

# **How to communicate about “biodiversity loss” Evidence from a US-wide terminology experiment**

**Wändi Bruine de Bruin, Monica Dean, Carling Monder, Allison Agsten (USC),  
Moa Cortobius (Save the Children), Georgia Silvera Seamons (Local Nature Lab),  
Robert Spaul (IPBES), Kim Tenggardjaja (California Dept of Fish and Wildlife)**

Funded by:



# Environmental communicators are trying to introduce new terms



Climatic Change (2024) 177:129  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-024-03786-3>

---

Should we change the term we use for “climate change”?  
Evidence from a national U.S. terminology experiment

**Answer: No**



UnderStandingAmericaStudy

# World is facing unprecedented *biodiversity loss*



UN Report: Nature's Dangerous Decline 'Unprecedented'; Species Extinction Rates 'Accelerating'



<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

# *Biodiversity* gets confused with laundry detergent



BBC (2010). Biodiversity – a kind of washing powder?  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-11546289>

# Organizations use various terms that emphasize different aspects of the phenomenon



**Biodiversity  
loss**

**Biodiversity  
crisis**

**Nature  
loss**

**Nature  
crisis**

**Extinction of  
plants and  
animals**

**Extinction  
crisis**

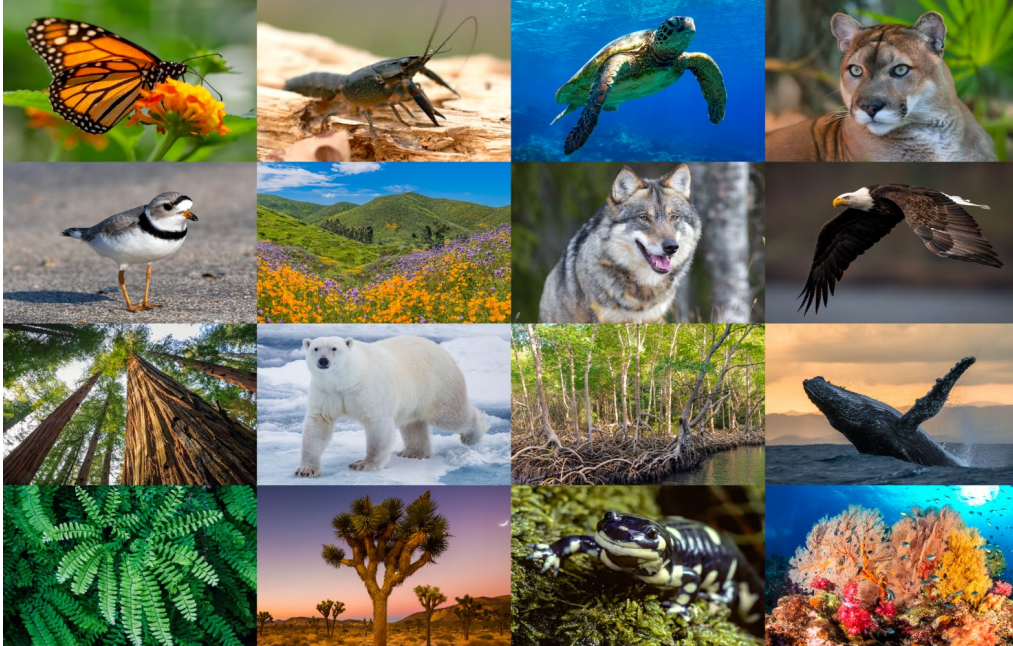
# Wording experiment with national representative U.S. sample (N=7,405)

Biodiversity loss	Biodiversity crisis
Nature loss	Nature crisis
Extinction of plants and animals	Extinction crisis



UnderStandingAmericaStudy

# Half of participants saw their assigned term in context (vs. on its own)

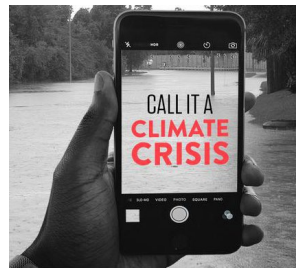


**Biodiversity loss** means we are losing the variety of life on earth. In the U.S., many species are going extinct. If nature is struggling, it is bad for us too. We need nature because it provides us with the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the water we need to drink and grow crops.

**Biodiversity loss** is happening because of the destruction of nature areas, pollution, climate change, and invasive species. Protecting our land and our water can help to turn this trend around.

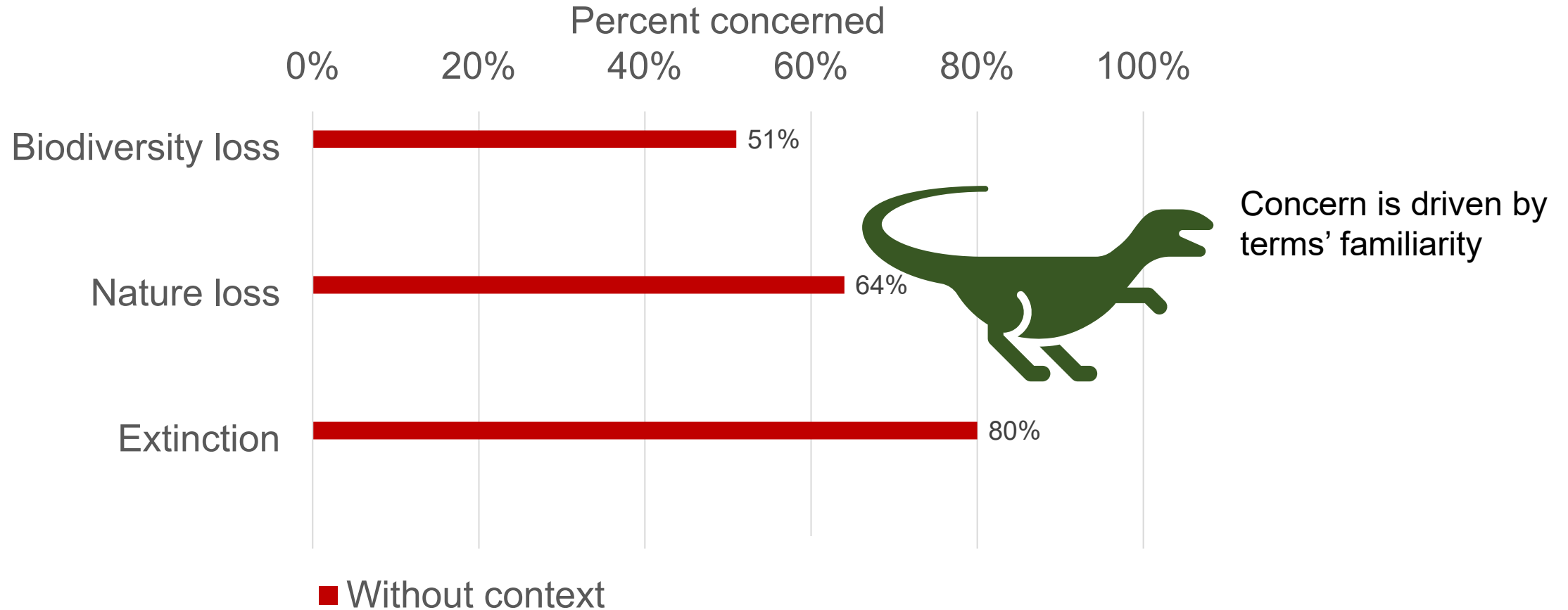
# About their assigned term, participants were asked

- ➔ How **familiar** are you with [this term]?
- ➔ How **concerned** are you about [this term]?
- ➔ How **urgent** do you think it is to do something about [this term]?
- ➔ How willing are you to **support policies** that protect our land and water, to address [this term]?



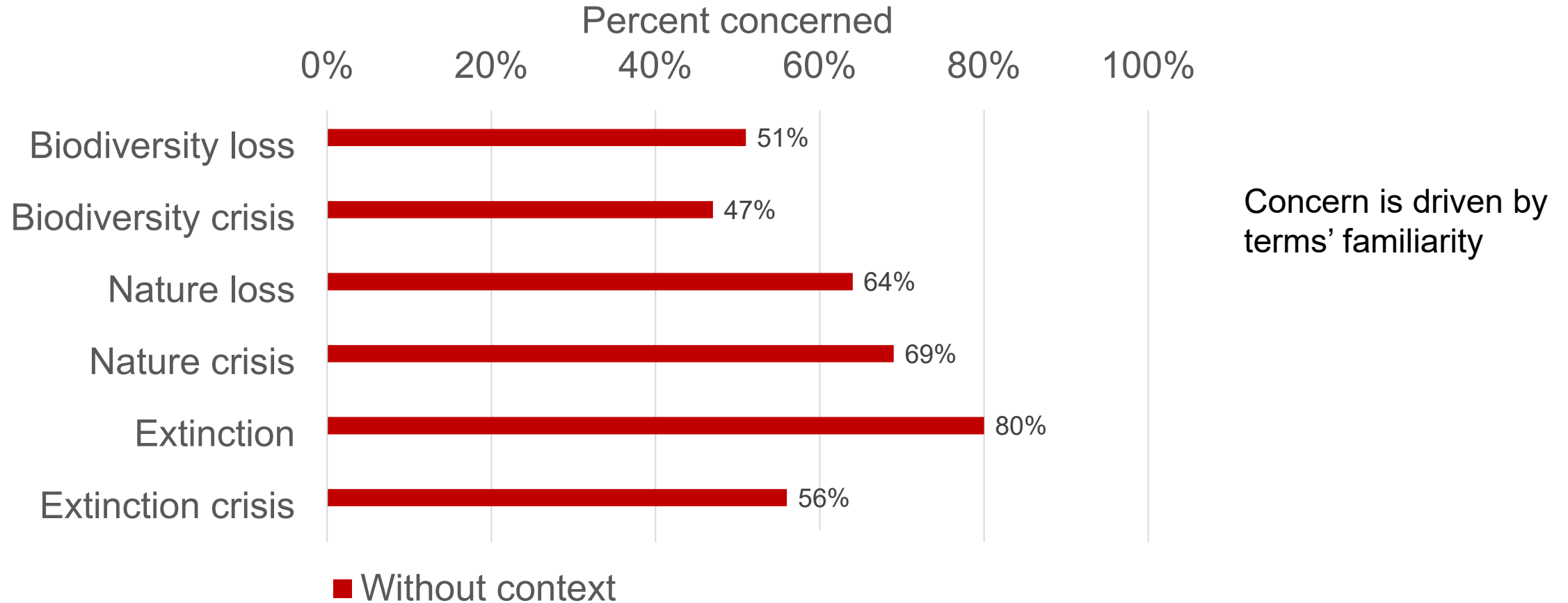
# Finding 1:

“Biodiversity loss” elicits the least concern, and “extinction” the most



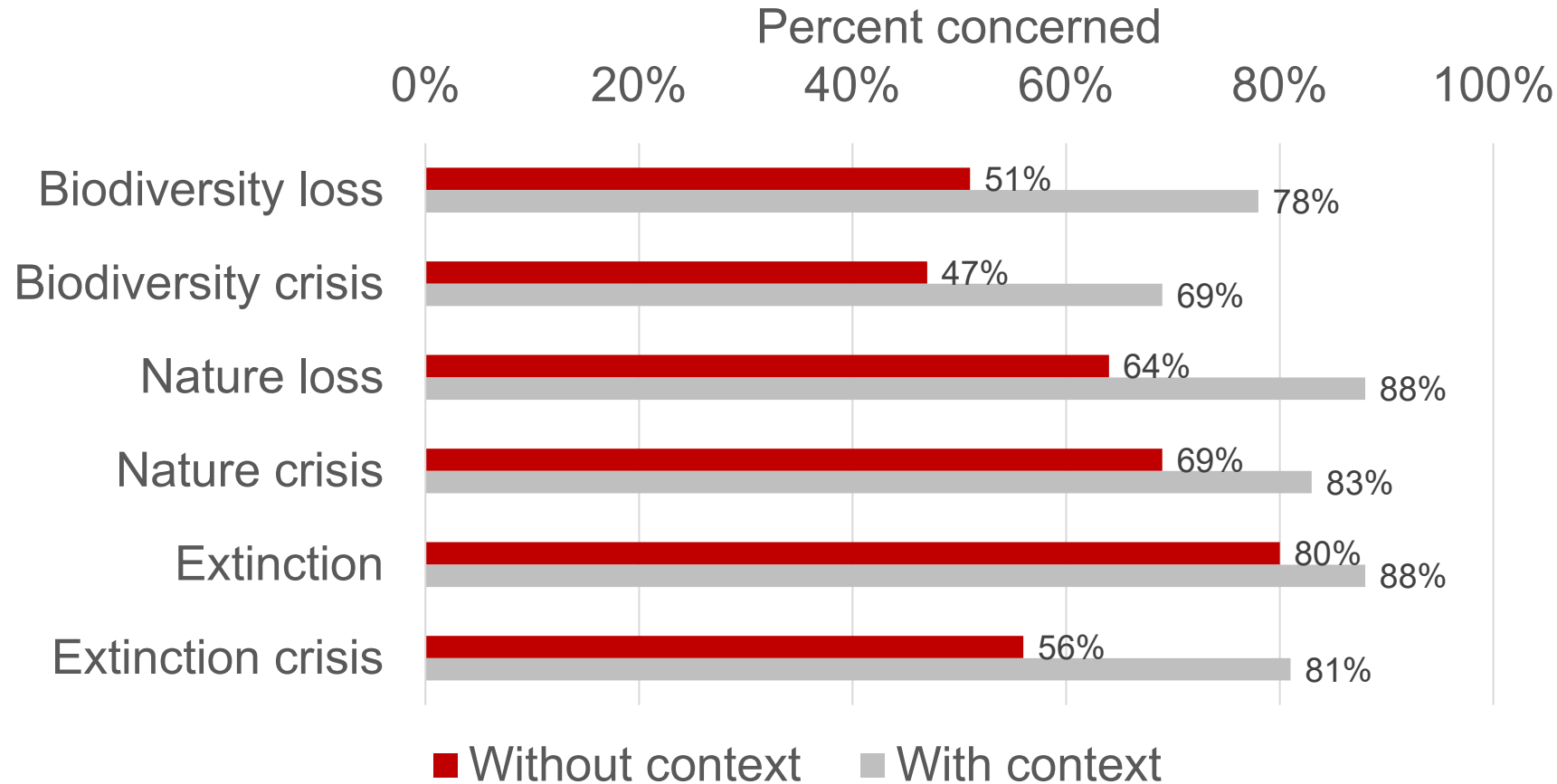
# Finding 2:

## Adding “crisis” doesn’t help and makes “extinction” less concerning



# Finding 3:

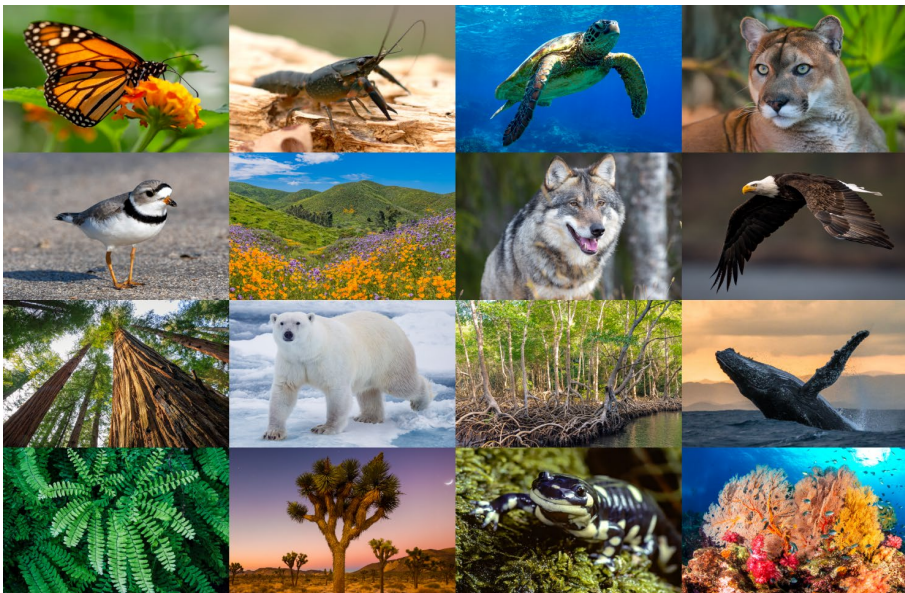
## Adding context helps each term, but “extinction” hardly needs it



Nature loss performs as well as extinction, but only in context

Patterns are similar for perceived urgency and willingness to act

# Key takeaways for public communications



1. Don't say "biodiversity loss" unless you are talking to experts
2. Don't bother calling it a "crisis"
3. Refer to "extinction of plants and animals" if possible
4. "Nature loss" is a good alternative but use it in context



UnderStandingAmericaStudy

# Contact information



wandibdb@usc.edu