

Life's defeat is imminent: We must become effective

Life, as well as life's diversity, is conclusively losing the battle for Earth. One might even say, given the momentum of the situation, that its defeat is imminent. It is time – way past time actually – that those who wish to defend life on Earth became effective.

The WWF's startling *Living Planet Report 2016* documents major declines in life's numbers from 1970 to 2016; for instance, there has been a 58% overall decline in vertebrate population abundance (WWF, 2016). The report predicts a total loss of 67% by 2020 if current trends continue. This is a catastrophe of the first order for all life on Earth.

Making this situation even more distressing is the fact that it has been long forecast. For instance, John Livingston, in his book *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation*, wrote (1981: 19):

When you [think about it], I am certain that you will come to the same conclusion: in the broadest sense, wildlife preservation is a catastrophic, heart-breaking disaster.

For crying out loud – and I do – this was published over 35 years ago and nothing has changed, except the outlook is worsening.

Livingston also wrote (1981: 14):

In conservation we have always assumed a dialogue between ourselves and everyone else; a civilized, adversary proceeding in which reason, logic and meticulous argument, liberally laced in horrible precedent, would persuade just men and women to our position. We have invested enormously in that assumption. Unfortunately for reason and logic, and for wildlife, it has not worked.

And it's still not working.

Livingston realized that conservation – for what, partly at least, appear to be good reasons in the short term – has long been barking up the wrong tree (1981: 13):

Defensive action – delaying action – is always terribly busy and reflexive and reactive, simply because there usually is not time in which to regroup, dig in, consider, and strategise. Confusion and fragmentation – and exhausting flailing – often follow. Such would be my characterization of wildlife conservation: we dart about, stamping at tiny smoulders in the carpet, rushing from hot spot to hot spot, when all the while the roof is racing to a fire-storm and the walls are creaking toward collapse.

In large part, it appears that it's the very foundations of our society which must change. Currently, society supports the never-sleeping, ever-watchful, always-malevolent megamachine, whose function is to convert the Earth into cash for the already rich. All 'victories' are necessarily temporary in such a system. This explains, partially, the problems described in the preceding paragraphs. (Livingston offered several more reasons.) Thus, we should be focusing our time and energy on doing what is necessary to change society, not fighting individual issues. The way we're doing it, we are losing, and life's defeat is on the horizon as we write and read. To attempt to talk about life's defeat, and have people understand what you mean, is an incredibly sad experience. But in some cases, people don't even grasp what I am saying.

It is time that those on the Earth's side reappraised and changed their tactics. Livingston's description above about the assumed dialogue "between ourselves and everyone else" is, I believe, highly

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accurate. It seems to me that almost none of the great articles, wonderful research and grand books reach anyone other than the already-converted few. Certainly, they have not sufficiently influenced the behaviour of those with destructive power to stem the slaughter or to modify the system more than cosmetically.

It’s my opinion that we already know what the problem is: humanity, its excesses and its operating system. Because current efforts to defend life are losing, or have lost so badly, they must be changed. The fundamental, underlying causes need to be identified (that is, of course, only if we delude ourselves into thinking that they are not now known) and addressed. We don’t need any more articles or research into the cause of the problem. We need fewer single-issue campaigns of the “Save X” variety. And

we don’t need a plethora of tiny groups, each jealously defending their minuscule turf and each acting alone in the face of gargantuan forces. The megamachine always wins in the end, in the current system.

It seems to me that we need to devote a maximum effort into the problem which has always beaten us: how to change humanity’s operating paradigm. We know *what* and *why*, but we don’t know *how*. Addressing this, I believe, is where all our efforts should be directed. This is where I hope *The Ecological Citizen* will shine. ■

References

- Livingston J (1981) *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation*. McClelland and Stewart, Toronto, ON, Canada.
- WWF (2016) *Living Planet Report 2016: Risk and resilience in a new era*. WWF International, Gland, Switzerland. Available at <https://is.gd/rcbOx9> (accessed April 2017).

Artwork

Soul Chart III

by Geoff Diego
Litherland

Higher-resolution version:
<https://is.gd/ecoartwork>

About the artwork: Woodcut print on paper (2016; one of a series of ten).

From the artist: The connections made in these woodcuts involve my relationship to my immediate landscape, the material properties of the medium in question and our perception and understanding of the macro and the micro. In the case of the woodcuts the macro and the micro is very much about our understanding time, the rings of the tree in relationship to the stars and how long it takes for them to perceptually reach us.

