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Simon Baeckens

Functional Morphology Lab, Department of Biology, University of Antwerp, 2610 Wilrijk, Belgium

Department of Biological Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney, New South Wales 2109, Australia

simon.baeckens@uantwerp.be

Simone P. Blomberg

School of Biological Sciences, University of Queensland, Saint Lucia, Queensland 4072, Australia

s.blomberg1@uq.edu.au

Richard Shine

Department of Biological Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney, New South Wales 2109, Australia

rick.shine@mq.edu.au

Inclusive science: ditch insensitive terminology

To increase inclusivity in science, we should avoid long-held descriptors for non-human organisms that could cause offence to some sectors of society. The explosion in citizen science and in science blogs ensures that the continued use of such terminology will come to the attention of people who find it hurtful.

One example is the expression ‘she-male’, long used to describe female mimicry by male garter snakes (R. Shine *et al. Nature* **414**, 267; 2001). Another is ‘sneaky mating strategy’ (see, for example, G. A. Parker *Proc. R. Soc. B* **242**, 127–133; 1990), which could be misinterpreted as endorsing conventional sex roles. And scientists continue to refer to ‘dwarf’ males in behavioural ecology (F. Vollrath *Trends Ecol. Evol.* **13**, 159–163; 1998), long after society in general abandoned the word as derogatory.

Language evolves, so terms applied in one situation can acquire different connotations over time. Moreover, attitudes are shaped by language, which itself can shape data interpretation (see, for example, J. D. Monk *et al. Nature Ecol. Evol.* **3**, 1622–1631; 2019).