

Dear WEC Community,

It is with heavy hearts that we write today to express our pain and anguish over the recent murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and too many others due to pervasive and continued racism in our society. We join the growing number of voices in calling for justice and an end to the continued violence and many injustices endured by the Black community in our nation at the hands of police brutality and white supremacy. We fully support the people and organizations engaging in efforts to combat bigotry, racism, and intolerance. We state clearly and unequivocally that Black Lives Matter.

As members of the WEC community, we stand in solidarity with our Black students, colleagues, and the entire Black community. We know that racism rears its head in many forms, from the individual to the systemic, from covert to overt. We continue to strive for an inclusive academic community that recognizes and appreciates different perspectives and voices. As a department, we commit to actively engage in anti-racist practices and dismantle institutionalized white supremacy.

As wildlifers, many of us appreciate the stress relief and solace that nature can provide in many ways. The recent event in Central Park, where Christian Cooper was threatened while birding because of his race, further reveals how discrimination and hate extend even to people immersing themselves in nature. This incident is, unfortunately, only one of many examples of members of the Black community and additional communities of color being mistreated and threatened either while participating in wildlife recreation or through their work in the wildlife profession. We have been inspired and uplifted by the efforts and voices in recent twitter campaigns #BlackBirdersWeek, #BlackInNature, and #BlackAFinSTEM. The future of the wildlife field lies in very capable hands and minds of an increasingly diverse group of young scientists, and that future looks very bright.

We are proud of the spirit and talent of all our Wildlife students and community and are honored by the passion and dedication so evident in the work that you do. Your voices deserve to be heard and respected, and you are a valued part of the department, the wildlife community, and the University of Florida. We know that between the pandemic that keeps many of us physically apart and the injustice that has gone on too long, this is a very difficult time. Know that we are here to listen and to offer support. Please reach out to any of us at any time.

Sincerely,

WEC IDEA Committee on behalf of the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation

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