

The Long Slog Through the Virtual Swamp: Making a Wetland Podcast in Spanish

Eduardo Cejudo- Centro de Investigación Científica de Yucatán A.C. eduardo.cejudo@cicy.mx

Priscilla Sánchez-Santillán- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. priscuaa@ciencias.unam.mx

Everybody can make a podcast, right? Just think about what you want to tell the world, clear your mind and record your voice. Voilà, votre podcast est prêt! Simple enough, right?

But what do you want to say? Is it important? Do you always think before you speak? Do you really want to speak to the whole world? Will anyone out there listen?

Not so simple, is it? You are reaching out to people you might never meet. You are trying to engage them, say something meaningful, open their eyes and encourage them to do good, to make the world a better place. You want your message to be strong. You want to put it in the right way, sound organized, articulated and clear. And what about your intonation, your word selection and the pace of your voice? Don't just grab your cellphone and press record—there will be plenty of environmental noise. You want it to sound like you are a pro!

This is the ordeal that we undertook when we made the podcast “Humedales SOS” this past year. (Yes, you can search for it!) We were involved in a HumMentor project, a SWS mentoring program focused on wetland science for small groups of students in Latin American and the Caribbean. Humedal means wetland in Spanish. HumMentor is open to students who want to conduct research or science communication in association with a wetland scientist, in English, Spanish, French or Portuguese.

We chose to focus on wetlands and produce podcasts - a non-traditional form of science communication, aiming to reach people with high school level education or with a basic knowledge of natural sciences. Wetlands are still poorly known and appreciated in Mexico, as in many parts of the world, and we wanted to bring attention to them. Our initial ideas circled around themes such as the sustainability of wetlands of Mexico, types of wetlands in different regions, their importance, what we can do to conserve them, along with sustainability needs, strategies and specific conservation programs for Mexican wetlands. We also thought about covering case studies of emblematic wetlands at risk or of a poorly documented wetland in Mexico and what it means to local communities.

Our time line for the next year was tight but organized: 1) three months to design the podcast (name, image, themes, training in recording software), 2) the next three

months to generate content, scripts and interviews with guests, and 3) in the remaining six months, to record, edit and broadcast eight episodes (1 to 1.5 hours per chapter), so one every three weeks. Guess what we achieved? Go on and search the podcast (yeah, in the globally known audio platform with the green icon). Are you surprised to only see two chapters? So are we. Well, the reason is obvious: it is not easy to make a podcast!

We found our name and logo relatively fast (with help from a computer-aided-design-savvy friend). Then, we chose the topics for most of our proposed episodes: what is a wetland, what are the types of wetlands (e.g., mangroves in Mexico; the iconic Xochimilco wetland), engineered wetlands for water treatment, poorly known karst wetlands in the Yucatan peninsula, and a recap of our journey with the episode “Wetlands in Mexico: where are we and where are we going?”

At this point, we stopped and thought: what do we know and what we need to research more? We knew that together we had a fair grasp of wetlands sciences or access to other experts to help us. What we did not know is how to translate and transfer some of this knowledge to the public in a podcast. We felt comfortable creating content for the first few episodes. So that was it, we had topics and the main ideas to elaborate the first scripts. Way to go! So, why all the fuss?

Well, the most difficult bridge to build is the one going from words to acts. We did not keep up with the pace of the proposed timeline for several reasons, the first and most important is that creating a product of quality requires time for preparation, research and inspiration for writing a good script. Remember, a podcast is not just a random person recording a voice: it should be a conversation with your audience, grabbing their attention, providing meaningful and trustworthy information which, hopefully, will improve their quality of life by expanding their knowledge. It is a large responsibility to create something that aims to increase people's awareness and understanding of their environment. It is one of our main responsibilities as wetland scientists, and it is a duty as citizens of the world.

Besides time for preparation, research and inspiration on each topic, we also needed training in recording and editing the sound files...many, many files. We sometimes had to create several files just for a few minutes of each episode. The first thing we needed was a quiet room, away from the neighbor's dog or traffic, and in our case, we needed two rooms and a strong internet connection because we were in two cities! We found decent microphones for our podcast sessions. We recorded our voice in a virtual meeting using the platform Bluejeans, and then, the sound files were edited with the free software Anchor that allowed us to edit and stitch together the podcast. This was Priscilla's task, since she was more familiar with the software, and what she did not know, she learned online. Only one

person can edit a podcast, but it is time consuming. To have a nice end product, two was already a crowd!

Lastly (an this is not an excuse but an explanation), we did all this in our free time, or stealing hours from work at school, just to take a small step in the right direction. We do have two more episodes in queue, hopefully finished soon enough for you to listen to it before this edition of *Wetland Science and Practice*.

Our path has been bumpy and perhaps we were not quite ready for this task. However, it was gratifying and stimulating listening to our episodes. We learned a lot, and sure we could have improved them, but we are more than satisfied with the result. The way we prefer to think about this experience is that it is a start.

Perhaps students and mentors out there can continue this type of project for your own country. You can rethink the initial idea and take the steering wheel. You may already have a topic in mind about wetlands that you want to broadcast, or you may know the right person to pick up the slack and continue our efforts on a podcast about wetlands. Go on and spread the word. Wetland science does not travel by itself.

We need courageous, innovative persons to teach and stimulate the public and promote wetland science education. We need to grow the network of wetland scientists and practitioners and supporters to share what we love, live and like the most: the wonderful wetlands!