

Ten Reasons to Care about Biological Diversity

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Every day the impact of humans on the environment increases. From a myriad of human activities comes a dizzying reduction in the number of plants and animals the earth can support. Scientists refer to this, with alarm, as the loss of biological diversity. Where there were once hundreds or thousands of species, only dozens may remain.

Extinction is the final and irreversible result of weakened and dwindling populations. The natural rate of extinction for prehistoric species was one species every thousand years. Extinction worldwide is now occurring at the rate of approximately one species per day.

For those people who ask "So what? Why should I care about the loss of some obscure fish or bird?" here are ten reasons to preserve biological diversity.

1. **"Because it's there" or The Moral Argument** - We did not create life on earth and it is not our place to destroy it. We share this planet with millions of other species, and it violates all our civilized notions of respect and fairness to shove another species out of existence.
2. **"Don't pop rivets on the spaceship" or The Practical Argument** - Nature and all its creatures are one complex, interrelated machine. Killing species is like randomly popping out rivets on the spaceship earth; one or two are not likely to be noticed, but at some point the whole thing is going to come apart. To survive we depend on the whole interdependent ecosystem.
3. **"There's gold in them thar hills" or The Economic Argument** - We have not even begun to discover the economic potential of other species. A few dozen plants and animals provide the bulk of our food, clothing, and building materials. Many, many species are being lost before anyone has given any thought to their economic potential.
4. **"Isn't Nature beautiful?" or The Aesthetic Argument** - Nature is beautiful and interesting too. Our lives are enriched by it. Our artists and writers are inspired by it. Our hearts are uplifted by the grandness of wild places. We all lose when such beauty is lost.
5. **"Incest is for idiots" or The Genetic Strength Argument** - In genetic diversity is the strength to adapt and survive. All plant and animal breeders know that a key to improving domesticated species is to replenish them with genes from wild stocks. With the loss of species we impoverish the future gene pool for agriculture and other natural resource-based industries.
6. **"Oh no! Bread mold in my petri dish" or The Research Argument** - Everyone knows that penicillin was derived from bread mold. But did you know that more than half of all modern medicines can be traced to wild organisms? Thousands of species are being thoughtlessly destroyed before they can be thoroughly researched.

7. **"Inquiring minds want to know" or The Education Argument** - Nature is fascinating. Behaviors and adaptations of plants and animals can be as mind-expanding as they are interesting. In each generation, discovering the marvels of Nature can be the spark that ignites a lifelong quest for knowledge.
8. **"It's better than television" or The Recreation Argument** - Outdoor recreation is a connection to nature that most of us feel is essential. Biodiversity supports numerous outdoor activities from hunting and fishing to birdwatching and spelunking. In fact, outfitting for camping, canoeing, hiking and related nature study has emerged as one of our fastest growing industries.
9. **"Consider the lilies of the fields" or The Philosophy Argument** - Humans have always asked the universal questions, Who are we? Why are we here? An appreciation of nature may not give the final answers but it shapes our understanding that we are only a part of a much larger creation.
10. **"Were there really elephants, Mommy?" or The Legacy Argument** - Can you honestly say you don't care that the world we leave our children won't have wild elephants or rhinoceroses? Or a million other species that were here when we came? Or vast prairies? Or rainforests? Or wilderness of any kind? If you can say you don't care, then let's hope the future children of the world don't care either. They won't have a choice.