

## **NACCB Interactive Session Report – 2020**

### **Live Storytelling: An Old Tool for New Conservation**

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“Live Storytelling: An Old Tool for New Conservation” was delivered as an interactive workshop at NACCB 2020. This workshop involved a short lecture component, a period of independent writing, and a series of story practice sessions.

During this session, participants were first briefed during a 20-minute mini-lecture on 1) what live storytelling events are comprised of, 2) what makes an effective and engaging live story, and 3) a primer of narrative arcs that may be used to structure a live story.

After a short period of questions and answers, participants were then given three minutes to sketch a “story skeleton” — in other words, the narrative structure for a 90-second, real-world story focused on their own lived experience or work in conservation. These stories are meant to be told live in front of an audience of non-experts. Next, participants were divided into breakout rooms of 3-4 people and instructed to tell their 90-second story to the group. Following this, the other group members re-tell the story as they heard it back to the storyteller, which is a crucial exercise that helps storytellers understand how their story is being perceived. The audience then offers one minute of critical constructive feedback. After this process, the storyteller swaps and the process began again.

Once all storytellers had practiced delivering their stories, we regrouped to discuss 1) things that worked well, and 2) things that we noticed were common pitfalls and problems, as well as if participants had identified solutions to them. A common theme of this group discussion was the crucial value of hearing how the audience perceived the story—often, the story was not perceived as the storyteller had wanted it to be, and storytellers were frequently surprised by this. Additionally, storytellers reported taking great value from hearing what their audience enjoyed or what piqued their interest, as well as details that the audience deemed unnecessary. This exercise is valuable in both refining stories, but also in communicating the value of audience feedback in story crafting and practice.

Finally, we hosted a pop-up live storytelling event, during which participants were invited to share their 90-second stories with the entire group. The stories that emerged from this exercise were, to put it succinctly, fantastic! Storytellers told about their struggle to enter scientific fields, their work in conservation, and the pleasures and pitfalls of fieldwork.

Telling live stories in front of an audience can be an intimidating and uncomfortable experience, particularly for scientists who are unfamiliar with the format. However, by way of a gradual process of telling stories for small groups and receiving friendly, constructive feedback, all of us can become better storytellers, and harness the power of storytelling for conservation.

After the workshop, slides were shared with all participants, and can be accessed by contacting [mecronin@ucsc.edu](mailto:mecronin@ucsc.edu).