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Great Plains Natural Science Society

6-2016

Missing the Point

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Missing the Point

Greetings GPNSS members! I hope summer finds you well and enjoying the Great Plains in some way, whether that be getting your hands dirty with field work, a reprieve from the office, anxiously awaiting the crappie bite at your favorite lake, or taking a much needed vacation. For those who enjoy cooler temperatures, summer heat and humidity are challenging and even the most seasoned field biologists among us are tested when fighting the conditions doing what we are passionate about. I personally prefer the fall and winter seasons, though also look forward to summer because it offers me a break from the rigors of an academic semester, time away from the office, time to locate bobcats and capture flying squirrels, or simply a chance to spend more time with my family. Summer also offers me more time than usual to prepare my own manuscripts and to think more critically about the research my graduate students are analyzing and preparing for submission (Chamberlain 2008).

Admittedly, I struggled to find a subject for this editorial until just the other day when I asked a colleague to review a manuscript I have been working to complete. One section of the manuscript was giving me particular trouble and I wanted somebody else's perspective. To my surprise, my colleague raised few concerns with this section, though had substantive concerns about my Introduction and my attempt to justify need for additional research. After wading through track change comments, I posited questions about how my colleague missed the point of the message I was attempting to convey to a graduate student who conveniently (or perhaps not so much for them!) walked in my office. Following that conversation, I thought "Voila, the subject of my editorial!" This is a subject matter I encounter frequently with authors and one I too contemplate, so I offer my perspectives on it.

Consider the following typical scenario. An author proudly submits their work for consideration for publication, receives reviews on the manuscript, and disagrees with particular concerns raised by the referees, Associate Editor, or Editor-in-Chief. During revision or resubmission (if rejected with opportunity to resubmit), the corresponding author carefully crafts a detailed cover letter that articulates how the referees misunderstood the text as originally written. In other words, the referee(s) missed the point the authors were attempting to convey (Chamberlain 2008). In such cases, authors often dismiss referee comments and continues on with revision. Sound familiar? For those of you reading along, perhaps you see where I'm going with this. As authors we replay over and over in our brains why it is that referees, Associate Editors, and/or journal Editors failed to understand the text we work so diligently writing. Logically, we may try to rationalize this by convincing ourselves of the difficult nature of the subject matter or that even the most experienced or detail-oriented referees or editorial board members occa-

sionally miss salient points (Chamberlain 2008). However, a more likely scenario is that authors simply do a poor job of conveying information.

As an author, it is our job to try to identify why referees fail to understand the intended meaning of our writing. If referees, Associate Editors, or the Editor-in-Chief (who we assume have expertise in the subject matter) fail to understand it, one might logically conclude that others also will. Again, it is easier for authors simply to dismiss a lack of understanding from peer referees or journal editors than to think about ways to prevent it from happening in the first place (Chamberlain 2008). Nevertheless, it is our responsibility to ensure that we are clearly conveying information in our writing. Since authors often become so familiar with their work, it often is challenging to "see" or otherwise recognize problems with interpretation of our work (which is clear in our minds). In the spirit of providing clarity in our writing, I would offer that authors should take additional time to think critically about every word they write to make sure that they are effectively articulated. Further, go the extra mile and submit your work to colleagues for courtesy reviews prior to submitting it for peer review. Though authors/coauthors often are anxious to submit their work, constructive feedback from colleagues or courtesy reviewers are especially helpful for improving your writing and offering suggestions for improvement. Much to the frustration of my coauthors, soliciting courtesy reviews is commonplace for manuscripts my graduate students or I prepare for submission. I have found this extra "layer" in the peer-review process especially helpful. We can all improve our writing, so should take suggestions for improvement to heart and use them to ensure that our point is clear.

As with past issues of *TPN*, this issue has much to offer to the natural resource manager. A quick glance at this issue will reveal several articles dedicated to improved techniques for studying and sampling fish and wildlife populations. Likewise, you will find articles on resource selection of woodpeckers, genetic variation in bighorn sheep, distribution of short-tailed shrews, and an interesting paper describing mink predation of brown trout. This issue also includes a number of book reviews, ranging from cranes of North America and the World, predator control across the American Midwest, tips and tools for birders, land conservation, and a taxonomic key for identifying North American lichens.

I appreciate the efforts of the referees and current slate of Associate Editors who take time out of their lives to provide critical reviews of manuscripts submitted to *TPN*; their efforts are nothing short of amazing! The success of *TPN* depends on timely and relevant reviews from outside referees, many of whom who expend extraordinary efforts to provide thoughtful comments to our authors. I personally am thankful for all that they do. In closing, if you have any questions,

comments, or concerns about *TPN*, please feel free to contact me. After all, this is your journal, and I very much appreciate your thoughts about it. Until next time, enjoy your summer everyone!

—Christopher N. Jacques
Editor-in-Chief

LITERATURE CITED

Chamberlain, M. J. 2008. Editor's Message – You Missed the Point. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 72(6):1285–1286; DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2193/2008-238>.