RSPB Centre for Conservation Science Authorship Guidelines

These guidelines are for determining who should be included on authorship of manuscripts submitted to peer reviewed journals, involving RSPB staff and volunteers and should be used by everyone. Those who prepare manuscripts will be best placed to identify who has contributed to them, and who should be included, and in most cases, authorship should be clear. It is expected that the lead author (i.e. the individual who will oversee the production of the manuscript, whether first or last place author), will be best placed to make final decisions in most cases in liaison with those most closely involved with the paper. If anyone feels they are pressured into adding authors, or people have added themselves without justification, this should be taken up with any Head of Section (not necessarily your own) or the Head of Department.

Guidelines

- Decide on who to include as early in the process as possible, preferably at the very outset of the work. Get a record of agreement from those involved as to whether they expect to be co-authors or not, or for example, whether they should be included in acknowledgements. This is particularly important when the project is a collaboration with external organisations. In such cases you might not need to identify the individual, just that someone will be included, but the individual should be identified as soon as possible.

- Ensure co-authors know what is expected of them and deliver against these expectations. Also ensure that manuscript drafts are circulated at a stage when they require input and with adequate time for co-authors to contribute.

- Authors should have made a critical contribution to the manuscript (i.e. without whose input the work would be substantially poorer). Consider anyone who meets at least one of the following criteria:
  - Those who conceived and contributed to / influenced planning of the original idea and wrote the grant to secure funding for the work (provision of funding alone is rarely enough to be granted co-authorship)
  - Those who made substantial intellectual contributions to study design or analysis
  - Those who collected or generated the bulk of the data
  - Those who undertook specialist analysis (e.g. GIS analysis, genetics analysis)
  - Those who made a substantial contribution to the statistical analysis of data (provision of advice without detailed involvement in the actual analysis should not be considered a substantial contribution, though these individuals would likely be listed in the acknowledgements).
  - Those who made substantial intellectual contributions in the later stages of the work and without whose impact the manuscript would be substantially poorer or have substantially less of a conservation impact / value.

- Do not exclude non-academic staff (e.g. staff from Conservation Data Management Unit, Conservation Officers, Reserves Ecologists, Reserves Staff, Birdlife Partners etc. often play a critical role).

- Authorship should aim to be inclusive, especially towards junior authors.

- Ensure that all potential authors are given equal opportunity to contribute to a paper and become a co-author.

- Line managers and Head of Sections should only be included if they have made a critical and intellectual contribution as defined above.

- Some journals require details on the contribution that each author made, so you will need to justify why each author is on the paper. Even if the journal doesn’t require this, it is good practice to follow the same procedure in identifying authors, so that your approach will stand up to scrutiny.

- Papers should never be submitted without the approval and agreement of all co-authors. The same goes for re-submissions; co-authors should be given a chance to comment on the version that is going to be re-submitted, as well as the response letter. If co-authors block manuscript submission, authors should consult their Head of Section.
Order of co-authors

The significance attached to author order varies between disciplines. In ornithology, ecology and conservation there is a general recognition that the first author did the bulk of the work and writing, and subsequent authors are listed in decreasing contribution, up to the last author who oversaw the study from initiation to completion (also known as the “Principal Investigator”). However, alphabetic listing, or part alphabetic listing, is very common and does away with any order based on relative contribution (although the first and last author places can be retained.). The reality is that few people pay much attention to the order of authors listed after the first author and last, but authorship is important to an individual’s research career and needs careful and sensitive thought.

- The first author should be the person who did most of the work. This includes running fieldwork, and not just data analysis. In almost all cases the first author should be obvious. This place should generally be fixed, even if they leave RSPB and someone else undertakes corrections or some re-analysis as the paper proceeds to publication.

- The corresponding author does not need to be the first author. For example, a volunteer, MSc student, staff member taking a career break, or staff on short-term contract, might undertake the work, which makes that person the first author, but it might be more appropriate practically for second or last author to be corresponding author. The important part to consider is the production and legacy of the paper. The corresponding author should be able to deal with rapid communication with the journal during the peer-review and proof production. Following acceptance, the corresponding author may be responsible for timely responses regarding requests for PDFs and potential data requests. In cases where the lead author has left RSPB or is likely to leave before the manuscript reaches publication (for example, the author is on a short contract or is an established staff member that is leaving), consider using a remaining established member of staff as corresponding author. This should always be done with the agreement of the first author.

- Identify the leader for communications work. This will likely be the first or last author. Some media organisations will only talk to these two authors. Get agreement on how to handle media and comms well in advance of the paper being published.

- Author contributions can be scored against contribution to study design, data collection, analysis, and write-up, if the order is unclear. This process will work best if open and transparent. Please note again that contributing/providing funding alone is not enough to be granted co-authorship.

- RSPB Centre for Conservation Science should be given as the affiliation if the contribution was made while the individual was working here. If they leave RSPB, the new affiliation should only be listed if the individual continued to make a substantial contribution while at the new organisation. If they do not do so the new organisation should be listed as “present address”.

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