

Forum: Environmental Committee

Issue: Protecting Endangered Species

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Introduction

Since the dawn of our planet, life on earth has witnessed and gone through five mass extinctions of biodiversity. Caused by massive volcanic eruptions, ice ages, meteorites and the movement of continents, species - such as the dinosaurs - have come and gone. Yet presently, some scientist are assuming that a sixth mass extinction is on its way and this time it is not caused by geology or the natural change of the earth climate but by us: the human species.

To this date humans have identified 1.3 million species living on our earth. Each year we discover new animal and plant species are being discovered, yet simultaneously we are rapidly losing species as well. Estimations say that around 200 to 2000 extinctions happen every year, mostly due to human intervention and the destruction of ecosystems.

Definition of Key Terms

Species

Using the biological concept, living organisms belonging to the same species share similar features and characteristics. Further, individuals are capable of exchanging genes, meaning they can mate to produce fertile offspring. The definition not only includes animal but plant and fungi species as well.

Ecosystem

An ecosystem includes all living - animals, plants and organisms – and nonliving things such as the soil and climate in a given area. Within such an environment the biotic members may interact and depend on each other.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity describes the variety of living species on our planet and their relationships to each other. Each ecosystem has its own complex biodiversity. Sometimes also the term biological diversity is used. Without the biodiversity of the earth, humans could not exist. Without plants there would be no oxygen to breathe, but also coral reefs for example help to protect population groups living near the coast from cyclones and tsunamis.

Endangered species

An animal is classified as an endangered species when its population numbers in the wild recedes to the point that it faces an extremely high risk of extinction. This definition is given by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. Additionally, a species can be categorized as endangered at the state, federal and international level.

Animal extinction

Extinction is a natural process and inevitable in natural world, sometimes even called the "engine of evolution". In the past animal extinction happened due to the geology, the change of the climate and ecosystems and simply due to the fact that some species were better adapted to the environment than others. However, since humans have started to disturb the natural ecosystems by changing the landscape, poaching wildlife, plundering the natural resources and releasing toxic substances into the environment. The current extinction level of species is around 1000 times the natural speed which is more than concerning.

Background Information

What is the cause of species extinction?

Human activities are the main reason for the increased rate of animal extinctions worldwide. Among the many factors, the following aspects should be kept in mind:

1. Alteration and destruction of ecosystems

Due to the destruction of for example rainforests or the fragmentation of rivers, natural habitats of animal and plant species are disturbed. An example would be tropical areas in Southeast Asia. By changing large forest areas into plantations for palm oil, a large number of species among them orangutans lose their living space.

2. Agricultural practices

First of all land is needed for farming and livestock and large areas of forests are destroyed in order to create space for agriculture. Further the use of pesticides is causing massive deaths of bees and other insects essential for pollination.

3. Hunting and exploitation of animals

Poaching and the illegal trade of exotic animal species are threatening many animal species. And not a long time ago, humans hunted animals, such as the Iberian wolf, as they were considered to be harmful and dangerous.

4. Introduction of exotic species

An exotic species can be defined as one which is introduced – voluntarily or involuntarily – in a foreign area. Especially in the time of colonialism, the European conquerors introduced many exotic species to land such as Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand to just name a few. In Hawaii for example the introduction of new species for example the rat has caused the extinction of around 90% of native bird species, as the exotic species compete for living space and resources and in some cases also prey on native animal species driving them into extinction.

5. Climate change

Climate change attributes to the alteration of habitats and living conditions of species. Some consequences of climate change include the bleaching of corals, expansion of epidemic, migration of species (such as whales), the increase of the sea level, a longer dry period and many more.

6. Tourism

Tourism in an unsustainable manner can have a huge impact on the biodiversity as well. The solution here is to promote sustainable tourism.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

World Wildlife Fund

The World Wildlife Fund, founded in 1961, is an international non-governmental organization aiming at the protecting and conserving nature and reducing the human impact on the environment. As a global network, the WWF cooperates with governments, businesses, communities and other international organizations such as the IUCN.

International Union for Conservation of Nature

This international organization was established in 1948 and its main goal is to “conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and so ensure that any use of natural resources is [...] sustainable” (<https://www.iucn.org/about>). By doing research, gathering data, conducting field projects and publishing annual reports the IUCN aims at influencing governments, businesses and other stakeholders to take action related to achieving a sustainable development. It has an observation and consultative status at the United Nations, therefore playing a huge role in the implementation of several international organizations related to protecting the earth’s biodiversity, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). Furthermore, the ICUN annually releases the ICUN Red List of Threatened Species, which evaluates the conservation status of species worldwide.

Countries and Nations

Some of the countries worldwide doing the most to protect their unique wildlife are Costa Rica, Thailand and Croatia. According to researches, nations with the most biodiversity often spend the least amount of resources on protecting the biodiversity, while countries with only a limited wildlife do the most in taking care of their animal and plant species. Countries, such as Germany, Luxembourg and Israel show much less developed efforts in conserving their wildlife, whereas New Zealand, Denmark and the Netherlands are among those who spend the most to protect the natural environment. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that conservation efforts are worst in countries around the tropics (such as on the African continent). Not only are there the most of the world’s wildlife located, but the main reason for the lack of effort is the fact that environmental protection often comes after economic development.

Timeline of Events

March 1, 1956	Sumatran Orangutan endangerment becomes worse;
March 24, 1970	South China Tiger becomes endangered;
November 1, 1978	The Leather Back Turtle becomes endangered;
December 24, 1978	Sumatran Tiger is listed as endangered;
August 1, 1996	Amur Leopard enters endangerment;
April 1, 2004	The Sumatran Orangutan becomes endangered;
May 1, 2012	Black Rhino joins the critically endangered list.

UN Involvement

The protection of endangered species can be found in the Sustainable Development Goals of the

United Nations. The UN further has an agency – the Environmental Programme (UNEP), also called UN Environment - which dedicates itself to assisting countries in implementing environmental practices and policies. The UNEP further oversees the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This agreement aims to ensure that wild animal and plant species are not threatened in their survival in the international trade. Furthermore, the General Assembly has passed resolutions tackling the illicit trafficking and poaching of wildlife which is one of the reasons why several animal species, especially on the African continents are on the brink of extinction.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (**CITES**)
- Convention of Migratory Species (also known as the Bonn Convention)
- Tackling illicit trafficking in wildlife (**69/314**)
- World Wildlife Day (3rd of March) (**68/205**)

Possible Solutions

Educate People about endangered species

Just awareness of these species is a critical step. From the worms in the garden to the bats that pollinate and control the mosquitos, there are many ways that our daily habits at home affect these creatures.

Introducing furthermore sustainable products

Much of what threatens local populations has to do with development and more and more of the natural world is plundered to product new goods. Nowadays our main goods have a huge impact on the in habitats of many animals, by avoiding the usage of these main goods, these habitats would be conserved.

Reduce overall water consumption

During droughts, people get better about not watering their lawns, but we need to understand that clean water is a global problem for wild animals, so the less humans consume, the better. Never dump chemicals or pharmaceuticals down toilets, storm drains or into streams or lakes.

Poaching

Poaching can have a devastating effect on animal populations. National Geographic reports that in just 5 years, the second-largest herd of elephants in African was reduced to 45,000 animals from a count of 110,000. Many other animal population levels have been halved, assuming that poachers have driven a species to extinction already.

There are several solutions to poaching that have been effective over the past decade, helping animal populations be able to start the recovery process. This progress has been made by the following; establishing of local conservancy committees, creating designated wildlife conservation areas, making the sale of animal products completely illegal, encouraging tourism activities that do not require hunting.

Deforestation

Deforestation in simple term means the felling and clearing of forest cover or tree plantations in order to accommodate agricultural, industrial or urban use. It involves permanent end of forest cover to make that land available for residential, commercial or industrial purpose.

Over the last century the forest cover around the globe has been greatly compromised, leaving the green cover down to an all-time low of about 30 per cent. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), an estimated 18 million acres (7.3 million hectares) of forest are lost each year.

The best solutions to deforestation to this date have been the following; curb the felling of trees, by employing a series of rules and laws to govern it; banning clear cutting forests; Land skinned of its tree cover for urban settlements should be urged to plant trees in the vicinity and replace the cut trees. Also the cutting must be replaced by planting young trees to replace the older ones that were cut.

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