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Railway Ecology: Underrepresented in Science?

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the effects of roads on wildlife have been extensively studied. Theoretically, railways cause similar effects as well, yet ecologists do not understand the magnitude of these effects. Despite the field of road ecology rapidly expanding and the large footprint created by railways, there is a prominent lack of research related to railways and their effects on wildlife. To emphasize gaps between road and railway wildlife studies, we performed a thorough systematic review of twelve peer-reviewed journals in which ecologists and conservation biologists commonly publish. We found a clear underrepresentation of railway studies despite the potential negative ecological effects associated with this important anthropogenic feature. We found 259 road-wildlife articles and only 17 railway-wildlife articles in the journals we assessed with the majority of road studies focused in North America and the majority of railway studies in Europe. Although road-wildlife studies have increased through time, railway-wildlife studies have remained stagnant. In our opinion, the development of research pertaining to ‘Railway Ecology’ is long overdue.

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