

# ECO-BULLETIN 10

## The Sixth Extinction

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As long ago as 2014 Elizabeth Kolbert wrote a book entitled “The Sixth Extinction” in which she stated that this is predicted to be the most devastating extinction since the dinosaurs were wiped out. There have been 5 mass extinctions over the last half billion years. These were caused by climate change, volcanic eruptions and, 65 million years ago a giant asteroid smashing onto the planet. **What makes this one different is that we are to blame.**

In 2020 Sir David Attenborough wrote his book “A Life on Our Planet-My Witness Statement & a Vision for the Future,” a book that makes for highly recommended reading with strong warnings about what we have done and are continuing to do to the planet.

In his book Sir David states that “the true tragedy of our time is the spiraling decline of our planet’s biodiversity. **For life to truly thrive on this planet there must be immense biodiversity.**”

### **Why is the loss of biodiversity so important to humankind?**

Biodiversity sequesters carbon, is important to the food we eat and the provision of clean drinking water, 70% of cancer drugs rely on natural sources etc. Recent updates produced by large international groups of scientists continue to chart environmental decline, the failure to meet UN environmental sustainability goals and the importance of these losses to humanity ( UN Report -Paris conference May 2019- ‘Nature’s Dangerous Decline, Unprecedented species extinction rates accelerating’; WWF Living Planet Report 2020; Reversing Biodiversity Loss- the case for urgent action March 2021; Biodiversity Summit in Canada (COP 15) December 2022 human degradation of environments).

These major reports are verified by hundreds of scientists who are experts in their fields. The strong links between biodiversity loss, global warming and pollution are well proven but not well appreciated.

Again, quoting Sir David, “**our impact is now truly global. Our blind assault on the planet is changing the very fundamentals of the living world**”.

“We have replaced the wild with the tame. **We regard the Earth as *our* planet, run by humankind for humankind.** There is little left for the rest of the living world. The truly wild world – that non-human world – has gone. In 1937 66% of the world was wilderness. By 2020 this had shrunk to 35%. **We have overrun the Earth**”.

Currently our activities are committing the Earth to failure. We are polluting the earth with too many fertilizers, disrupting the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles. We are converting natural habitats on land

– such as forests, grasslands and marshlands – to farmland at too great a rate. We are warming the Earth far too quickly, adding carbon to the atmosphere faster than at any time in our planet's history. We are causing a rate of biodiversity loss that is more than 100 times the average and only matched in the fossil record during a mass extinction event”.

A study published in 2017 in Proceedings of the National Academy of Science estimated that - shockingly - we had already lost more than half of all individual animals since 1970. The scientists found that more than a billion populations of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians have been lost all over the planet. It's not just about losing endangered species. Mark Cawardine, a well known naturalist and conservationist, describes it as “swinging a wrecking ball through the Earth's biosphere”. The data is scary and depressing

In 1950 there were 2.5 billion people on the planet, today there are 8bn and it is expected to be more than 9billion by 2050. The more people, the greater the pressure from habitat destruction, direct exploitation, pollution, the spread of alien species and global warming.

It is important that we understand the need to maintain biodiversity, from the tiniest creatures to the largest. Mankind has a God-given role as stewards of our planet and carers for **all** natural life. God has given us a wide range of skills to action existing solutions and to produce new ones. We need **EVERBODY** to do as much as they can, and more, so that together the world can halt the decline and limit the damage.

**Creator God, we give thanks for this wonderful earth which we share with the whole community of life. We pray for the awareness that we cannot sustain current aspirations of infinite economic gain on a finite planet.**