

A Place for Ecology

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The UK National Vegetation Classification has made a great difference to the way in which all manner of environmental professionals do business with the natural world, as well as illuminating the spectrum of scepticism, uncertainty and trust with which practitioners and customers variously regard science. Results from some of its many applications also reveal attitudes and practices that subvert the benefits of ecological research. On the one hand, spurious notions of the 'wild' minimise legitimate cultural claims to relationships with place while much conservation and landscape planning works to obliterate the fuzziness and dynamism of green infrastructure and creative interactions between nature and humankind. The policy frames to which many of us now work also exert a particular twist, imposing unrealistic targets for landscape management and inflexible measures of environmental condition. For some, the ethical implications of ecological endeavour are not a legitimate part of our professional integrity, yet the notion of ecosystem services, widely welcomed, presses such moral decisions upon us – or provides an opportunity for negotiating a more imaginative relationship to the natural world. Ecology has a place in relating environmental value and condition to human well-being in ways that neither enslave the natural nor fail to liberate human resourcefulness to find its place in a sustainable world among other creatures.

