

undoubtedly its major use will be as a reference book in offices across the country. It has proved to be a well-thumbed, frequently-consulted text in our laboratory.

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ENVIRONMENT

Extinction: The Causes and Consequences of the Disappearance of Species

By Paul and Anne Ehrlich. 1981. Random-House, 304 pp. US\$21.00

Rare Birds' Nest Stolen! Sperm Whales Protected! Falcons Fly Again!

Recently, animals threatened with extinction are getting a lot of press coverage. The escalating extinction rate of wildlife species, where wildlife means all wild animals and plants, is becoming an issue of global concern. The World Conservation Strategy, a blueprint for global conservation of natural resources, includes the preservation of genetic diversity as one of the Strategy's three principle goals. The eminent socio-biologist Dr. E.O. Wilson considers the continuing extinction of wildlife species the greatest catastrophe of our times because the future of mankind becomes more constrained with each extinction.

A new book, *Extinction*, by Paul and Anne Ehrlich (authors of *The Population Bomb* and *The End of Affluence*), looks at this subject in considerable depth. In doing so, the Ehrlich's develop an excellent analogy: the authors see each extinct wildlife species as a rivet popped from Spaceship Earth. Although the ship will withstand a few missing rivets, the cumulative effect will be disastrous.

As professional biologists, the Ehrlich's have considerable expertise with wildlife. They present a comprehensive look at the importance of wildlife, the ways in which wildlife species have been and are being pushed to extinction, and the potential remedies to this "rivet popping". Throughout, interesting insights are made into "the extinction factors". Of particular interest is a section on prehistoric extinctions. It is hard to imagine the anger of future generations deprived through the loss of some present wildlife species. A discussion of species deprived *us* by our earliest and more recent ancestors allows us to feel some real anger.

A second insight is into the central role of habitat conservation in the fight to keep wildlife species thriving. The single species approach to conservation (the tiger, the rhino, the panda), although very successful, has to give way to a broader thrust directed at habitats. This is especially true of the Tropical Rain Forests which, although covering only 6% of the

earth's surface, contain nearly 50% of wildlife species. These forests are disappearing at an incredible rate (conservatively estimated at 50 acres per minute). This short-sighted destruction of tropical forests spawns another analogy: trees are terrestrial whales.

The book is exhaustive, providing all the basic information about wildlife extinctions. The book breaks each large area into many small sections. The notes to each chapter are extremely complete, providing tonnes of additional reading for the keeners. This comprehensive approach leads to the stacking of detail on detail like cord wood making the book hard to read at times. At its worst, it reads like a pneumatic drill sounds. Such is the danger inherent in carefully outlining the direct economic benefits of plants to mankind, or the nefarious ways *Homo sapiens* exterminates wildlife — directly and indirectly.

To the concerned, the book provides the vivid background to a biological crisis. To the converted, little of this book is new. The solutions proposed are familiar friends: stabilizing world population, founding a new economic order, replacing short-term gain with longterm benefits. In the end, after considerable discussion of the need for habitat preservation and a new thrust, the Ehrlich's conclude:

"What may be needed now is a great act of leadership. Just as President Kennedy put the U.S. on the road to space, another president could put the nation — and, one would hope, the world — on a road to treating the Earth as a Spaceship".

Extinction expertly details an old but escalating problem. What we need now is action on a grand scale. *The World Conservation Strategy* suggests a number of concrete solutions. The World Wildlife Fund's coming campaign on The Tropical Rain Forests is also an encouraging sign. In short, the time for thinking and theorizing is over. We know what to do. Let's do it. Now.

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