

MASS EXTINCTION EVENT

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As humanity grows ever more populous and powerful, natural systems that have been stable for millions of years are in turmoil. Plant and animal populations are rapidly declining and species are becoming extinct faster than ever before. Scientists have begun to call this a mass extinction event. The last recorded truly mass extinction was about 65 million years ago presumably because an asteroid hit earth. The dinosaurs went extinct and lots of other organisms went extinct and we are now starting into another mass extinction, except this time, it is not an asteroid, it's our own species, *homo sapiens*, that is doing the job. Most of us know that there's an environmental crises and we would even say that we are very concerned about it but we behave as if it is not happening. I think what has been missing for some time is the realization that this is a human issue - that if in one century we have gone from 2 billion to 6 billion people, clearly the space of the planet is being deeply affected. We are very ignorant to the full effects of our actions. We need to do some deep reexamination of our fundamental assumptions of how we live our life in this society. If people carrying out the most basic of human activities that is causing all these things we share the planet with to disappear forever, it is hard to relate to that, to realize that just in these little life activities of ours, we are driving into oblivion these beautiful other life forms that have evolved for millions of years and that are our only known living companions in the universe.

The global human family faces enormous challenges, yet we are beginning to see a bigger picture and finally hearing what scientists have been telling us for years, that habitat destruction, the climate crisis, pollution, and other factors multiplied by the growing human population are driving our fellow creatures to extinction so rapidly that entire ecosystems may face irreversible chain reaction collapse.

Nobody knows how many species we share the planet with. Our ballpark estimate would be about 10 million. We are likely to wipe out about half of that in this century that we are all living in right now. If our influence on earth continues to expand, I think that we are likely to lose half or more the species on earth. The most dire numbers I think around the time scale of about 35 years. It is really very difficult in my experience to persuade people that something that may happen in 50 years time is something they should worry about today. This extraordinarily shortsighted and extraordinarily foolish and is a complete contradiction of the idea that it was human intelligence that made us successful. We do not use very evolutionary attributes that brought us to where we are.

Now if you ask the question, how many human beings might die because of the loss of biodiversity, we could easily be talking about billions because we depend on biodiversity for a wide range of ecosystem services which if they falter, we are going to be in deep trouble. We cannot live without many of these other creatures. I don't think we in any way should feel complacent, that we are not on the list of possible extinctions. There is an entirely different dimension to the problem than just let's just preserve the bison or the panda or

the golden eagle or the bald eagle or whatever. These are all part of the same system and it is all part of our preserving our life support system. Extinctions have profound consequences for humans. No species is an island. Biological communities are real communities of very complex with very serious interdependencies and when you remove species, there will be effects. Plants that familiarate (*sic*) the climate, bacteria that break down waste products are essential to the maintenance of all life on earth.

The extinction problem is not just a problem of loss of species; it is a problem also of loss of populations because it is the populations that deliver the ecosystem services. If there is one population of honeybees alive in Italy and they are extinct over the rest of the planet, that's not going to help you pollinate your alfalfa in Idaho. When we wipe out populations of species of other organisms, we are sawing off the limb that we are sitting on.

Mass extinction is so far removed from human experience; we lack the cultural structures, the language, or even the imagination to envision such a nightmare. What we are talking about here with extinction is a kind of unraveling of the fabric of life. Just the shock of that, the sense of there is something going on here that is so threatening to my sense of wellbeing that I have to shut it out in some way and everybody, I think, experiences that. I know many times when I was initially reading about extinction, I would hear these overwhelming statistics, 3 to 10 species going extinct every day, and I didn't know how to wrap my mind around these overwhelming statistics. What do you do when you find that out? I think it is beyond anything that humans have had to face ever before and so the magnitude of what we are trying to do in terms of getting past this denial is quite large. Human thought is the source of our problems and is the source of our solution. Until we address our way of thinking and our whole framework and orientation, we are going to continue to make mistakes. When you think about it, what does our culture offer us in the way of wisdom to deal with any kind of difficulty? Our cultural wisdom is "buy this" and it will make you happy. We need to have a new definition of progress of the good life. Our senses have become attenuated in relation to nature. All of this is about reconnecting, rereframing to the fibers of our world. I feel that there is an invisible thread of compassion between people of like minds who are critically concerned about this issue for finding each other, for creating alliances, for creating organizations who are creating a movement, a movement of survival, a movement of recovery and it is happening all over the world. Cultural evolution can go on extremely rapidly, in fact, it is going on right now. When the time is right, societies can change with incredible rapidity. We care about life. We care about the next generations. We need to bring this to bear in a radical fiery dynamic and committed way. This is a critical pivotal moment in history. I can feel it every day. It is almost like a pressure cooker. Things are shifting and changing. We are either going to wake up or die. We don't know which one it is going to be.

It is not too late. We have all that it takes to take care of the world we have inherited. We have only to make up our minds to do it and answer the call.

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