

Correspondence

Get more out of FAO statistics

Papers on the sustainability of food systems (M. Springmann *et al. Nature* <http://doi.org/gfb7ht>; 2018) and the impacts of land use on global carbon budgets (G. Grassi *et al. Nature Clim. Change* **8**, 914–920; 2018) are among the latest examples of high-profile publications that rely on statistics compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Authors of such high-profile publications might not always realize that they can find out more about the strengths and limitations of their data by engaging directly with the FAO.

The FAO disseminates statistics collected over more than 50 years for crop, livestock, forestry and fisheries production, and for trade, food security and balance sheets, land and water use, emissions and fertilizers (<http://www.fao.org/faostat/en>). It supports capacity development in more than 180 countries and territories to improve the collection and processing of national statistical information. And it disseminates all such data as common public goods — free of charge to users worldwide.

FAO specialist staff are on hand to advise researchers on any uncertainties or limitations relating to these national statistics. This service can help them to improve their analyses and to identify emerging data needs.

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Risks of WHO listing traditional medicine

The World Health Organization's decision to include traditional oriental medicines in its International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related

Health Problems effectively approves them for primary medical care (see *Nature* **561**, 448–450; 2018). In my opinion, incorporating such contentious treatments into these guidelines is risky.

The antimalarial artemisinin is so far a lone active compound to emerge from the multi-billion-dollar industry of traditional oriental medicines. Active ingredients in such medicines need to be identified by rational investigation based on the scientific method. A long tradition doesn't obviate the need for evidence: the galenic concoctions popular in ancient Greece were discarded with good reason.

Irrespective of their cultural origins, medicines should improve people's lives. Legitimizing traditional oriental medicines at this point could cause sick people to forgo proven treatments and subject them to unknown and unnecessary side-effects. And because some of the treatments come from endangered species, it also risks driving animals such as the rhino to extinction.

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Good leaders boost ethical science

Mariam Aly's laboratory manual and wiki collate multiple layers of information and guidance for her team members (see *Nature* **561**, 7; 2018). Translating research processes from scholarly concepts into good laboratory practice in this way aligns with established principles in effective leadership. In my view, investigators prepared to go that extra mile to help their teams are more likely to run ethical labs and produce better science.

Aly's advice on promoting the reproducibility of results and participation in open science — both topics frequently overlooked in

education — safeguards against ethical lapses. By setting baseline expectations, openly sharing information and stimulating collaboration, she creates a more productive research environment.

Lab leaders need strong interpersonal skills to foster a culture of integrity — for example, by effectively handling difficult conversations, negotiating around shared interests and encouraging members to declare mistakes before they escalate.

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Brighten outlook for long-term studies

Many governments have a legal obligation to monitor the status of their wildlife populations — for example, to document the effects of climate change or habitat loss on population numbers, structures, breeding success and survival. These are long-term studies, so funding can be challenging — particularly when government priorities shift.

My experience from a 46-year study of guillemots (*Uria aalge*) on Skomer Island in Wales has taught me the value of well-designed and well-managed population-monitoring programmes, which amount to a health check on the oceans.

After the Welsh government (through Natural Resources Wales) cut my modest, but adequate, funding four years ago, I was forced to turn to crowdfunding from a sympathetic public to support the continued monitoring of this vulnerable species (T. Birkhead *Nature* **514**, 405; 2014). I considered it essential not to lose track of the ongoing change in its populations.

Researchers are increasingly having to turn to alternative funding sources to keep their

long-term studies going. Although crowdfunding has the advantage that it cannot be top-sliced or taxed, there is a risk that the more ecologists resort to it, the less inclined governments will be to provide financial support. However, it could end up as the only way to sustain long-term investigations.

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Cure lure of India's predatory journals

The number of papers published in Indian predatory journals is still alarmingly high (see *Nature* **560**, 537–538; 2018) — despite the dramatic decline in such journals (from 518 to 254) over the past 5 years, and India's consequent fall from 4th to 15th in the Directory of Open Access Journals' ranking.

Simply excising predatory open-access journals from the government's current list of approved research journals is not enough. Its University Grants Commission also needs to prevent others from creeping in — for example, by appointing a committee to annually review the journals on the list. The commission could also organize workshops that raise researchers' awareness of predatory journals and dissuade them from using these to boost their publication record.

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