

## Academy of Natural Sciences: Job Cuts

**JOCELYN KAISER'S ARTICLE ON JOB CUTS AT THE** Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia ("Philadelphia institution forced to cut curators," *News of the Week*, 7 Jan., p. 28) exemplifies a disturbing trend that threatens our understanding of biological diversity. At a time when species are thought to be going extinct at record rates (*J*), our capacity to describe that diversity is being severely undermined. The situation in Philadelphia demonstrates that the very institutions charged with this cause are now also being threatened with extinction.

Academy President D. James Baker does not seem to understand this, and his vision for the institution is a frightening prospect for the entire natural history museum community. Efforts to focus Academy research on noncollections-based programs such as watershed management are misdirected. Such programs already exist at universities and environmental consulting firms around the country, and reproducing them devalues the very thing that makes the Academy unique—its biological collections. The Academy is a taxonomic institution and that should remain its central focus. The history of the Academy suggests that, once a curator is lost, the associated collection falls into obscurity, and now ornithology at the Academy is threatened. Furthermore, Baker's implication that a taxonomic focus cannot bring in outside research dollars is a fallacy. At the same time, systematists cannot be expected to bear the burden of fixing their institution's financial situation. What the Academy needs is enthusiastic leadership that understands its institution's taxonomic mission. Baker and the Academy board seem to lack this understanding.

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### Reference

1. S. L. Pimm, P. Raven, *Nature* **403**, 843 (2000).

**THE ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES** IN Philadelphia is one of the most important research museums in the world, with a rich tradition going back to Audubon and beyond. Unfortunately, its stature is now in grave jeopardy because of cuts in staff ("Philadelphia institution forced to cut curators," *J. Kaiser, News of the Week*, 7 Jan., p. 28).

Reductions in Academy staff were necessary because of a severe budget deficit, but the nature of the cuts signifies a major problem in leadership at the institution. In scrambling for dollars, the Academy's directors have lost sight of the institution's fundamental mission. The budget cuts disproportionately slashed basic museum research. For example, the bird collection must now operate without a research head for the first time in almost 200 years. What remains after the cuts are mostly cash-cows, namely, exhibits and applied research in environmental and biomedical science. Although exhibits are important to the Academy's mission, applied programs are not. The Academy is a natural history museum, not the Environmental Protection Agency or the Centers for Disease Control.

Heads should roll at the Academy, that is clear, but not the heads of employees who are fulfilling the mission of the institution.

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**IN HER NEWS OF THE WEEK ARTICLE** "Philadelphia institution forced to cut curators" (7 Jan., p. 28), J. Kaiser reports on budget shortfalls at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia. In my discussions with Kaiser, I emphasized that the cutbacks mentioned in the article were made to reduce the Academy's budget deficit and should not be construed as reflecting negatively on the individuals concerned. It was unfortunate that the article gave the names of the curators who received notice and implied that these individuals were laid off because of unsatisfactory performance.

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## The Recreational Fisher's Perspective

**IN THEIR REPORT "THE IMPACT OF UNITED** States recreational fishers on marine fish populations" (Reports, published online 26 Aug. 2004, DOI 10.1126/science.1100397; 24 Sept. 2004, p. 1958), F. C. Coleman *et al.* suggest that the overfished condition of marine fish stocks rests on the shoulders of the recreational angler. In reality, the study merely confirms what fishery scientists,

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managers, and anglers themselves have known for decades—recreational catches comprise a significant share of some U.S. fisheries. Unfortunately, the authors have mischaracterized marine fisheries by pointing out just the current proportion of recreational landings of a few "populations of concern." What the authors fail to consider in the study is how most of these species arrived at their current condition—through years of commercial overfishing.

## Image not available for online use.

### A bocaccio

For example, the authors say that in 2002, anglers landed 87% of the total harvest of bocaccio, or approximately 200,000 pounds. What the authors fail to explain is that of the total 104 million pounds of bocaccio landed in the previous 20 years, commercial fisherman landed 89 million pounds, more than 85% of the total. In other words, over the same period, recreational landings account for less than 15% of the total (*J*). It is the sustained commercial overfishing of bocaccio (see figure in Supporting Online Material) (2) that is the primary reason for driving this species into decline.

The authors also fail to accurately represent the reality of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery. To state that recreational anglers take half of the total red snapper harvest is to ignore the most significant part of the story. The authors never mention the source of mortality that has the greatest impact on red snapper stock recovery: mortality of juvenile snapper caused by shrimp trawl bycatch. The reality is that even if all sportfishing—and commercial fishing, for that matter—ended today, the stock will never recover without addressing this major source of mortality.