

Plagiarism: allegation and response

One paragraph of my report¹, available online since 2004, was copied in an article published in this journal² and a wrong citation³ was marked by the authors.

References

1. Athreya, V. R., Thakur, S. S., Chaudhuri, S. and Belsare, A. V., A study of the man-leopard conflict in the Junnar forest division, Pune district, Maharashtra. Submitted to the office of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Maharashtra State Forest Department and the Wildlife Protection Society of India, New Delhi, 2004; http://www.projectwaghoba.in/docs/junnar_conflict_report_athreya_et_2004_condensed.pdf
2. Pandey *et al.*, *Curr. Sci.*, 2007, **92**, 1129–1133.
3. Khadse, A. N., Report submitted to Maharashtra State Forest Department, 2002, pp. 1–38.

I would like to highlight that the paper² has text copied not only from my report but also from the following:

- a. Uphyrkina, O., Johnson, W. E., Quigley, H., Miquelle, D., Marker, L., Bush, M. and O'Brien, S. J., *Mol. Ecol.*, 2001, **10**, 2617–2633.
- b. Luo, S. J. *et al.*, *PLoS Biol.*, 2004, **2**, e442.
- c. O'Brien, S. J. and Mayr, E., *Science*, 1991, **251**, 1187.

Even if I concede that the sentence from the *Science* paper was copied verbatim because it is a definition (though it should have been marked within inverted commas and the reference cited), neither the bits from Uphyrkina's and Luo's papers, nor from my report, are definitions.

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Response

Our paper was the outcome of a collaborative project involving two sets of investigators with varying expertise – Prashant K. Pandey, Dhiraj P. Dhotre, Mahesh S. Dharne, Milind S. Patole and

Yogesh S. Shouche of the National Centre for Cell Science (NCCS), Pune; Ashok N. Khadse of the Pune Forest Division; and Umesh I. Hiremath and Ravindra D. Chaudhari of the Zoology and Environmental Sciences Research Centre, Shri Shiv Chhatrapati College, Pune. Our paper deals with the amplification of mitochondrial 12S rRNA genes from the DNA and the analysis of these sequences. The information about man-leopard conflict is included only as background information.

The NCCS team has experience and expertise in the molecular biology/phylogeny area. The leopard scat samples were provided by Chaudhari, and the NCCS group was involved in DNA isolation, PCR, sequencing and sequence analysis. All information related to man-leopard conflict came from Chaudhari and Khadse. Khadse was the Deputy Conservator of Forests, Junnar Forest Division during man-leopard conflict. During preparation of the manuscript, he had access to all the information and reports related to incidences of leopard attacks in villages coming in his jurisdiction as an officer. Khadse says that all the data in the report by Athreya in 2004 (by the time when the man-leopard conflicts from the Junnar Forest Division were almost over and the situation was under the control of the Forest Department in 2003) has come from the report he had submitted to the Government of Maharashtra in 2002 in Marathi, the official language of Maharashtra. He claims that this fact was acknowledged by Athreya in her report. There is also proof of this acknowledgement supporting Khadse's claim.

The sentences in question do not involve any specific hypothesis or intellectual idea and merely state the facts about incidences of leopard attacks on humans and the geographical information about the locations where the man-leopard conflicts, casualties and livestock depredation have occurred more. Khadse maintains that the sentences under question are English translations of his original Marathi statements, either written or oral. The sentences in our paper and Athreya's report in English are indeed identical and we apologize for this. This error on our part was inadvertent and

unintentional and we express our regret over this. We would like to acknowledge her report¹ as a reference for our publication:

1. Athreya, V. R., Thakur, S. S., Chaudhuri, S. and Belsare, A. V., A study of the man-leopard conflict in the Junnar forest division, Pune district, Maharashtra. Submitted to the office of the Chief Wildlife Warden, Maharashtra State Forest Department and the Wildlife Protection Society of India, New Delhi, 2004.

However, the manuscript does not deal with man-leopard conflict but identification of leopard species from field collected faecal DNA, data for which was generated, compiled and analysed at NCCS itself. The other papers (pointed out by Athreya) from where the sentences alleged to have been copied, have been cited by us as references. Thus, any similarity to original sentences is unintentional and is due to ignorance of those authors who contributed those parts of the manuscript. Unfortunately, the specific requirement of using quotation marks to enclose the phrases longer than 12 words reproduced verbatim from elsewhere is not widely known nor is this explicitly indicated in the instructions to authors provided by most journals.

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Comment

In his reply, Shouche indicated that I had copied from the report written by Khadse in Marathi, but it is to be noted that I have attributed the information to Khadse and the only information I have used from the reports is numerals extracted from the tables.

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