

BLACK ECOLOGISTS STATEMENT

In recent weeks and months, we witnessed the murder of George Floyd during a traffic stop by Minneapolis police, the shooting of Breonna Taylor by Louisville police, the killing of Tony McDade, a black transman, by Tallahassee police officers, and the murder of Ahmaud Arbery while jogging in Georgia. If it were not for widespread public outcry, these incidents would have likely gone unnoticed.

All of these events are a stark reminder that BLACK LIVES still don't matter in the United States. As Black Ecologists, we stand together with our brothers and sisters in condemning this senseless act of state violence. We are the children, siblings, and companions of the countless of unnamed precious Black people that have lost their lives under unjust, racist circumstances.

The birth of the Black Ecologists organization was sparked by the high-profile police shootings of Black people from 2014-2016. Inspired by the Movement for Black Lives, the Black Ecologists organization seeks to develop a safe space for its members to address the many challenges that Black Ecologists face in academia. To date, we have established a Black Ecologists chapter in the largest professional society for ecologists, the Ecological Society of America, organized a symposia highlighting the scientific contributions of Black Ecologists, and advanced interdisciplinary scholarship across socio-ecological systems.

Across departments specializing in ecology and evolutionary biology, African Americans are severely under-represented, earning less than 1.8% of PhD's in 2014, while representing 13% of the American people. A persistent feeling among Black Ecologists is a lack of belonging in their departments and institutions. We are also more likely to be harassed while engaging in outdoor activities. This was showcased by the recent instance in Central Park where a white woman reported a Black man birding to the police after being asked to put a leash on her dog, underscoring that being Black in the outdoors is not to be taken for granted. To address these challenges, we continue to promote activities that pave the way for Black Ecologists to succeed. Amongst other things, we encourage institutions to not only release statements condemning racial violence, but enact policies that more directly benefit the lives and careers of Black Ecologists. Black Ecologists not only need representation, but tools and networks that facilitate their inclusion into scientific and professional activities that can benefit their careers.

Like other Black professionals, Black Ecologists face issues of racism and belonging in their daily lives. Consequently, we are not afforded the privilege to separate our scientific interests from the political realities. Against the backdrop of police brutality, Black communities are also being disproportionately disrupted by the havoc of the pandemic. Millions of black workers have lost their jobs and those with essential jobs face disproportionately greater health risks.

Echoing Fannie Lou Hamer, we are "Tired of Being Sick and Tired". We stand in solidarity with the basic rights of Black people and lend our support to the courageous, intersectional response that has defined the justice movement for George Floyd.

In solidarity,
Black Ecologists