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The End Of The Wild (Boston Review Books)



Synopsis

With the extinction rate at 3000 species a year and accelerating, we can now predict that as many as half of the Earth's species will disappear within the next 100 years. The species that survive will be the ones that are most compatible with us: the weedy species -- from mosquitoes to coyotes -- that thrive in continually disturbed human-dominated environments. *The End of the Wild* is a wake-up call. Marshaling evidence from the last ten years of research on the environment, Stephen Meyer argues that nothing -- not national or international laws, global bioreserves, local sustainability schemes, or "wildlands" -- will change the course that has been set. Like it or not, we can no longer talk about conserving nature, only managing what is left. The race to save biodiversity is over. But that doesn't mean our work is over. *The End of the Wild* is also a call to action. Without intervention, the surviving ecosystems we depend on for a range of services -- including water purification and flood and storm damage control -- could fail and the global spread of invasive species (pests, parasites, and disease-causing weedy species) could explode. If humanity is to survive, Meyer argues, we have no choice but to try to manage the fine details. We must move away from the current haphazard strategy of protecting species in isolation and create trans-regional "meta-reserves," designed to protect ecosystem functions rather than species-specific habitats.

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Customer Reviews

Meyer presents a to-the-point, X-ray-explicit diagnosis of the state of the biosphere, and the prognosis is not good. So pervasive is humankind, he argues, instead of natural selection we now have human selection. Other species must adapt to our climate-changing presence, as have the common rat and the white-tailed deer, or face extinction. Hundreds of thousands of organisms, including such splendid animals as the African elephant and the giant panda, have become "relic species" as they struggle to maintain their foothold in environments radically altered by human development. The species we choose to protect for economic or aesthetic reasons are relegated to "boutique populations" in bioreserves, which are, in truth, the "-antithesis of the wild." Meyer outlines the human-spun "web of threats" to biodiversity and warns not of an end of life but of biodiversity, resulting in "a peculiarly homogenized assemblage" of human-adapted organisms. Brisk and shocking, Meyer's grim vision is a snap to attention. We must acquire an ecological perspective if we hope to save any remnant of life's many--splendored bounty. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Meyer blends factual evidence with expressive prowess in such a way that his ideas cannot fail to make an impression. He offers enlightening illustrations and presents his argument with extraordinary clarity. (Rebecca S. Bundhun, New Statesman) This book is an exemplar of clear, structured polemical writing, a 10,000-word essay in which each word serves a purpose. In just 97 quarto-sized pages, Meyer offers a more powerful and convincing dissection of the human predicament in relations to biodiversity than most full-length academic books. (Mike Hulme, Times Higher Education Supplement) Stephen Meyer's *The End of the Wild* places the wilderness, and its destruction, at the heart of the human enterprise. Industrial society has defined human progress on the basis of how much nature we can colonize, how many resources we can waste, how much wilderness we can erase or tame. We need to change our ideas of human progress and measure our humanity in terms of how many species flourish with us. We are just one member of the Earth Family, and Meyer's important book is a stark reminder of how badly we have behaved towards our kin and how urgent it is that we change. (Vandana Shiva, Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, New Delhi)

Fascinating, if true. This brief, brilliant bold assertion says humans have created an ecological collapse that rivals the extinction of dinosaurs when 76 percent of Earth's life forms went extinct. It's a bold assertion presumably supported by Meyer's academic credentials plus the ethics of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in not suffering fools. Meyer's argument is concise: ". . .

humanity has pounded the wild into a shape that fits its needs . . . coexisting with nature has always meant taming it . . . we have lost the wild for now . . . perhaps in five or ten million years it will return." Instead of the wild diversity that now exists, Meyer asserts, "Everyone will enjoy English housed sparrows; no one will enjoy wood thrushes." Okay - - who misses the passenger pigeon? Who knows what it was? How different is our society today because no one has ever seen a live passenger pigeon? Or, in more immediate terms, who would miss the Irish if they vanished? Would the world be richer or poorer without Catalans? What value were the Beothuks? Do we really need the Jews? We know about the Holocaust of the Jews and its impact. But who knows about the Beothuks? Likewise, we need an examination of what life on earth will be like without the wood thrush and 75 percent of other species. "Never send to know for whom the bell tolls," wrote John Donne in 1633; this admonition applies to more than our neighbors, it applies to the world around us. Meyer says the bell is tolling. It makes his book fascinating.

I used this for a college class and ended up keeping it. Really good information.

Great condition, excellent read.

The problem is stated succinctly. It is huge. We are acting as if there is no cost to us as a population. Then he states the solution as a bigger version of the same thing we have been doing. In fact there is no solution but delaying the worst impacts of the ultimate destruction of the wild.

The essence of this book is that we must stop the human selection process of species and pursue certain avenues of conservation which actually do work. It's a quick, terse, highly worthwhile read. It's broken into seven short sections, the following quotes being the last line of each. I went ahead and pasted them in from my own notes to give a good taste of the author's writing.¹ "The broad path for biological evolution is now set for the next several million years. And in this sense the extinction crisis-- the race to save the composition, structure, and organization of biodiversity as it exists today--is over, and we have lost."² "Ecosystems will experience a dumbing down as built-in redundancies are eliminated. The web of life will become the strand of life."³ "Thus, climate change and economic globalization are powerful against of human selection that amplify and make irreversible the familiar, localized human disturbances that undermine biodiversity."⁴ "The wild will cease to exist even if we can manufacture each of its constituent parts."⁵ "The economic toll from the benign neglect of alien weedy species would be globally disastrous . . . and would mean the

demise of a large proportion of relic species."6 "What is the essence of our own morality if it fails to encompass most of the earth?"7 "We have lost the wild for now. Perhaps in 5-10 million years it will return."

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