The Wildlife Society's

Out in the Field (OiTF) Packet

Version 2 (updated October 2021)

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What is the TWS Out in the Field (OiTF) Initiative?

The OiTF Initiative was started in 2019 to make LGBTQ+ TWS members more visible so that we can support and mentor each other, and work with our allies to foster a more inclusive, welcoming culture where diversity of all kinds is clearly embraced.

OiTF has three simple goals:

(1) to increase visibility of LGBTQ+ wildlifers in TWS,
(2) to build a community of LGBTQ+ wildlifers, and
(3) to identify ways to support LGBTQ+ wildlifers, including students, in the wildlife profession.

OITF is housed within the TWS Ethnic and Gender Diversity Working Group (https://wildlife.org/egdwg/)

To find out more about the OiTF Initiative, please visit:

- https://wildlife.org/oitf
- Follow us on Twitter: https://twitter.com/TWS_OitF (@TWS_OiTF)

OiTF Current Organizers:
Main point of contact: Travis Booms (Alaska), travis.booms@alaska.gov
Organizer: Silas Fischer (Ohio), silasfisc@gmail.com
Organizer: Liz Hilliard (North Carolina), liz@wildlandsnetwork.org
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Organizer: Adam Janke (Iowa), ajanke@iastate.edu
Organizer: Katie O'Donnell (British Columbia), odonnell.katie.m@gmail.com
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What does LGBTQ+ mean? Just as many organizations and agencies use initials to readily and easily identify themselves, LGBTQ+ is a shorthand way to represent a diversity of sexual and gender identities. LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and related identities. These letters and the language used to discuss these identities, have expanded over time to be inclusive and representative of all identities.

How to use the TWS OiTF Packet

The OiTF Packet was created to empower TWS subunits to help achieve the OiTF goals within the membership of their subunit. These goals are:

(1) to increase visibility of LGBTQ+ wildlifers in TWS,
(2) to build a community of LGBTQ+ wildlifers, and
(3) to identify ways to support LGBTQ+ wildlifers, including students, in the wildlife profession.

After the success of the inaugural OiTF events at the 2019 AFS-TWS Conference (see March/April 2020 TWP article), the OiTF organizers received inquiries from several TWS members on how they could launch OiTF events within their TWS subunit.

This packet is designed to share tools, outreach material, and information on how TWS subunits can implement the OiTF initiative within their subunit, including at their annual meetings.

Once you receive this packet, we encourage TWS subunits to contact us to review the packet content, as well as discuss potential events and activities that can be implemented. Please contact Colleen Olfenbuttel (colleen.olfenbuttel@ncwildlife.org) to set up a conference call/virtual meeting to discuss the packet and your subunit's interest in OiTF.

The following are examples of events/activities that can be considered for your TWS subunit:

- Encouraging meeting attendees to have the pronoun of their preference on their name tag.
- Having moderators communicate with the speakers in their session on preferred name and pronoun to use for speaker introductions.
- Distributing the TWS OiTF rainbow pin and pledge card.
- Establishing an OiTF Ambassador within your subunit.
- Hosting a social gathering at your meeting to introduce the OiTF initiative to attendees and TWS subunit members. This is often best done early in the meeting to serve as an ice-breaker, show LGBTQ+ Wildlifers they are welcome, and help attendees understand the distribution of other materials (e.g., OiTF rainbow pin, pledge card, ambassador ribbon) during the meeting.
- Organizing panel discussions and/or symposiums about LGBTQ+ experiences in the wildlife profession.

The Wildlife Society's
OiTF LGBTQ+ Rainbow Pin and Pledge Card

The TWS Out in the Field (OiTF) rainbow pin (Figure 1) and pledge card (Figures 2 and 3) were created by the OiTF initiative to allow TWS members to visibly demonstrate their support for LGBTQ+ Wildlifers. The intent is to make LGBTQ+ Wildlifers at TWS events feel welcome and supported by anyone wearing the pin. However, the pin can be worn anytime (e.g., non-TWS conferences, classroom, workplace) to create a welcoming environment.

Figure 1. The TWS OiTF pin.

We created a pledge card to clearly identify the overall goals of the OiTF initiative and what it means to wear the TWS OiTF rainbow pin. Some of us were aware of examples from initiatives at other conferences or professional meetings where a person wearing a ribbon or pin identifying them as an LGBTQ+ ally had behaved in an insensitive and inappropriate manner. Which, in turn, diminished the message of the identifying pin or ribbon.

We wanted LGBTQ+ Wildlifers at meetings and conferences to feel supported by anyone wearing the pin. Thus, we decided to attach our pins to a card explaining what it means to wear the TWS Out in the Field pin. We decided to put it in the form of a pledge to reinforce the personal connection of the wearer to the message of the pin:

> "*By wearing this pin, I express my belief that all Wildlifers, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, deserve to feel welcome, respected, and valued, in accordance with the bylaws and Code of Ethics of The Wildlife Society.*"

In addition to supporting LGBTQ+ Wildlifers, those that wear the pin pledge to:

1. Not use anti-LGBTQ+ language or slurs.
2. Speak out when witnessing discrimination, bullying or harassment.
3. Respectfully use the pronouns that others identify as theirs.
4. Let my LGBTQ+ colleagues know that I accept them for who they are.
5. Encourage others to be Allies.

This messaging may seem to be directed primarily to allies, but in fact it is equally important for LGBTQ+ Wildlifers to support one another.

Figure 2. Side one of the OiTF pledge card.

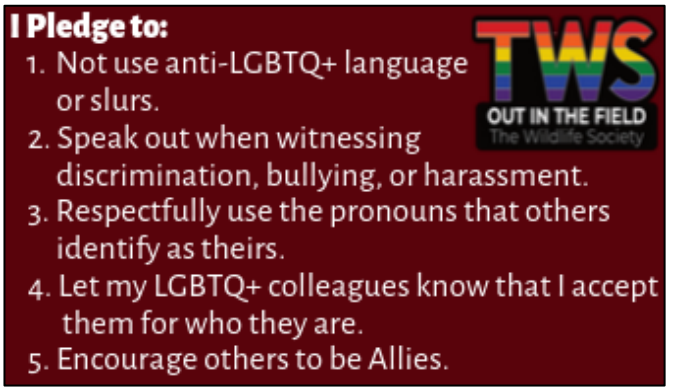

Figure 3. Side two of the OiTF pledge card. The OiTF pin is attached in the upper right corner.

We encourage TWS subunits who distribute the OiTF rainbow pin to attach it on the red side of the pledge card; the pin is the same size as the logo on the pledge card. This not only makes distribution easy, but assures the recipient receives the messaging on the purpose of the pin and acknowledge the significance of wearing the pin.

The pledge card is the size of an average business card so that it can be easily carried inside a name badge for easy reference by the TWS OiTF rainbow pin wearer to address inquiries they may receive by other attendees. Ideally, LGBTQ+ Ambassadors (see ambassador ribbon handout) distribute the pin and pledge card, as that allows conversations between out LGBTQ+ Wildlifers and TWS members. But if your subunit is unable to find a LGBTQ+ Wildlifer comfortable being an ambassador, allies can distribute the pins as long as they also explain the attached pledge card to potential wearers.

Notes on the rainbow flag: The rainbow flag is a symbol of LGTBQ+ pride and social movements. The colors of the flag reflect the diversity of the community and has been in its current form since 1979. LGBTQ+ community members and allies use this (among the multitude of variations on the flag) as a symbol of their identity or support.

Obtaining OiTF Pins and Pledge cards

Please contact Katie O'Donnell (odonnell.katie.m@gmail.com) for costs and other details about how to order these products for your subunits.

The Wildlife Society's
OiTF LGBTQ+ Ambassador Ribbon

The TWS OiTF Initiative created the "LGBTQ+ Ambassador" ribbon (Figure 1) to attach to name badges and other badge ribbons commonly worn at the annual TWS Conference and at TWS subunit annual meetings (Figure 2).

Figure 1. The OiTF LGBTQ+ Ambassador ribbon.

The ambassador ribbons are worn only by LGBTQ+ TWS members to identify ourselves and increase our visibility to each other and to conference/meeting attendees.

One objective of the OiTF Initiative is to increase the visibility of LGBTQ+ Wildlifers in TWS. Unlike other underrepresented groups, LGBTQ+ Wildlifers are not easily identifiable, so we often don't know who else identifies as LGBTQ+ when we're in the workplace, the field, or at conferences and meetings. This lack of visibility includes an absence of visible TWS LGBTQ+ leaders who can provide important examples and role models.

Being visible is an important step in letting other LGBTQ+ wildlife students and professionals know that they too are welcome in TWS's family and that they are not alone. Like their straight colleagues and friends, LGBTQ+ Wildlifers should be able to be open and truthful about who they are without fear of repercussions or being marginalized. In addition, because ambassadors self-identify as LGBTQ+, other LGBTQ+ Wildlifers can confide in them to share their personal stories and experiences.

Wearers of the ambassador ribbons also distribute OiTF outreach materials, such as the TWS OiTF rainbow pins, which are worn by allies and out LGBTQ+ attendees, OiTF ally pledge cards, and other OiTF items.

Figure 2. Example of how the OiTF LGBTQ+ Ambassador Ribbon can be used on a name tag. Note the TWS OiTF pin in the upper left-hand corner of the name tag.

Obtaining the OiTF LBGTQ+ Ambassador Ribbon

Please contact Colleen Olfenbuttel (colleen.olfenbuttel@ncwildlife.org) for costs and other details about how to order these products for your subunits. Ribbons can be ordered direct from a vendor of your choice using the following specs:

- 4" x 1-5/8" custom stack-a-ribbon
- Rainbow color
    - Pcnametag.com describes the rainbow color as "SSCUS1C_Rainbow"
- Gold imprint color (for text)
    - Note: If your subunit uses another imprint color for the text of your meeting/conference ribbons, please feel free to have the imprint color for the OiTF ribbon match your other ribbons.
- Imprint text:
    - LGBTQ+ (1st line)
    - Ambassador (2nd line)

Average costs is usually $0.50 to $0.60 per ribbon, including set-up fee.

The Wildlife Society's
Guidance on Pronouns

Please consider the following text to explain pronouns to your membership. If you have pronouns on nametags, this explanation can be used in your program and/or on a poster/sign next to the pronoun stickers at registration desk:

> *"What pronouns do you use for yourself and others? Please consider placing a pronoun sticker on your nametag. These stickers signal your personal pronouns to help others know how to address you and to reduce misgendering (being referred to as a gender one does not identify with). This is important because it helps all feel welcome and comfortable at our conference. If you have questions, feel free to ask any Wildlifer with a rainbow LGBTQ+ Ambassador ribbon on their name tag!"*

List of pronouns for stickers:	**Quantities:**
She/her	35%
He/him	35%
They/them	10%
Xe/xem	5%
"Fill-in-the-blank" option	10%
"Ask me about my pronouns"	5%

The Wildlife Society's
OiTF Postcard Examples

The TWS OiTF created postcards for the 2019 AFS-TWS Joint Conference to promote events of interest to TWS Wildlifers, explain the TWS OiTF initiative, and provide additional resources for both TWS Allies and LGBTQ+ Wildlifers (Figures 1 and 2). For the 2020 TWS Virtual Conference, the OiTF initiative created a virtual postcard to promote events of interest to TWS Wildlifers attending the virtual conference (Figure 3).

Please consider creating similar outreach material for the OiTF events occurring at your meeting or conference. If you are interested in these templates, please contact Katie O'Donnell (odonnell.katie.m@gmail.com) for more information.

Figure 1. Front side of the postcard distributed during the 2019 AFS-TWS Joint Conference.

Figure 2. Back side of the postcard distributed during the 2019 AFS-TWS Joint Conference. Note the black and red colors used to match the color scheme of the TWS logo.

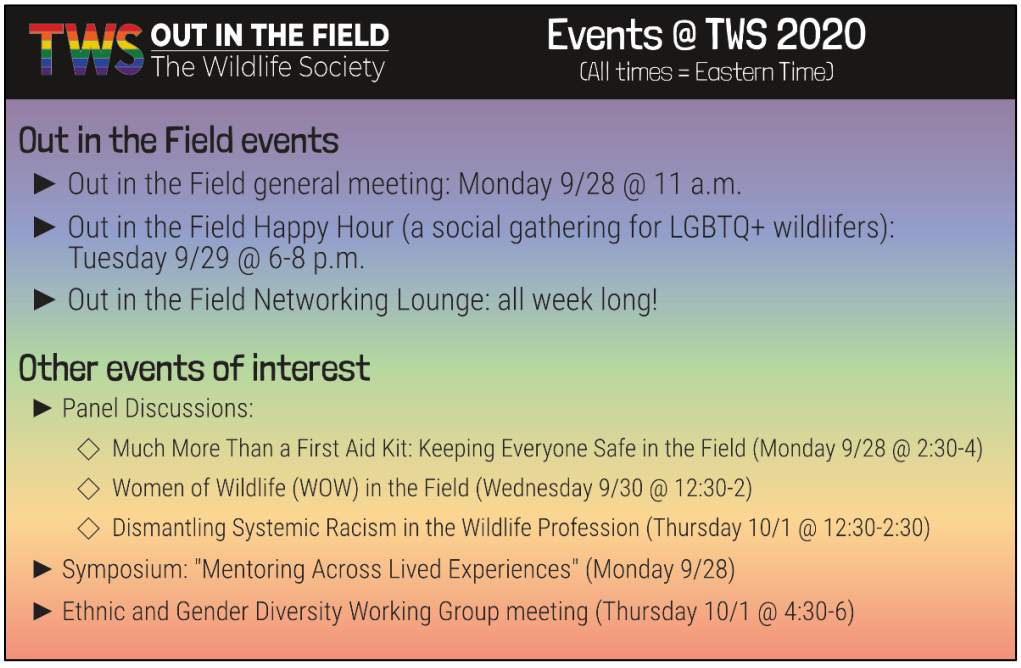

Figure 3. Virtual postcard distributed for the 2020 TWS Virtual Conference.

We Are All Allies

Written by Liz Owen, PFLAG; adapted by TWS OiTF

https://pflag.org/blog/we-are-all-allies

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."
- Martin Luther King, Jr.

PFLAG is the ally organization, and you can put into practice everything you know about being a good ally, and apply it to working in support of any person or group being marginalized or made to feel other. And while there is no "one way" to be an ally, PFLAG's approach through the Straight for Equality program is a great place to start!

First and foremost, if you haven't read guide to being a straight ally, a publication from the PFLAG National Straight for Equality project, now is the time. The fourth edition was recently released, and it is chock FULL of information that can be put into practice, not just to help people become allies to the LGBTQ community, but to help each of us be good allies to other communities as well.

Here are some starting points for all allies:

- **Be willing to learn**. In guide to being a straight ally, it's made clear that allies are people who recognize that, while they don't know all that can be known about the issues or experiences of people to whom they want to be an ally, they do want to learn and understand more. So make it a point to learn. Black History Month is a perfect example of an opportunity to learn more about the history of the civil rights movement, and the issues still being faced today by people of color. For example, do you know why Black History Month is celebrated in February? That's a great place to start! Visit the website of the founders--Association for the Study of African American Life and History, or the ASALH--to learn more about it.

- **Be willing to listen**. When someone takes the time to share with you their lived experience, hear them. Really hear them. Instead of using it as an opportunity to explain why you're not racist (sexist, ageist, _____ist), or to explain that you know "exactly" how they feel, use it as an opportunity to stop talking and start taking in information. And here is something important to bear in mind as you do: You are hearing the experience of one person, whose experience is not the experience of an entire group of people, nor is it that one person's responsibility to speak out as a representative of a group to which they belong. A good ally bears this in mind, and simply uses what they learn of this unique experience to further inform what they are starting to learn.

- **Be willing to be uncomfortable**. Sometimes, the hardest part of being an ally can be sitting in discomfort: whether it's discomfort with new information, discomfort with

hearing you may have made a mistake--in the present or in the past--in your ally attempts, or even discomfort in being an ally, with the privileges that sometimes come along with that designation. Yes, it's hard to be uncomfortable, but it's a wonderful opportunity to go within and explore where you stand and what you believe, to reflect and review. If you can sit within the discomfort, you'll find that there's an enormous amount of personal growth that can happen in that place.

- **Be willing to act**. This is where your privilege as an ally can make a difference--it can still be challenging to stand up, but don't let the challenge deter you. Whether it's asking someone not to use inappropriate words, speaking with a friend about poorly thought out behavior, making sure the needs of others are considered when making decisions, or speaking up when an inappropriate joke is shared, each of these can make a big difference.

So get started: Be the ally to others that you want others to be for you. But in doing so, raise the bar for yourself. Rather than following the Golden Rule and assume that others want to be treated like you do, go with the PLATINUM rule: Treat others the way THEY want to be treated. (That means you'll have to ask and listen to find out!) In this way, slowly but surely, you won't just be talking about the importance of intersectionality….you will start becoming the change you want to see in the world

What is PFLAG?

PFLAG is the first and largest organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) people, their parents and families, and allies. With over 400 chapters and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas across America, PFLAG is committed to creating a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are respected, valued, and affirmed.

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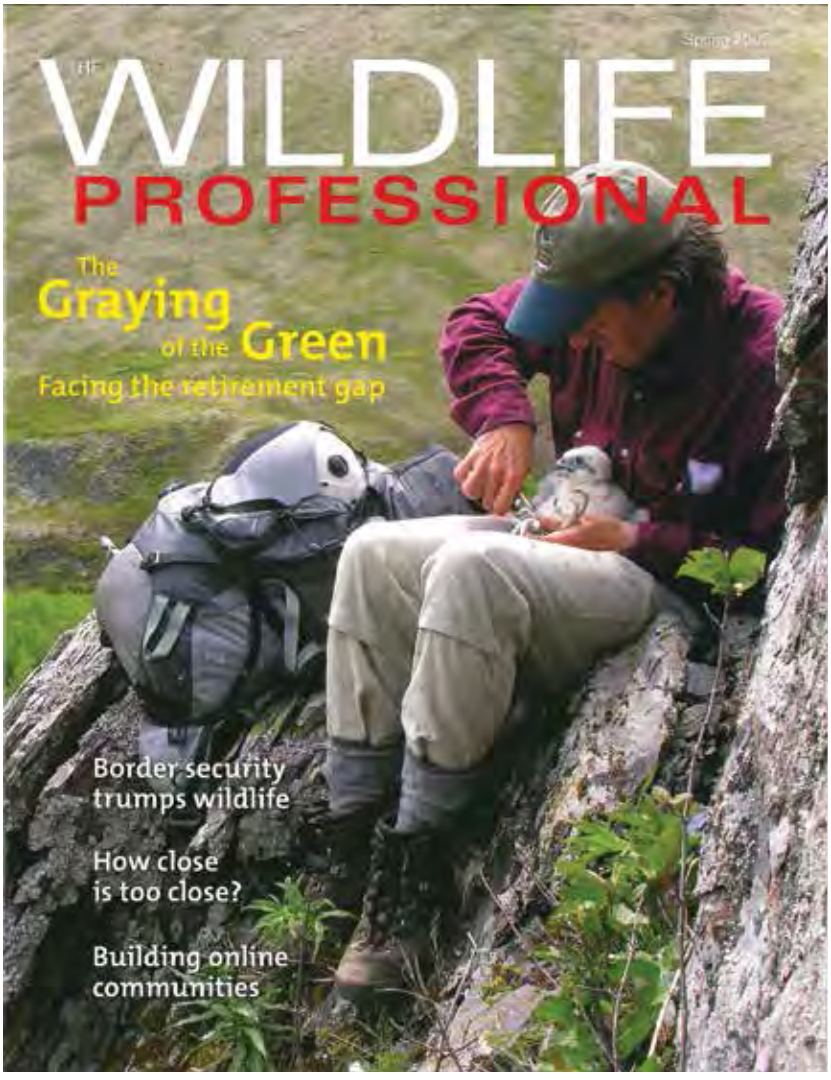
I *Am* One of You

A GAY WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST'S PERSPECTIVE ON OUR PROFESSION

By Travis Booms

I'm in the back seat of a Super Cub flying wildlife surveys near the Yukon River in northern Alaska. It's late November and I'm focused on counting the species of the day from my window while trying to keep the hose that delivers heat from the engine of the drafty little plane pointed at my feet. It's -20 degrees Fahrenheit and the cold is seeping through my bunny boots.



Credit: Nick Dunlop

▲ **The first issue of *The Wildlife Professional* featured Travis Booms on the cover, a striking example of how invisible LGBTQ professionals are in the wildlife field. They are part of our wildlife professional community but typically remain silent about their sexuality out of fear of discrimination.**

The pilot and I are making small talk to pass the time between wildlife sightings, so he starts telling jokes. Pretty soon I realize where this is leading. Yup, he just cracked a gay joke. It wasn't unusually crude or graphic, but its message — even if unintentional — was crystal clear.

You're not one of us.

Like any gay man, I have been through this routine before. You laugh it off and move on. It's not worth making a scene over, especially with one of five guys with whom you will be sharing a one-room bunkhouse later that night in a remote Alaskan village. But it lingers in my mind, even if only subconsciously.

You're not one of us.

Though I have been through this countless times before, it still gets my blood pressure up because, dang it, I *am* one of you! I have worked just as hard, taken the same classes, built the same general skill set and climbed the same ladder as most of you, progressing from nearly useless volunteer tagalong neophyte to president of a student chapter of The Wildlife Society to a professional biologist employed by a state agency.

And like many of you, TWS has played a significant role in my professional development. What's more — like many of you — being a wildlife professional isn't just a career to me; it's an inherent part of who I am.

I commend TWS and other professional organizations for making major and tangible progress toward gender equality and diversity in the wildlife field. I'm encouraged to know that although women are still underrepresented in our field and are still subjected to sexist remarks, innuendoes and far

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worse, discussions and symposia on gender equality have become the norm.

Women in the wildlife profession is no longer an unknown, quiet topic; it's a proud movement with substantial and growing support. Anyone who questions this need only attend one of the Women of Wildlife events at a TWS conference to know gender equality is on the march in the wildlife field. And that is awesome.

But what is not yet the norm at this point is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) biologists stepping forward as role models for the many who are only partially out or still professionally closeted.

Depending on the statistics you choose, 500 to 800 TWS members likely identify as LGBTQ. The actual percentage is probably lower than that of the general population, however, because stigmas and discrimination present in the wildlife profession have discouraged LGBTQ students from entering the field. In fact, some of my friends who displayed tremendous potential as young wildlife biologists and who were highly involved in TWS entered other fields because of the homophobia they perceived in our profession.

Nevertheless, statistics strongly suggest that at least one of the next 15 wildlife professionals you speak to identifies as LGBTQ. Seriously, stop and think about that. Write down the names of the next 15 biologists you speak to. We are one of you!

But unlike women and people of color, LGBTQ biologists are not outwardly identifiable in a crowd. We are silent observers. I can wander through large gatherings of my peers at conferences and yet can't find a single gay person in the crowd. It's not because we aren't there; we are. Too often, however, we choose to remain in the shadow of heteronormativity. And for those of us from the 27 states that do not prohibit LGBTQ discrimination in the workplace by statute, we remain closeted for very good reason.

Honestly, I've been a bit baffled on what to do and how to make my fellow LGBTQ biologists feel less marginalized. Being gay doesn't define me or my work. It has no relevance to my ability to complete my job. I can spot a gyrfalcon sitting on a nest ledge just as well as the next biologist. Hence, I don't make it a discussion topic in my day-to-day life; but, maybe I should.

I'm fortunate to work for a fish and game agency that, at least in my experience, is largely welcoming to openly gay and lesbian biologists. The agency also prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. Biologists in most of the United States, as well as non-state employees in Alaska, are not afforded such protections. This is why coming out in the wildlife profession is more than an act of social bravery. To most of us, disclosing our sexual orientation puts our careers, families, financial wellbeing and possibly even our physical wellbeing at risk.

My goal in this essay is really quite simple. It is to say that I *am* one of you and that LGBTQ biologists work in every agency, every region and every state. And we are also sitting in every undergraduate and graduate wildlife biology class. If you take statistical probability seriously — and I presume that 100 percent of you do — essentially every person reading this commentary knows at least one, and likely many more, LGBTQ wildlife professionals. If you don't, we simply are not out to you.

To my fellow LGBTQ biologists — and especially students considering this field as a profession — know that you will not be the only one at the next TWS or other professional society social mixer. If you see me at a conference, please introduce yourself and your peers to me. Let's build a community where none currently exists. Better yet, introduce me to the community that I've hopefully just been missing.

Lastly, to anyone reading this who remains skeptical about how quietly integrated into the wildlife profession LGBTQ biologist are, take a look at the cover of the inaugural issue of *The Wildlife Professional* from the spring of 2007. I find it heartening to know that a gay wildlife biologist is featured on the very first cover. ■

Travis Booms, PhD, is a regional wildlife biologist for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

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Out in the Field

A NEW LGBTQ+ INITIATIVE TAKES SHAPE WITHIN THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

By Colleen Olfenbuttel, Travis Booms, Claire Crow, Katherine O'Donnell

The future is hard to predict, but we scientists love to try anyway. We use probability and models to make sense of data and project the future, and we use those predictions to calculate our actions. Sometimes, though, the best action is to ignore the calculations and allow your instinct to decide.

Credit: Katie O'Donnell

▲ **Supporters of the Out in the Field initiative wore rainbow lapel pins at the 2019 AFS-TWS Joint Conference in Reno, Nevada.**

Travis Booms did just that when he decided to come out in his article "I Am One of You," which appeared in *The Wildlife Professional* March/April 2019 issue. He never expected his article to spark an initiative in The Wildlife Society that would bring together five strangers to hatch a plan, cause a room to overflow with wildlifers and lead TWS CEO Ed Thompson, TWS President Gary White and other TWS leaders to stand up and eloquently voice their support for the LGBTQ+ wildlifer community.

Travis' article sparked what has come to be known as the "Out in the Field" initiative, a new effort that began when four TWS members contacted Travis after his article was published to find out how they could answer his call to build a community for LGBTQ+ wildlifers in TWS.

Out in the Field has three simple goals: (1) to increase visibility of LGBTQ+ wildlifers in TWS; (2) to build a community of LGBTQ+ wildlifers; and (3) to identify ways to support LGBTQ+ wildlifers, including students, in the wildlife profession.

Being out and open

Why is there a need? North American wildlife agencies, which are entrusted with the management and conservation of the wildlife resource on behalf of the public, are increasingly faced with a public that is far more diverse than the wildlife profession itself. Some agencies and organizations have recognized the need to better represent their diverse stakeholders, including re-examining their organizations' values to ensure a diverse and supportive work environment. The Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies asserts these core values for their staff and organization, which represents all state and provincial wildlife agencies in North America: "We value people and treat them with respect and dignity" and "We value different opinions, backgrounds, and perspectives. We are not afraid to have difficult conversations and maintain our professionalism throughout."

As Travis pointed out in his article, many LGBTQ+ students and professionals still feel they can't be fully open with their colleagues, while others still face repercussions for being out or being outed by a colleague. But being out and open is an important component in building relationships with your colleagues, as strong relationships result in collaboration, trust and teambuilding — all which feed into one's career success.

We wildlifers spend a lot of time with each other due to the nature of our work — long drives to field sites, remote camping for weeks, early mornings sitting in duck blinds, hours in planes for telemetry flights, late nights mist-netting for bats. Naturally, we bond during these times, and not just over discussions about the wildlife we study.

Our non-LGBTQ+ colleagues openly talk about their personal lives — their kids, spouses, families and friends. They readily thank their spouses at award banquets and retirement parties. They bring their significant others over for dinner with their graduate advisor.

Our LGBTQ+ colleagues, however, often hesitate to do the same. In writing "I Am One of You", Travis wanted his fellow wildlifers to know that

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we LGBTQ+ wildlifers want to participate in these important, interpersonal discussions around the water cooler and not worry that doing so may lead to ostracism or harassment, slower career advancement or losing our jobs. Though such consequences are happily on the decline in many places, they continue to persist elsewhere. Our worries are very real and grounded in our lived experiences.

What does LGBTQ+ mean? Just as many organizations and agencies use initials to readily and easily identify themselves, LGBTQ+ is a shorthand way to represent a diversity of sexual and gender identities. LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and related identities. These letters, and the language used to discuss these identities, have expanded over time to be inclusive and representative of a variety of identities.

Becoming visible

The 2019 AFS-TWS Joint Conference in Reno, Nevada, served as the kickoff for this new initiative, which is housed under TWS' Ethnic and Gender Diversity Working Group. The organizers were Travis Booms, Claire Crow, Katie O'Donnell and Colleen Olfenbuttel — all LGBTQ+ wildlifers — along with Tad Theimer, an outspoken and key ally. We realized there was a need to let LGBTQ+ wildlife students and professionals know that they too are welcome in TWS' family and that they are not alone — that, just like their straight colleagues and friends, they can be open and truthful about who they are without fear of repercussions or being marginalized.

As Travis wrote, while being LGBTQ+ doesn't affect our ability to do our jobs, being open and out can put our careers, families, financial wellbeing and possibly our physical wellbeing at risk. And, unlike most other underrepresented groups, LGBTQ+ wildlifers are not easily identifiable, so we often don't even know who else identifies as LGBTQ+ when we're in the workplace, the field or at conferences. Further, TWS has lacked visible LGBTQ+ leaders who can provide important examples and role models.

The Out in the Field initiative is our attempt to change this. We want to make ourselves more visible so that we can support and mentor each other and work with our allies to foster a more inclusive, welcoming culture where diversity of all kinds is clearly embraced.

Our kickoff event in Reno was months in the making. Through hundreds of emails among us five strangers, we hatched plans for the upcoming conference. We quickly realized we needed both financial and logistical support. Several organizations (EGDWG, the Southwest Section of TWS, the Student Development Working Group, the Early Career Professionals Working Group and the International Wildlife Management Working Group) and individuals responded generously to our requests for help.

To help fulfill the first goal of Out in the Field, we created rainbow TWS pins, so that both LGBTQ+ wildlifers and allies alike could visibly show their support. We also decided to create "LGBTQ+ Ambassador" name badge ribbons that we and other out LGBTQ+ TWS members could wear to identify ourselves. These ribbons increased our visibility to each other and to conference attendees.

Wearers of the ribbons handed out the TWS rainbow pins, ally pledge cards and LGBTQ+ informational cards. Because ambassadors self-identified as LGBTQ+, other LGBTQ+ wildlifers could confide in them to share their personal stories and experiences. Meanwhile, TWS Council initiated its own effort to visibly support diversity at the conference, creating

Credit: Colleen Olfenbuttel

▼ **Over dinner, organizers Travis Booms, Claire Crow, Katie O'Donnell (left to right) and Colleen Olfenbuttel (not pictured) meet for the first time to prepare Out in the Field pledge cards with attached TWS rainbow pins to distribute during the conference.**

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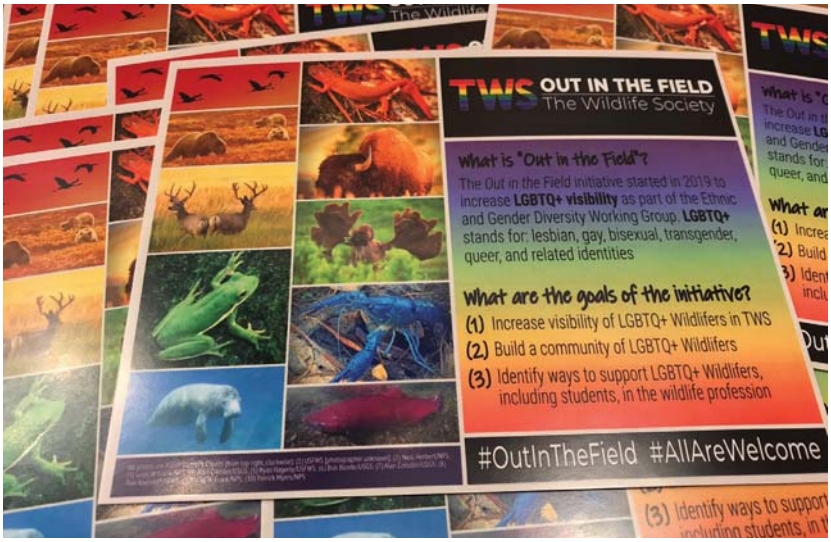

Credit: Katie O'Donnell

▲ **Postcards provided information on the Out in the Field initiative and events, the significance of wearing the TWS rainbow pin, the ally pledge and additional resources.**

▼ **An overflow crowd attends the inaugural Out in the Field luncheon, a gathering for LGBTQ+ wildlifers and their allies, at the 2019 AFS-TWS Joint Conference in Reno, Nevada.**

Credit: Katie O'Donnell

and encouraging conference attendees to wear an "All Are Welcome" pin. The synergy of these efforts demonstrated to LGBTQ+ wildlifers that they are welcome and supported in the TWS family.

An overflow crowd

The big event was the inaugural Out in the Field luncheon for both LGBTQ+ members and allies. We planned the luncheon for the first full day of the conference so that attendees knew early on about the initiative and what the pins and ribbons meant. We also hoped to jumpstart discussions on how to accomplish the three goals of the initiative, help LGBTQ+ attendees start to get to know each other and demonstrate that there are allies within many levels at TWS.

However, the morning of the luncheon, we found ourselves unnervingly anxious. We wondered if we had made a huge mistake — ordering food and setting places for 40 people. What if only a half-dozen people showed up? What would we do? Sit uncomfortably, looking at each other's name tags trying to think of things to say?

Thankfully, what others had been saying all along happened. People showed up. They started appearing 30 minutes early. So many people showed up, our allies started bringing in more chairs to the luncheon. And still, people were overflowing into the hallway. During the luncheon, Thompson returned a second time to the podium to announce that he had tripled our food order on the spot, asked for tables and chairs to be set up outside in the hallway and warmly embraced what we all were witnessing – the start of a new, energetic, positive movement in TWS that quite literally overflowed a room.

Straight and queer; men, women, and nonbinary; young and old; student and professional; cisgender and transgender; tattooed and not; tall and short; council members and regular members; and people of all colors showed up. The diversity in the room was beautiful. Standing in front of the room while Colleen spoke about this new initiative, looking out at allies and LGBTQ+ members alike, we felt moved. And honored. And incredibly grateful.

Throughout the conference, we were approached by LGBTQ+ students and professionals, many with personal stories about their experiences in the wildlife profession. And while both LGBTQ+ and allied students expressed gratitude that the initiative demonstrated that TWS is a welcoming place for all, many fellow LGBTQ+ professionals expressed astonishment at how far we have come — that TWS would make such a point of welcoming them at all, let alone support the initiative.

Where do we go from here?

Those perspectives from our fellow wildlifers stem from a not-too-distant past when they felt ostracized and unwelcome in our profession, and they show that many still perceive the wildlife field as close-minded regarding gender and sexual minorities. Out in the Field hopes to remove that perception — or in some cases, reality — permanently.

Out in the Field is a long-term initiative, and plans are already underway for the 2020 TWS Conference

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in Louisville, Kentucky. And yes, a luncheon on the first day with free food is part of that plan! If you attended the luncheon in Reno and signed up for our email list, we hopefully have already been in touch with you, so you can help us start planning. If you are interested in helping to plan for 2020 and beyond, or financially supporting these efforts, please feel free to reach out to any of the authors.

Ultimately, we feel that Out in the Field will make TWS, and the wildlife profession, stronger by recruiting and retaining the best of the best, which includes LGBTQ+ wildlifers. Diversity strengthens and enriches a system, be it the wildlife that we manage or the organization to which we belong.

With the myriad challenges facing our natural resources — climate change, rapid development, declines in hunters, habitat loss and limited funding to adequately address any of them — the wildlife profession cannot afford to have the next generation of wildlife professionals, with new perspectives and different ideas, leave this field because it is perceived as — or actually is — unwelcoming or discriminatory. This initiative was designed to show our fellow wildlifers that "We are some of you" and we are here to support our LGBTQ+ colleagues.

TWS' mission is "to inspire, empower, and enable wildlife professionals to sustain wildlife populations and habitats through science-based management and conservation." We hope that Out in the Field will inspire, empower and enable our fellow wildlifers, allies and LGBTQ+ alike, to contribute to our profession for the benefit of the wildlife resources we seek to conserve.

As past-president Gary Potts stated during his tenure "We are The Wildlife Society!" ■

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From Bee-eaters to Bats

EXPLORING THE DIVERSITY OF THE LGBTQ+ EXPERIENCE AMONG WILDLIFE PROFESSIONALS

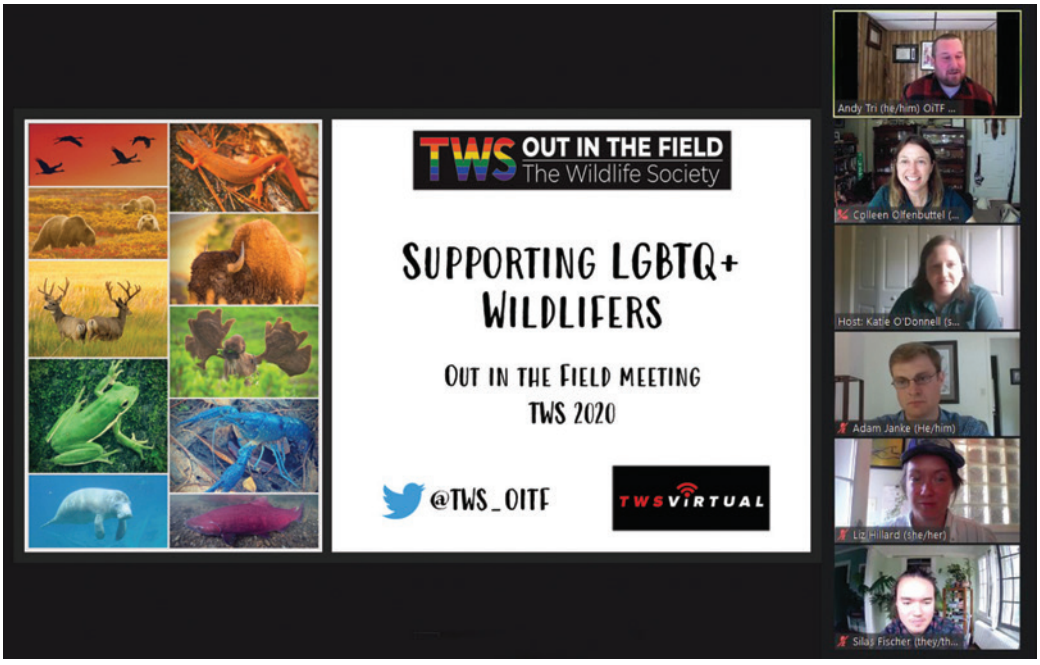
By Adam Janke, Silas Fischer, Colleen Olfenbuttel and Andrew Tri

Ask any room of wildlife biologists to name their favorite species and a lively debate is sure to ensue. There will be game people and nongame people, team bird and team mammal, herp lovers and international wildlife fans. We all share a passion for wild things and wild places, but when it comes to agreeing on how these wild things rank, we hold strong opinions.

It was no different last October during a conference social hour in which members of The Wildlife Society identifying with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other LGBTQ+ communities gathered to network as part of TWS' growing Out in The Field initiative. At the onset, they were asked to share one wildlife species they felt best embodied the "queer experience." Predictably, the opinions were as diverse as the participants were.

A few themes emerged, though. Some chose species without color differences or other sexually dimorphic traits, like ocellated turkeys (*Meleagris ocellata*) or caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*). Others picked animals with striking coloration or ornamentation, like prairie chickens, poison dart frogs and the "drag queen bird" — more commonly known as the European bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*). Unique behaviors, like the long-tailed manakin's (*Chiroxiphia linearis*) courtship display or the shape shifting of octopuses, spoke to some. Subtle beauty was important for others, as seen in California condors (*Gymnogyps californicus*) or the hidden beauty of chameleons.

For some, ubiquitous species like raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) or frogs embodied queerness. Gender-defying organisms like agave plants and sea horses fit for others. Some saw their experience in the resilient lives of penguins, who according to one participant, "find love despite living in rugged landscapes." Misunderstood species, like wolves (*Canis lupus*), struck a chord for others. One participant saw their experience in the life of the Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*) — beautiful and striking when they stick their neck out but willing to retreat to the safety and comfort of their shell when threatened. In the end, the nearly 30 wildlife biologists from 19 states and three provinces agreed on perhaps only one thing: the queer experience is as varied and remarkable as the wildlife diversity we all admire.



Courtesy Adam Janke

▼ **The Out in The Field initiative of TWS held a public forum and discussion at the 2020 TWS virtual conference (pictured here), as well as a virtual social for wildlifers in the LGBTQ+ community.**

Defining LGBTQ+ diversity

Diversity within the LGBTQ+ community comes from two characteristics all people hold: gender identity and sexuality. These characteristics, along with others like age, physical ability, race and ethnicity, are what social scientists call "internal dimensions of diversity" — characteristics of a person's central identity that we do not choose. As pop star Lady Gaga

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reminds us, “Baby, [we’re] born this way.” Diversity also includes external dimensions that we do choose — career, marital status, religion, place of residence — which can be dynamic over time.

We need to understand and acknowledge both the external and internal dimensions of diversity because both enrich workplaces, build stronger teams and help people solve challenges, including those we face in the wildlife profession. Internal dimensions are most central to people’s identities, though, and often, they are the most overtly oppressed in society.

That is why it is critical for professionals to understand the complexity of these internal dimensions of diversity and how they intersect with one another to form the identities of the people with whom we work. Wildlife biologists strive to protect and enhance biodiversity for ecosystem resiliency. We can apply that same thinking to understand our colleagues and ourselves better, improving the resilience and relevance of our professional community and our professional organizations.

Key terms

The terms gender and sex are often inappropriately used interchangeably, an issue widespread in wildlife research and literature. Confusing the terms obscures the important distinction between sex — a label assigned at birth based on morphological or chromosomal characteristics (i.e., male, female, or intersex) — and gender, which is a more complex concept defined as a person’s self-assessed identity as male, female, both or neither.

Gender identity is the term used to describe how a person identifies as a man, a woman, a blend of both (i.e., nonbinary or gender queer) or neither (i.e., agender). It is a person’s internal sense of their gender and can either differ from their sex assigned at birth (i.e., transgender, nonbinary and agender) or not (i.e., cisgender).

Sexual orientation is a term used to categorize a person’s emotional or physical attraction to others. Categories include gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight, asexual and pansexual or omnisexual — those who are attracted to people regardless of sex or gender. These categories can help define a core identity relating to sexual orientation, but they can also obscure the spectrum of attraction found among many people, from strictly same-sex attraction (homosexual) to strictly opposite-sex attraction (heterosexual) or entirely outside of this gradient, as found among asexual people.

Credit: Pierre Dalous

▲ **European bee-eaters were among about 20 species of wildlife reported to embody the queer experience among LGBTQ+ wildlifers at the 2020 TWS conference.**

Understanding how people identify can be complicated. There are no reliable external indicators of how a person identifies, and how they express their identity may change over time. This introduces another important concept. Gender expression is how an individual presents their gender identity. Sometimes that is through voice, behavior, clothing or hairstyle. Sometimes it is for personal reasons. Other times, it is part of a pragmatic strategy to exist safely in a society where certain identities are oppressed, or in some cultures, explicitly persecuted.

We tend to see more diverse manifestations of these identities among people who identify with the LGBTQ+ community. Because these diverse manifestations of gender or sexuality are less common, they are often misunderstood. As a result, LGBTQ+ people are more likely to face discrimination, physical harm or suffer from mental health issues. Additional internal dimensions of diversity, such as race and physical ability, can also intersect with LGBTQ+ identities to influence experiences with discrimination and violence. Transgender women of color, for example, are victims of hate crimes at higher rates than white transgender women.

Widely held stereotypes of what it means to be male or female in a mostly cisgender, heterosexual

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culture further constrain expression and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. Breaking down these stereotypes and accepting people for the complicated and fascinating individuals they are is critical.

Making space

How can we — as wildlife professionals — make use of all these concepts to be inclusive at work, in the classroom or in the field? First, keep in mind these identities fundamentally define us as people. Every person has a gender identity, sexual orientation and gender expression.

TWS' Out in the Field initiative is working to elevate the visibility of LGBTQ+ wildlifers and build a community to ensure all wildlifers are embraced and accepted for who they are (Olfenbuttel et al. 2020). Last December, we held our second virtual happy hour for LGBTQ+ wildlifers in support of this goal. Like our first social, about 30 people showed up from approximately 20 states and provinces.

Students, early-career professionals and seasoned professionals from positions as varied as industry biologists, private consultants, state or federal biologists and university educators joined. After some informal networking, we asked this group what they wished their non-LGBTQ+ wildlife colleagues knew. Here we present the highlights from these discussions as tools for all wildlife professionals to apply to build a more inclusive and equitable profession.

▲ Including pronouns on business cards, name badges, email signatures and more can normalize the practice and build a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ people.

Learn the language: For many, there is a language to learn when seeking to understand the LGBTQ+ community. Many of us in the community, including each of the authors of this article, admit that the more we listen to the experience of others, the more we learn about the complexities of our own community. Complex identities are hidden in the shadows in many cultures — often oppressed or overtly persecuted. Historically, these identities have not been taught in schools or discussed openly.

Fortunately, that is changing in many cultures. Increased visibility of diverse gender and sexual identities is improving people's understanding and opening minds, leading to further expression and acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities and opening a path to more learning as a result. For people new to the language, articles like this one can help. Learning new languages is complex. People will make mistakes, which should be treated as learning opportunities. When learners slip, it is best to listen, offer a polite correction and some constructive feedback as we all learn the language of inclusion together.

Understand and recognize intersectionality: An identity within the LGBTQ+ community represents just one dimension of how a person identifies. Their identity also may include other dimensions of diversity, a concept social scientists call intersectionality. Recognizing intersectionality helps us better understand the range of experiences among our colleagues, and it advances important conversations about equity and inclusion. For example, LGBTQ+ people of color can face additional discrimination due to race or ethnicity, whereas white LGBTQ+ wildlifers may not. These additional aspects can add further challenges to finding acceptance, understanding and inclusivity for people with intersecting, historically oppressed identities.

It is critical for wildlife professionals to understand the complexity among all dimensions of diversity to understand themselves and their colleagues better. This understanding will enable us all to ultimately advocate for inclusive spaces in classrooms, workspaces and the field. Meaningful advocacy involves acknowledgment of the plurality of diverse voices and championing efforts to create equity.

Create safe working environments in the office, lab and field: Discussions at our recent event often centered on the feeling that LGBTQ+ wildlifers cannot always bring their full selves to work (Booms 2019). Rather, many LGBTQ+ wildlifers worry about whether universities, agencies, organizations and field sites are free from prejudice against LGBTQ+ identities, are physically unsafe or are otherwise unwelcoming. As a result, many make decisions about their species of study, areas in which they will work and organizations they will work for based on concerns for their well-being.

Supervisors can strive to establish a workplace culture that ensures an inclusive and safe environment for all by rejecting homophobic or transphobic language or actions, speaking out when witnessing bullying or harassment, being visible in embracing diversity and listening to the needs and experiences of all employees. Supervisors can ensure gender-neutral restrooms and housing options are available in workplaces and the field, set expectations of staff

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and field crews that they will treat each other equitably and with respect, have staff work in pairs to assure safety in the field and be familiar with social and cultural conditions at field sites.

Above all else, strong leaders and LGBTQ+ allies are good listeners. They are receptive instead of dismissive, and they ask genuine, noninvasive questions instead of making assumptions.

Signal acceptance and inclusion: One critical way to build more affirming spaces is to use reliable and visible symbols of acceptance and inclusion. Allies can incorporate statements of inclusiveness in institutional documentation, post signage in office spaces and highlight actions taken to create an inclusive environment. Allies can also share their personal pronouns (e.g., he/him, she/her) in email signatures, conference nametags and conversations as a means to normalize and accept a range of pronouns used by people in the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., they/them, xe/xem).

These simple steps can signal acceptance to transgender and gender-nonconforming people and reduce incidences of misgendering, in which someone is referred to with gender pronouns with which they do not identify. In this way, the use of pronouns by cisgendered people becomes a reliable symbol of a welcome environment for all.

What it means to be LGBTQ+

Toward the end of our inaugural Out in the Field social at the virtual TWS conference in October 2020, we attempted to arrive at a favorite species or taxon that best embodied the queer experience among the myriad options. Predictably, we did not reach a clear consensus, but one kept coming up — bats.

Participants found in bats a number of common themes that resonate across the community. Bats are one of the most diverse taxa and are found across the globe in a wide variety of ecosystems. They occupy a breadth of ecological niches and have evolved to thrive in a variety of challenging contexts. Bats are widely misunderstood, and are often the subject of myths and misunderstandings. To many people, the sight of a bat is unnerving, but among those who study them or admire their diversity and resiliency, their beauty is obvious. They often go unseen, living among people but carrying out their lives in the shadows or privacy of natural places. They are often persecuted from hatred born of ignorance of their value in ecosystems.

Credit: Ann Froschauer/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

▲ **Bats often live in the shadows, play critical roles in ecosystems and are persecuted out of misunderstanding. Many of these characteristics align with the experience of LGBTQ+ people.**

In these ways and more, the experience of bats is not unlike the experience of many queer people. Despite their ubiquity, they are often misunderstood, unseen or persecuted. The work to champion the lives of these critical organisms is not unlike the work needed to value LGBTQ+ wildlifers. We need to learn to see them, appreciate them and allow them to be their true selves. By doing so, we benefit the wildlife we manage and the organizations we belong to, as diversity strengthens and enriches us all. ■

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