



---

## Is It Time to Bury the Ecosystem Concept?

- Maria Vernet and Karen Baker, PAL LTER

Robert O'Neill, Is it time to bury the ecosystem concept? *Ecology* 82(12), 2001 pp3275-3284

O'Neill reminds the reader that the ecosystem approach is a model we impose on nature and examines model assumptions including stability, fixed boundaries and homogeneity. Use of the ecosystem model over the past decades has revealed some aspects of natural systems are better explored through alternative methods. One focus is on the importance and impact of local stability and on the equally important concept of long-term sustainability. His framework provides the bigger context, beyond basin to global, so can address questions such as 'what is left in a location after ecosystem flight occurs'.

The statement "Homo sapiens is not an external disturbance, it is a keystone species within the system" suggests that with ecosystem defining characteristics like dispersal range (which in case of dogs and humans is global), we discover the disturbance/recovery of 'spaceship earth' is indeed in the hands of the species with a capacity for

a) information integration; b) organizational memory; c) humor; d) all of the above; e) none of the above.

The answer will be forthcoming.