



PROTECTING LIFE AND

Human beings are engaged in a massive assault on life and the environment. We are precipitating the mass extinction of species and developing more and more methods of exploiting animals. This assault on the Earth and its creatures must halt, not only for the sake of the animals who suffer and die needlessly, but also for our own sakes.

Whether we recognize it or not, by destroying and polluting ecosystems and by inflicting misery on our fellow creatures, we undermine the foundations not only of our material prosperity, but also of our psychological—and even spiritual—well-being. We are all intricately intertwined in the web of life. The damage we

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do to natural systems and the suffering we cause people and animals come back to diminish our own existence. Since our actions have multiple effects, not all of which can be known in advance, we must act carefully, conscious of our capacity both to harm and benefit all members of the Earth community. It is critical that we be cognizant of the death and suffering we are visiting upon our fellow beings and that we take steps to protect and enhance their well-being as our fellow citizens in this Earth community.

The fate of humanity and the ultimate good of society are inseparable from the fate of the animal kingdom and the good of the environment. The satisfaction of human interests should not involve the infliction of suffering upon animals or the desecration of the natural world. The only solution to our ecological crisis is the rapid development of a society that is humane and sustainable. We have a brief window of opportunity to make dramatic changes in our world view, life-styles, communities, and policies.

ENVIRONMENT



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Air pollution spews from an electric power plant; feeding the nation's demands for power has devastating consequences for the environment. Inset: rescue comes too late for an oil-soaked water bird after the Prince William Sound oil spill in Alaska in 1989. The spill's toll on area wildlife was enormous.

THE ASSAULT ON LIFE Human beings first began to alter the world significantly some six thousand years ago, with the development of agriculture and urban centers. They tamed and bred animals, clear-cut forests, dammed rivers, plowed the soil, and built cities. Although these activities often were very destructive to local ecosystems, only recently has the human presence begun to threaten significantly the life systems of the planet as a whole.

The human population is growing explosively—at a current rate of 250,000 people a day. At the beginning of the century, the population was less than 2 billion. It is 5.3 billion now and will grow to some 10 billion by early next century. Humans are developing and applying more effective technologies for exploiting natural resources, including animals. Development of genetic engineering; deadly poisons such as DDT, dioxin, and plutonium; mass production of automobiles, televisions, and countless other consumer goods; expansion of the suburbs; development of high-

tech weaponry—application of such technological developments makes the human presence much more destructive of the Earth and its creatures than ever before.

Nature is so despoiled that there is almost nothing wholly “natural” left. The most remote glade feels the effects of air and water pollution and weather modification. The animals who inhabit it or visit it are out of balance with nature due to man’s activity in other locales and his joyous slaughter for sport. Not one twig, not one field mouse, not one nighthawk—not even one human being who has had enough of it—can escape acid rain or the deterioration in quality of life caused by human activity. Prairie dogs are killed, and the bulldozers tear up their little town to make way for another shopping center.

Loren Eiseley, the great essayist, poet, naturalist, and anthropologist, saw that our science, our economics, is often maliciously “tampering with the secret purposes of the universe itself . . . a

deliberate blasphemy." Dr. Eiseley meant that the world is not here primarily for human use, rather it is to be revered and respected in all its aspects, for its own sake. Humankind may achieve a status of importance only in the careful enhancement of the life and beauty of this planet.

Humans are engaged in a massive assault on the animal world, resulting in an accelerating extinction of animal species, degradation of habitats, rapid decline in populations, and increased confinement and manipulation of individual animals.

•By the end of this century, our planet could lose 20–50 percent of its species.¹ Over the past decade, the extinction rate has increased from one species a day to one each hour. This is an extinction rate some 1,000 to 10,000 times as great as would be occurring without humans. From 500,000 to several million of currently existing species are likely to perish by the year 2000.

•In Rock Creek Park, a fairly undisturbed woodland reserve in Washington, D.C., from 1948 to 1983, the migrant songbird breeding population plunged by more than 70 percent. At least three songbird species vanished.²

•Although direct killing by humans is sometimes a cause of species extinction, there are other, more predominant factors: (1) land development for urban, commercial, industrial, or recreational purposes; (2) land conversion for agriculture; (3) changes in natural communities through livestock grazing, control of natural fire, and so on; (4) pollution and pesticides; (5) water development, such as reservoir construction and stream channelization; (6) predator and pest control; (7) hunting, poaching, and collecting (in the case of insects and plants); and (8) direct human disturbance of roosting and nesting areas.³

•The loss of vulnerable stopover points (such as nesting areas) or other critical habitat areas can imperil species even though there may be a respectable percentage of remaining habitat in a particular country.

•Providing food and water for the world's 4 billion livestock and 9 billion chickens results in rapid conversion of habitat into pasture and farmland. It also causes diversion of streams and depletion of aquifers to provide large amounts of water, particularly for intensive animal agriculture, and disrupts natural communities.

•Pesticide use continues to rise worldwide with destructive effect. In the Paris basin of France, chemical pesticides have caused a 70 percent reduction in the 800 species of animals, of which only 5 per-

cent are harmful to cereal crops.⁴

•Not only do oil spills imperil animals who drown or die from exposure, but oil also disperses widely and is lethal for fish larvae and plankton, thus reducing the base of the food chain.⁵

•The U.S. Animal Damage Control program, between 1988 and 1989, shot, poisoned, burned, drowned, or gassed 4.6 million birds, 9,000 beavers, 76,000 coyotes, 5,000 raccoons, 300 black bears, and 200 mountain lions. These animals were destroyed at a cost to taxpayers of \$29.4 million to protect agricultural interests—particularly wool growers—from undesirable losses.⁶

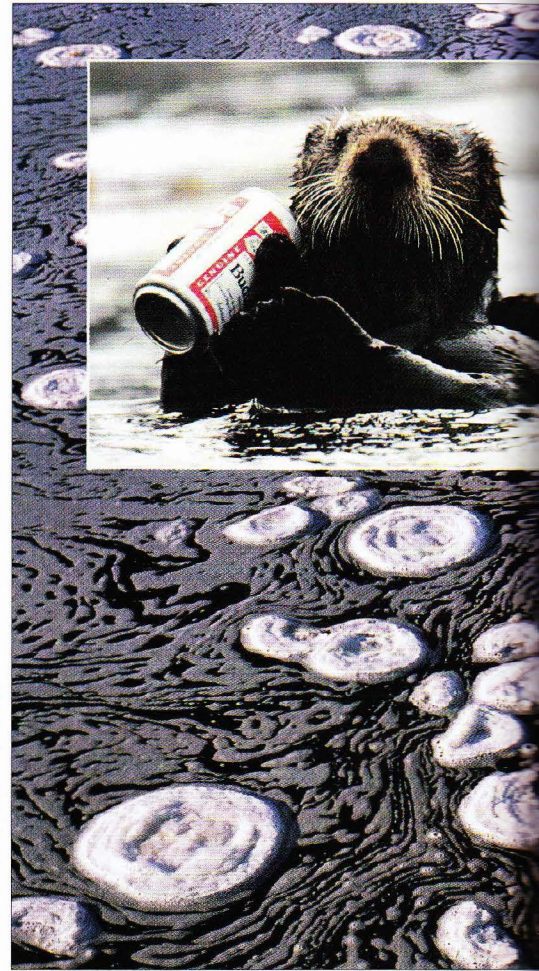
•Every year 17 to 22 million animals are used in research and testing in U.S. laboratories. The animals include (in decreasing order of use) mice, rats, guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters, dogs, primates, cats, and other creatures. Laboratory procedures often involve infecting, poisoning, burning, shocking, injecting, or subjecting animals to painful or deadly experiments. Many animals are housed alone in small, barren cages.⁷

•More than 7,000 puppies and kittens are born every day in the United States. Only one out of five will spend his/her natural lifespan in a responsible home. Most end up scavenging for food, living a shortened life, or dying alone through some misfortune.⁸

LIVING HUMANELY AND SUSTAINABLY What promises the best opportunity for living in a respectful, if not reverential, way with animals and nature, while still meeting the basic needs of all human beings? Our central task is to shift the bottom line of our culture from exploitation to sustainability. This requires that we recognize how our dominant values and economic system encourage the abuse of the Earth and undermine local self-reliance, diversity, and community. Our life-styles and communities as well as our politics and economics, theology, and cosmology will need to become more humane and sustainable. This involves:

Awakening our ecological sensibilities and ethics. This involves a perceptual and value shift in which we learn to appreciate the depth of life and feeling that exists in each being and in the processes and balance of nature. These sensibilities move us to act to enhance the quality of life for all sentient beings.

Developing a critical understanding of the personal and social structures that promote exploitation or sustainability. Our personal choices, social policies, and institutional structures contribute variably to

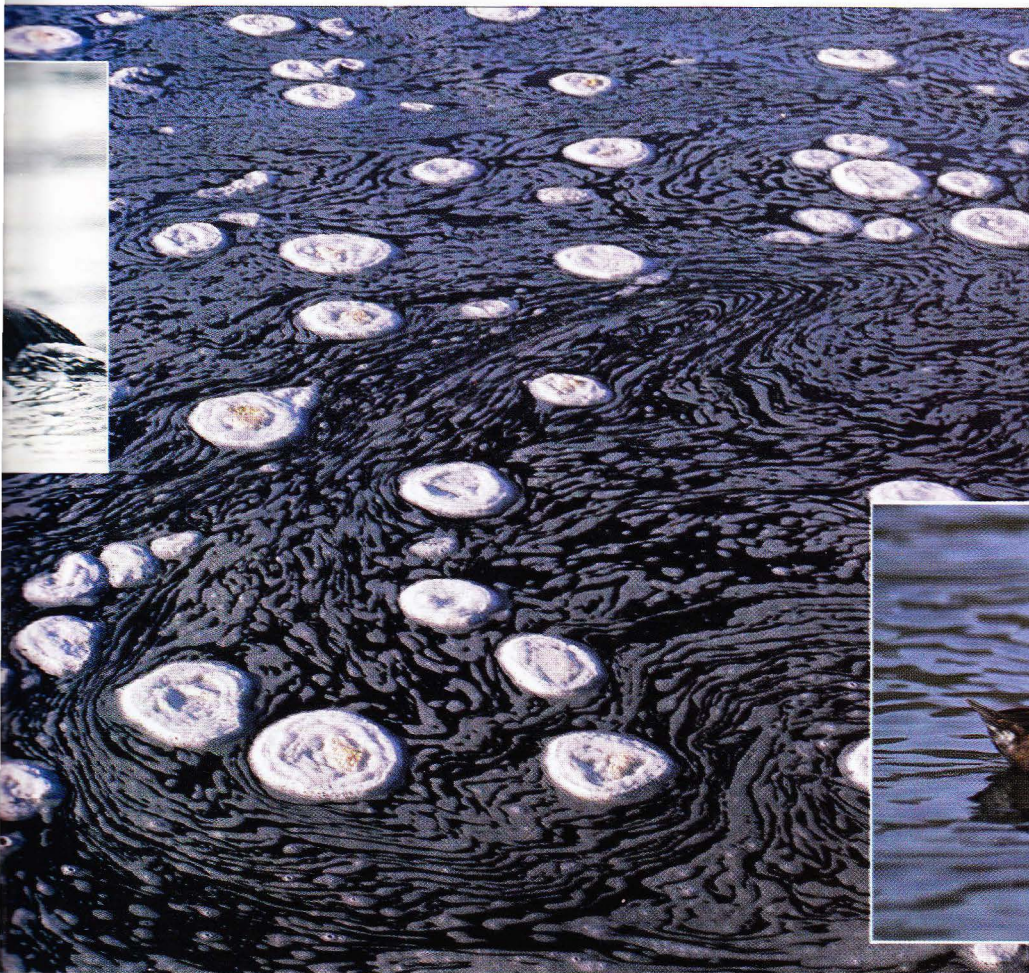


the liberation and fulfillment or oppression and desecration of life. Seeing clearly, for example, how pesticides, factory farming, or suburban sprawl contributes to the suffering of animals and the diminishing of life strengthens our resolve to change our behavior and to make societal policies life-enhancing.

Making a significant personal effort to modify our life-styles and consumer habits to live more lightly and compassionately on the Earth. This involves changing our assumptions, diets, modes of reproduction, transportation and shelter, and general purchasing patterns to support enterprises that are not only economically viable but socially just, humane, and ecologically sound.

Cooperating with others to build more humane and sustainable communities. We can't do it alone: we must work with our neighbors and coworkers to fashion a local community able to provide much of its own food, energy, and services and to handle its own waste in an ecologically sound fashion in the context of a rich, unique culture and biologically diverse region.

Engaging in political action and advocacy to shift institutional priorities and social policies toward humaneness and sus-



SIMON FRASER/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY; INSET: RON SANFORD/ALLSTOCK; RIGHT: DARRELL GULIN/ALLSTOCK

Scum caused by pollution blossoms in the South Tyne River in England. Sheep-dip pesticides, trash-dump runoff, and acid rain are the culprits. Inset: a sea otter struggles with a six-pack ring, with beer can, around his neck. Below: a diving duck swims with an elastic band caught in his mouth. Such animals are often hidden victims of environmental deterioration.



tainability. Clearly our legal, economic, political, and value structures often favor centralization, short-term economic gains, and the exploitation of natural resources, animals, and peoples. Images, incentives, and regulations must be reformed to encourage humaneness and sustainability. Important elements in a broad policy shift to support sustainability would emphasize:

- The adoption of effective principles, standards, and beliefs to reduce world population growth.

- A major reduction in the use of petroleum products, to be accomplished by the development of alternative energies and means of manufacturing, heating, cooling, and propulsion and by frugality, with the objective of eliminating global-warming gases and preserving this mineral resource for long-term essentials.

- Increased protection of natural areas—forest, meadow, or swamp—with international assistance to certain societies if there is basic inequity because of this restriction.

- A return of agriculture to organic procedures, minimizing the use of chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.

- More opportunities for human beings to live in contact with nature, involving a

return of population to rural living, and the redesign of cities.

- An education program for all humanity that teaches (1) the history of the planet in terms of the evolution of all life and of substances and processes of nature; (2) the ecology of the planet, the interrelationship of all things, animate and inanimate, in the pattern that has produced and would maintain the marvelous panorama of life and beauty; (3) the social, moral, and personal changes and developments required to implement and support a humane sustainable society; (4) the basic sciences as they tell of the makeup of all things in the universe and as they may serve the welfare of all life; (5) the satisfaction and happiness that come from living in harmony with nature; (6) the sense of beauty, the ever-increasing refinement of beauty being the benign evolutionary purpose for this planet; and (7) the spiritual and temporal fulfillment that comes from serving that purpose in one's society and in one's personal life.

The moral life of human beings is right only as it preserves and enhances the beauty of the world. As we farm, teach, build structures, dispense medicine, debate social conflicts or legal rights, or preach from mosques, temples, synagogues, or

churches, we must propound the values of life in harmony with nature, the Earth, and its creatures. We must teach the doctrines of ecological integrity and humaneness and in opposition to those human activities that contaminate the skies, oceans, and fields and inflict unnatural suffering on other living things. We must make the effort to live humanely and sustainably both at home and in our workplace and ask that our businesses and politicians support such ways of living. ■

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