (Burivalova, Allnutt, et al., 2019; Burivalova, Miteva, et al., 2019).

1.2 | Evidence initiatives

Various evidence synthesis initiatives exist with the aim of providing an overview of available evidence on conservation and environmental management (Table 1). For example, Conservation Evidence (Sutherland, Taylor, et al., 2019) presents summaries about specific conservation actions, such as 'Direct removal of juveniles to control a freshwater invasive species, the American bullfrog'. It tells users what the available studies on this topic found. Then, based on this evidence and through a modified Delphi process, a panel of experts provides their judgement of the effectiveness of each action, and, importantly, the certainty about the outcome and harms, in the sense of unintended negative consequences (e.g. 70% effectiveness, 60% certainty, and 0% harm for the American bullfrog example). This large database currently covers 1880+ individual conservation actions, across several taxonomic groups and habitat types (Sutherland, Dicks, et al., 2019).

Other platforms map out the available literature in terms of the topics covered and the quality of the evidence, such as 3IE's evidence maps (Table 1). A multitude of Artificial Intelligence tools (ChatGPT, Bing AI, etc.) appear to help scientists or decision-makers quickly gather and summarize the available publications, however, most operate as a black-box algorithm, with unknown biases and errors, including falsely presenting evidence from studies that do not exist. The Collaboration for Environmental Evidence (CEE)[6] promotes and hosts systematic reviews and other evidence products, which are considered complete and authoritative verdicts on well-defined topics, such as 'What is the effect of prescribed burning in temperate and boreal forest on biodiversity, beyond pyrophilous and saproxylic species?' (Eales et al., 2018). These detailed, highly technical reviews are often accompanied by a shorter, accessible policy brief and lay summary. Evidence syntheses can become incomplete as new publications appear, particularly if the overall amount of evidence is very small, giving a large weight to any new piece of evidence. They are also designed to answer a very narrow question, without the flexibility to answer additional questions once studies are collected. However, new methods, such as dynamic meta-analysis or living reviews are beginning to address these issues (Martin et al., 2023). It is costly and time-consuming to repeat systematic reviews on a regular basis—the CEE estimates that a typical systematic review in environmental management costs between 30,000 and 300,000 USD and can take many years, although updates could be cheaper (Centre for Evidence-Based Conservation, 2013). This makes it unlikely that a systematic review can be done for every single question relevant to conservation, especially in less well-funded regions.

Through a collaboration of scientists and environmental journalists (Burivalova, Allnutt, et al., 2019), we developed an evidence platform that (i) complements existing initiatives by focusing on broad strategies rather than individual actions, (ii) allows users to ask a multitude of questions, and, through a key innovation described here, (iii) can be updated by the global conservation community on an ongoing basis, distinguishing it from initiatives listed in Table 1. Here, we describe the platform, its uses, performance during the first year of being open to community contributions, and its potential to contribute to forest conservation.

TABLE 1 Examples of initiatives or platforms that show evidence on conservation.

Initiative	Summary	Example of strategy or theme evaluated	Types of output given	Area of focus and outcomes	Scale or coverage
Conservation Evidence[a]	Summaries about specific conservation actions	Direct removal of juveniles to control a freshwater invasive species, the American bullfrog	Lists available studies, gives certainty indication about the outcome	Global, biodiversity	3689 conservation actions, 8568 studies
3IE evidence maps[b]	Maps out literature available on a topic	Environmental sustainability	Lists available studies, evaluates quality of evidence	International development policies and programs, environmental and socioeconomic outcomes	35 evidence gap maps on development policies and projects
Collaboration for Environmental Evidence[c]	Promotes and hosts systematic reviews and evidence syntheses	What is the effect of prescribed burning in temperate and boreal forest on biodiversity, beyond pyrophilous and saproxylic species?	Systematic review, sometimes accompanied by policy brief, ranking of systematic reviews (CEEDER search), evidence guides	Global, environmental policy and practice, social, environmental, economic outcomes	1779 systematic reviews and overviews
Conservation Effectiveness[d]	Visualization of evidence on positive, neutral, and negative outcomes of broad conservation strategies	Payments for Ecosystem Services	Brief, non-technical summary of each piece of evidence, ranked by strength, sorted by variable and country	Focus on tropical forests, but open to non-tropical systems, social, environmental, economic outcomes	8 conservation strategies, with 1424 pieces of evidence from 632 publications
Evidensia[e]	Visualization of evidence on a range of sustainability issues and outcomes	Habitat fragmentation or connectivity	List of available studies, classified as performing better, worse, or not having a significant difference	Broad range of ecosystems and regions, social, environmental, economic outcomes	400 studies
Nature-based Solutions Evidence Platform[f]	Visualization of evidence on nature-based solutions to climate change	Created habitats	Grid and list of studies showing effect as negative, positive, of no effect	Focus on solutions to climate change, social, environmental, economic outcomes	223 studies

[a]https://www.conservationevidence.com/.

[b]https://www.3ieimpact.org/.

[c]https://environmentalevidence.org/.

[d]https://conservationeffectiveness.org/.

[e]https://www.evidensia.eco/, design inspired by Conservation Effectiveness.

[f]https://www.naturebasedsolutionsevidence.info/.

2 | MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 | Conservation Effectiveness platform

The Conservation Effectiveness platform (https://www.conservationeffectiveness.org/) allows users to visualize evidence on the outcomes of broad conservation interventions or strategies (e.g. reforestation, community forest management, payments for ecosystem services), in terms of outcomes (e.g. carbon sequestration, community well-being, profit), which fall under environmental, social, and economic themes. Each conservation strategy has a visualization that presents the scientific evidence as positive (conservation was associated with an improvement), neutral (conservation was associated with no change), or negative (conservation was associated with a worsening of an outcome) finding. Users can see all evidence or filter evidence by country, theme, specific variable that they are interested in, and the desired type of evidence, distinguishing between case reports, studies with a quasi-experimental design, meta-analyses, among others (Burivalova, Miteva, et al., 2019; Christie, Abecasis, et al., 2020). The visualization is not designed to be used as a vote counting tool—please see Usage notes. Instead, it is designed to encourage users to explore studies that may have contradictory findings. Each finding contains a short, non-technical summary of results related to the specific variable and a link to the original publication. The original platform is described in more depth in (Burivalova, Allnutt, et al., 2019).

The key innovation discussed here is that anyone with an Internet connection can add their own study, or studies by other researchers, as soon as they are published in a peer-reviewed journal. In the future, grey literature could be added, which would address one type of publication bias. The contributor creates an account, logs in, and fills out two forms: one for the publication itself (including title, first author, year of publication, and URL), and one form per 'finding', or evidence entry. Each finding form requires information on the evidence that is eventually displayed in the visualization (see above). Once submitted, new entries are reviewed by an editor, who either (i) approves the addition of the new piece of evidence to the platform, (ii) suggests changes to the entry according to the platform's standards, (iii) or informs the contributor that the study does not fulfil the inclusion criteria (Burivalova, Allnutt, et al., 2019; Burivalova, Miteva, et al., 2019). The editor also ensures that the publication is not already included on the platform. However, one finding may be implicitly featured multiple times on the platform if it has become a part of a meta-analysis. We made the decision not to exclude individual findings once they are included in a meta-analysis, because an important use of the platform is the possibility to view individual pieces of evidence by country. Once the evidence is published, anyone with an account can comment on the evidence, for example if they disagree with the interpretation or if they find a mistake. Such comments are shared with the original contributor, the editor, as well as anyone who views the piece of evidence in the application when logged in.

Users (without needing to log in) can interrogate the visualization to ask different types of questions (Figure 1). The main user categories that the platform is tailored to include: (i) conservation practitioners planning to implement a specific strategy in the area they manage (e.g. Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme). Practitioners can consult the platform for any 'red flags'—pieces of evidence showing where this strategy failed or brought unwanted outcomes, to help prevent similar outcomes in their case. At the same time, the platform may help them find examples of where the considered strategy resulted in overall positive impacts. (ii) Decision-makers in NGOs can consider the totality of evidence on a particular strategy when deciding which interventions to pursue. Such evidence should be considered along with systematic reviews if available, as well as other evidence that might not be published, within the broader conservation decision-making framework defined by each user (Salafsky et al., 2019). Even if the individual pieces of evidence are included in a relevant systematic review, our platform may help decision-makers visualize the evidence in terms of geographic proximity, and easily consider different categories of outcomes (e.g. biodiversity vs. equity). Our platform can also help decision-makers populate tools for evidence-based decision-making, such as the Evidence-to-Decision tool (Christie et al., 2022). (iii) Funders can see evidence gaps, in terms of geography and thematic areas, to help guide their funding strategy. (iv) Scientists and journalists can search for evidence to use in their publications, and identify likely knowledge gaps in the absence of a systematic evidence map. Whereas the platform does not immediately contain all available evidence, it can help researchers and journalists identify examples and counter-examples of a point they are making. For instance, a journalist preparing an article on the impact of upstream reforestation on water quality in Costa Rica may want to quickly find examples of co-benefits of such schemes elsewhere in the world.

2.2 | Community-sourcing versus systematic search

To compare community-sourced accumulation of publications during 1 year with a more systematic approach to searching relevant literature, we used the search engines Google Scholar and Scopus on the strategy Reforestation. We systematically searched each platform for relevant publications, then checked whether each publication was already included on Conservation Effectiveness after 1 year of being open to community contributions. If not, we assessed whether the publication would meet the criteria for inclusion on Conservation Effectiveness.

The search terms were the same for Google Scholar and Scopus: reforestation, forest restoration, impact, outcome, environmental, social, and economic. However, Scopus used Boolean operators and Google Scholar did not. Using this search string, Google Scholar produced 27,500 results. Only the first 1000 of these results were processed, due to the scope of the project. At the time of the study, Google Scholar search results were not entirely reproducible. Although the same search query was entered and settings were adjusted on the browser to mitigate search engine bias, results

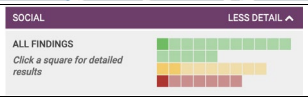
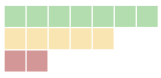
Function of visualization	Type of question	Graphical implementation	Potential for bias / caveats
Subsetting evidence by country	Does [reforestation] work in [Malaysia], and how does the evidence compare to [Indonesia]?		Some countries can have more evidence than others, check if meta-analysis exists.
Considering evidence by broad themes	Might broadly positive [environmental] outcomes of [reforestation] come at a cost of negative [social] outcomes?		Environmental outcomes are generally researched more than socio-economic outcomes.
Considering specific outcomes	Does [reforestation] improve [animal diversity]?	Animal diversity 	One positive outcome in [animal diversity] does not equal one negative outcome.
Considering stronger and weaker evidence	Does stronger evidence (e.g. RCTs) show the same trend on the success of [reforestation] as weak evidence?		Our evidence classification reflects only certain aspects of possibility to infer causation and generalize from publications. It does not reflect e.g. Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
Individual examples of failure to learn from (click on square)	Where and in terms of what outcome did [reforestation] fail to bring benefits or made things worse?	 "By converting grassland to plantation, plant species richness decreased significantly, by 35%."	Extreme examples may be more likely to be published in scientific literature. Even strong evidence is not necessarily generalizable.
Individual examples of success to learn from (click on square)	What are the examples of successfully implemented [reforestation] that are geographically close to my area?	 "The program sequestered about 1 million tC between 1998 and 2005 through establishing plantations."	
Pursuing individual studies in more detail	What else can we learn from the study	hyperlink to peer reviewed publication in each square	Typical caveats in interpreting scientific publications apply.

FIGURE 1 Conservation Effectiveness is an interactive, community-powered platform that displays peer-reviewed evidence on broad conservation strategies, such as protected areas, payments for ecosystem services, or sustainability certification, in terms of specific environmental, social, and economic outcomes. Users can interrogate the platform for different purposes and questions (first and second columns), using different graphical features (third column). Caveats and biases (fourth column) are explained in more detail on the platform and in previous publications (Burivalova, Allnutt, et al., 2019; Burivalova, Miteva, et al., 2019).

produced by Google Scholar varied slightly in terms of the order in which they appeared. Using the equivalent search string on Scopus yielded 2181 results. Results were sorted by the engines' classification of 'relevance'.

We downloaded a list of all publications included or considered for publication on Conservation Effectiveness under the Reforestation strategy as of 27th of January 2021, which is when we generated the search results from Google Scholar and Scopus. We were able to access all publications through our institutions' libraries. Publications generated by the two search engines were then matched against this table to determine how many were already included and how many were currently missing. Missing publications were ranked as 'relevant' if they fulfilled the inclusion criteria of Conservation Effectiveness platform, namely:

(i) Peer-reviewed;
(ii) Describes the outcome of actual reforestation or restoration attempts;
(iii) Excludes modelling studies that predict what the result of restoration might be if it is carried out. Modelling studies were only included if they modelled outcomes that cannot be easily measured directly, but that are based on empirically measured variables, such as economic benefits based on an already implemented reforestation effort;
(iv) Is an empirical study, a review, or a meta-analysis. Expert opinions, comments, perspectives, etc., were excluded;
(v) Reports the following information, at a minimum: authors, year of publication, title, where the study was carried out, what the methods were, what it measured, and how;
(vi) The study must either compare the results of the reforestation project to a control (no reforestation effort, e.g. natural regeneration, or crop field, or barren land), or to the state before reforestation (e.g. 'since the project started, 100 new jobs were generated in reforestation');
(vii) Studies must measure some form of active reforestation, with at least some tree planting. Excluded were studies that focus on silvicultural measures, such as thinning, liana cutting, etc. even if they may lead to faster forest regeneration. Studies focusing purely on natural regeneration were also excluded, as we used natural regeneration as a control.

2.3 | Usage notes

Detailed notes on usage and limitations are given in the interactive tutorial on ConservationEffectiveness.org, and on the Frequently Asked Questions pages. The key consideration is that the platform is not designed to sum individual pieces of evidences (Figure 1), as two

pieces of evidence (two squares) do not have the same weight, even if they fall under the same evidence type category. Similarly, one positive finding does not 'cancel out' one negative finding. Such vote counting is discouraged, as it is not a reliable way to assess an overall effect size, due to numerous statistical concerns (Gurevitch et al., 1999). When sufficient studies exist, meta-analysis is currently the best way to estimate an overall effect size. Our tool is intended to find a diversity of studies relating to a question and quickly navigate them according to their outcome directionality, geographic location, and theme. Such process does not replace the need for careful and critical reading of the individual studies, and the eventual use of proper statistical meta-analytical methods. One study may be represented by multiple squares, corresponding for example to separate findings reported for different countries. The visualizations are not exhaustive, as evidence accumulates continuously.

3 | RESULTS

The platform was established in 2018 and opened to public contributions in 2020. It is based on an open-access code (https://github.com/mongabay/mongabay-conservationviz), and currently hosts evidence on nine conservation strategies, with ~1,500 pieces of evidence from ~650 publications. As with any tool, it can only be considered successful if widely used. Our main strategy to increase its use includes collaboration with environmental journalists who use the tool in stories. Centred around the tool, Mongabay produced a series of investigative articles on conservation effectiveness. Beyond Mongabay's core readerships, stories from this series were amplified and shared by a number of environmental watchdog groups, conservation NGOs, influential individuals, and organizations/companies, including the US Forest Service, International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, Conservation International, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Forestry Department, the Society for Conservation Biology, the International Coral Reef Initiative Secretariat, the High Seas Alliance, Center for International Forest Research (CIFOR) Director General, Paul G. Allen Philanthropies, the Arcus Foundation, the Timber Trade Federation, the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme, the World Conservation Society, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, the CGIAR Forest Research Program, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), among others.

The Center for International Forest Research (CIFOR) has used our platform in two ways. First, in supporting a multi-stakeholder discussion on the effectiveness of sustainability certification:

> Through collaboration with [Conservation Effectiveness] as part of a broader project aimed at establishing the effectiveness of forest certification across the globe. The platform has been the structural framework around which discussions have been shaped. This was not a classic research project. Around the table, which continued for a few years, were people and institutions from all sectors (private, public, NGOs, academia, …) many of whom had explicit vested interests in the outcomes of the project. And yet the logic behind the platform still served to structure the discussions very well, indicating its strengths not only as a (passive) 'repository' of academic information, but also as an instrument supporting and steering decisions by a large set of stakeholders.

The second use exemplified CIFOR's effort to make their own research results more broadly available:

> As part of a more classic academic approach, whereby a PhD student [affiliated with CIFOR] would conduct a literature review on a particular topic (policies to combat [illegal logging] and timber trade). The platform served the PhD's needs very well, as a structured framework and methodology in the background, but also as an instrument through which findings could be made public, available, and transparent to all parties. During the process of implementation, plenty discussions focused on 'ownership', 'attribution' of the research findings, 'authorship', etc. Among other things, I think the final results show that the platform can serve as a powerful tool for strictly academic processes, but also very adaptable to the (broadening set of) needs of promoters, users, funders, and institutions.

Both quotes are by Paolo Cerutti, CIFOR.

The tool and associated reporting also had a direct impact on sustainable forestry. According to a Vice President at World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and former Director of Conservation at the MacArthur Foundation, the General Assembly of the Forest Stewardship Council passed a motion to increase investment in evaluation in part as a result of the evidence and reporting on the effectiveness of sustainability certification. Indeed, the Forest Stewardship Council was inspired by our platform to create a similar visualization on evidence of the effectiveness of FSC certified forestry (https://connect.fsc.org/impact/demonstrating-impacts#independent-scientific-research). Finally, our platform has been used in higher education to explain concepts in conservation evidence use in undergraduate and graduate conservation courses (e.g. University of Wisconsin Madison, University of California Santa Cruz).

3.1 | General patterns

During the first year of community contributions to the visualization in the strategy 'Reforestation and Forest Restoration', the platform accumulated evidence from 74 publications. (Currently, there are

116 publications, however, the analyses here reflect only the first year.) Through a limited systematic search, we determined that the two examined scientific literature search engines (Google Scholar and Scopus) yielded 247 additional publications on Reforestation that fulfilled the inclusion criteria of Conservation Effectiveness (Figure 2). As such, the community process captured an equivalent of 27% of the studies yielded by the more systematic approach, within 1 year. However, there was little overlap between the studies already included on Conservation Effectiveness and those found through the search engines. Only two studies appeared on both engines and Conservation Effectiveness; an additional 21 studies were on Conservation Effectiveness and one of the search engines. Fifty publications appeared on Conservation Effectiveness but not in the Google Scholar search (first 1000 results) or on Scopus.

3.2 | Related works

Related work includes a publication on the evidence typology used by Conservation Effectiveness (Burivalova, Miteva, et al., 2019) and an overview of results from four strategies (Burivalova, Allnutt, et al., 2019).

4 | DISCUSSION

The accumulation rate of studies in the first year of the platform being opened to community contributions suggests that first, without additional promotion efforts, Conservation Effectiveness may need 3–4 years to accumulate existing evidence by the global community. Thereafter, evidence being added may reflect publication rates for each strategy. Second, the fact that there was little overlap between search engine results and what was included on the platform points to the idea that a diverse community of contributors may be able to cover a broad range of publications, beyond those yielded by a non-exhaustive search through any single search engine. It is known that different search engines perform differently (Haddaway et al., 2015); however, it was beyond the scope of our project to carry out an exhaustive search.

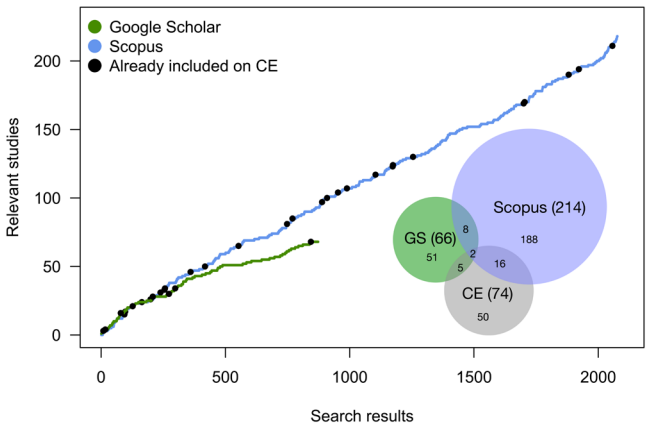


FIGURE 2 Comparison of studies accumulated under the Reforestation strategy on the Conservation Effectiveness (CE) platform during 1 year and a systematic search of two scientific literature search engines: Google Scholar (GS), and Scopus.

Making the evidence platform open to contributions by the whole conservation and science practice community might ultimately reduce some types of biases that an evidence synthesis might otherwise suffer from, and increase others (Christie, Amano, et al., 2020). For example, the Conservation Effectiveness platform accepts evidence from peer-reviewed publications in any language, whereas a modestly funded systematic review might not have the capacity to include languages other than English. However, since the evidence platform is not based on a systematic search protocol, it could suffer from biases by the individual contributors if they were vested in a particular conservation strategy being perceived as positive or negative. Currently, the platform also does not accept unpublished evidence, which introduces a potential publication bias. We hope that this bias declines with the increasing number of contributors from different countries, disciplines, and backgrounds, and future research should measure the level of such bias. Additionally, the Conservation Effectiveness platform could help address biases connected with the realities of power differential in academia, which result in certain demographic groups of scientists being cited less (Lerman et al., 2022). Including scientists' work on the platform may make their work more visible, regardless of the journal it is published in, and thus more cited. We will measure whether this is the case in future studies.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

A major issue in conservation is the difficulty of learning from past mistakes — conservation failures are not shared frequently enough (Burivalova, Miteva, et al., 2019; Guadagno et al., 2021). The Conservation Effectiveness platform normalizes reporting any reliable evidence, regardless of whether it shows that conservation succeeded, failed, or made no difference. With the introduction of the possibility of anyone contributing, the platform was able to accumulate 74 publications within the first year. Whereas this does not reflect all literature on our test strategy, it shows the potential of the community-powered platform to remain up to date after 3–4 years, hinging on successful community engagement. Additionally, it may make conservation science more inclusive and trustworthy: both contributors and users can comment on existing pieces of evidence and offer alternative explanations, providing breadth while maintaining accessibility for non-scientists. Whereas the platform does not replace the need for systematic reviews, a continuously updated evidence base lets society maximize the conservation potential of each new piece of scientific evidence, as soon as it is published. Successful conservation is a complex endeavour, and it is clear that there is no silver bullet to solve the climate and extinction crises. Yet, judicious consideration of past evidence is likely to make each new effort more beneficial.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Zuzana Buřivalová and Rhett A. Butler conceived the ideas and designed methodology; Gwendolyn A. Richardson, Bennett Rabach, Sharif A. Mukul, and Zuzana Buřivalová collected and analysed the data; Zuzana Buřivalová led the writing of the manuscript. All authors contributed critically to the drafts and gave final approval for publication.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Some of the co-authors (ZB, RAB) are creators of the tool; however, they receive no financial benefit from the usage of the tool.

PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at https://www.webofscience.com/api/gateway/wos/peer-review/10.1002/2688-8319.70028.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All information extracted from studies is publicly accessible on ConservationEffectiveness.org/download/ (Conservation Effectiveness, 2024) and a list of publications from Figure 2 is available on the repository figshare (Burivalova et al., 2025).

STATEMENT ON INCLUSION

Our study was based on developing a tool rather than primary data collection. Whereas the tool was developed by a larger team (please see Acknowledgements) and the database populated by a global community of scientists (several hundred), it was not feasible to include all contributors as co-authors. One of the objectives of our tool is to increase the inclusion of scientists from all regions in conservation decision-making by highlighting their research.

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