



Social Justice Committee

STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH All of God's Creation

Endangered Species: A Rippling Effect on Our Ecosystem

Scientists generally agree that we are now experiencing the sixth mass extinction event in the history of the planet. “Unlike the extinction of the dinosaurs, the mass die-out happening now wasn’t spurred by some natural phenomenon like an asteroid or volcanic eruption.... **This crisis is being driven by climate change, industrial-scale agriculture land-use, the spread of invasive species and diseases, pollution, and numerous other factors directly caused by our behavior....**

It’s happening fast, too. A 2019 United Nations report found that **about 1 million species face extinction in the coming decades**, with recent years’ global rate of species extinction tens-to-hundreds of times higher than the expected rate....

A species dying off also affects whatever species ate it, whatever predator ate that species, and so on—rippling outward along an intricate web of inter-species relationships that is the product of millions of years’ worth of evolution. That includes humans who may rely on the affected plants or animals for food and shelter. **There’s no such thing as one extinction in a vacuum....** For example, pollinators like bees and butterflies are under pressure due to factors like habitat loss and use of pesticides. Unless we work to counter those threats, species extinctions will seriously jeopardize global crop production and the world food supply....

The number-one cause of nature-loss identified in the seminal 2019 United Nations report is ‘**changes in land and sea use,**’ primarily from large-scale agriculture, logging, and runaway development. As a result of those and other threats, roughly 9 percent of all terrestrial species do not have enough habitat for long-term survival. Humans are pushing plants and animals to the brink by pushing them off the map; 75 percent of land environments and 66 percent of marine environments worldwide have already been “severely altered” by human actions....

The situation may feel pretty hopeless, but **we do already have some proven tactics for saving wildlife.** **Protecting lands and waters** is one of the most important. In a study of global biodiversity data published in 2016, scientists found that there were 10.6 percent more species in protected areas than unprotected areas. And though human development eats up more habitat every day, there is still a lot of wild nature left to conserve: about 60 percent of the continental U.S. is still in a ‘natural’ or wild state, according to 2019 findings. A study published in 2021 by Wilderness Society scientists found that at least 10 percent of suitable habitat for most land vertebrates (mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles) could be conserved by protecting 30 percent of the continental U.S., paralleling a national conservation goal adopted by the current administration.” (*The Wilderness Society*, January 21, 2022)

The **Endangered Species Act** is one of the world’s most successful conservation tools—it has saved more than 99 percent of the species in its care. But we need to let it work. Making the choice not to fund or enforce this law weakens its capacity and jeopardizes the recovery of endangered and threatened species. (*Endangered Species Coalition*, October 10, 2021)

“Species that have become extinct will never come back. And with them go millions of years of evolution that could have helped us understand more about the history of the Earth and where we came from and where we are going. ... We are at the exact moment in which we have to act to change the trends.” (Marina Rivero, Conservationist, *Nat Geo Explorer*)