

They Keep the Rat Flag Flying On the Protection of Endangered Species

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Two things have to be considered on subject:

1. Which species are endangered?
2. Will something have to be done about it, and if so, how and what?

When we are being told that many species are endangered, it is always implied that they have to be saved; frequently we are asked immediately to make a financial contribution, often to sign a petition demanding some form of drastic legislation or the use of some repressive law against a property developer or industrial firm. So most of our information about the number of endangered species comes from people not likely to be impartial.

Most of the time you will be confronted with a list of animals and plants, the majority of which you have never heard of in your life before, plus a few popular ones to alarm people.

But this is very dubious: We know of several million species, the majority of which are animals. More than 90% of animal species are insects and we are discovering several previously unknown species every day (Aristotle estimated that there are about 500 species of animals). We have been around for quite a while, so is it not surprising that we have not come across every one of these insects by now? Clearly some of them must be exceedingly rare. To give us an idea exactly how rare, let us consider a well known example from forensic science: A suspect denies ever having been at a certain place. His shoes are confiscated and a forensic biologist painstakingly identifies which species every dead insect stuck under them belongs to. As most of these have an extremely confined range, it will be possible to determine to a precision of usually a

square kilometre or so all the places these shoes have been worn at lately. So what we learn from this is that countless insect species range over a few km² only. To mention a point that belongs to the second part of our consideration: If a species only exists, say, in Kensington Gardens its extinction will not be the end of the world and probably not even the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

But is it *Homo sapiens* at all, who endangers these animals? Consider a species discovered today (literally today!) Let's call it the minor-seven-dotted-Benn-Livingstone-beetle (On conservationists' petitions you will see that many animals are named in some way like this).

It has taken thousands of zoologists centuries to discover this marvel of nature. Hundreds of thousands of man-years to find one of them. Now this noble creature has to find another one just like it within weeks and one of its own sex will not do. Does that animal need US to become extinct? Probably not. By the way: What are the chances of a minor-seven-dotted-Benn-Livingstone-beetle becoming fossilized? And then a million years later found by a palaeontologist? Will this scientist see the seven dots on it? (S)he will not. So could (s)he not think it was the quite common and widespread minor six dotted Benn-Livingston beetle (or even the major-seven-dotted-Benn-Livingstone-beetle which differs from its minor comrade only through having red eyes rather than orange ones)? I suppose you can now see, why the extinction of the overwhelming majority of prehistoric insects will never be discovered. And I am not joking about the quality of conservationists' arguments. Let us look at the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* of March 29, 1982: On page 75 you can see that for the Federal Republic of Germany we are asked to consider 70 different native species of dragonfly and fear for OUR lives, because 2 of them have become extinct. Try not to be sorry all year now, but of 1420 native West German species of large butterflies 6 are no more. I would not trust these figures too much either. Page 73 lists among vertebrates extinct in West Germany the tunny. Now the only way this can have happened is that a zoo kept one which died.

Allegedly endangered is the house-rat. I would not mind, but I don't believe it for one second. The vole is also on the danger list, but only the one with the small eyes, not the one with the big eyes.

But do they really want us to fear for our own lives because of this claptrap? Yes! Page 79 quotes the President of the Club of Rome, Aurelio Peccei: "If mankind does not change its suicidal conduct, we can soon put ourselves on the Red List of endangered species". Helga Schuchardt of the German "Liberal" Party FDP is quoted on page 77 as saying, that in politics alarm signals, like the drop in the number of species, are "systematically ignored" and that "the counter-culture has a better feeling for the LIFE-ENDANGERING DEVELOPMENTS (my emphasis) than our bureaucracy". PZ No 16 of September 1978 published by the Federal Bureau of Political Education in Bonn writes on page 4. "The order for the catastrophe has been placed, scientists warn. We will only have to wait for [it. For] the catastrophe from WEALTH (my emphasis), thoughtlessness, PROGRESS (my emphasis), too much dangerous technology and human failure." Later in the same article: "The earth-sphere is being made up with civilization. (This presumably means, that the earth is being suffocated by civilization.) Nature defends itself against that (development). We have not noticed this allergy (but) Nature will yet revenge itself." Yes, this is a literal translation. It is not nice to live in a lunatic asylum, especially if the greatest nuts are the wardens, so let us do all we can to prevent Britain from getting a government like that!

One further article from this paranoid state publication should suffice., it is on page 6 and entitled: "The day of judgement looms in the year 2040". It gives a number of possibilities which all amount to mass-starvation and then recommends: "Sire half as many children (as at the time of writing), put 40% less money into industry, reduce consumption of raw materials to a quarter of its present value, REDUCE FOOD-PRODUCTION (my emphasis) by one fifth. Result: The population would go down to its level of 1970, the standard of living diminish by 33% - then mankind would have a good 200 years left."

Let us return to *Der Spiegel* now, same day, same article. What shall it cost us? I quote from page 73: "Not just leftist nuclear (power) opponents and environmentalists, but also conservatively minded friends of German flora and fauna have to be THANKED (my emphasis), that during recent years in the Federal Republic investments of allegedly 30 billion Marks (£10 billion) have been blocked by objections. However, conservationists have also contributed to the fact, that state and economy had to spend 120 billion Marks (£40 billion) for the protection of the environment since 1970, as chancellor Schmidt said in 1980."

Evidently this is not considered even nearly enough. Let us now look at some more recent garbage, again from *Der Spiegel*, this time of Nov 3, 1986 page 136. This page considers allegations that the sparrow might become extinct. First some contradictions: The favourite places of these birds are said to be street cafes and kiosks selling snacks. Later it is claimed. "Large scale sealing of the ground with concrete and asphalt in the centres of towns and villages make it difficult for the sparrow to pick up enough small insects for the subsistence of its young." So first the sparrow eats, what people have dropped of their food (anyone can observe, that this is indeed so), now it needs insects. When considering the sparrow, it is said that the ground is sealed (i.e. the bird cannot get at the soil), but now look what they write about the blackbird a few sentences later: "in the short-mown municipal green grass this soil-drilling bird can dig well for wrens." Observe: As the bird approaches, the ground, carefully prepared by evil humans, identifies which species the bird is and then becomes grass for the black-bird while emulating concrete to persecute the poor sparrow. A further reason why the sparrow is supposed to be in trouble is that it tends to sit on the ground (true), is bad at flying (offer a sparrow something in your outstretched hand and watch how it will simulate a humming bird, this bad flyer) and therefore can't get away fast enough and gets run over by cars.

Having seen now, which animals are endangered, let us see how beneficial some of them are to us. The same edition of *Der*

Spiegel mentions the tiger on page 201: "For the good dozen tigers, by which the population in the Sunderbans is rising annually, about 50-60 humans have to give their lives, five per tiger." It is admitted here however, that the tiger is no longer in danger. The authors, furthermore, don't seem to want to be seen propagating such visible slaughter.

Having looked at the sources, let us now do some theory: Can extinction of a species cause us major trouble? If a species has only a few members its influence must be rather limited. If a relevant one should start diminishing we would notice that at once and there would be no danger. Besides, the talk of complete interdependence of species is an extreme exaggeration. Except for oxygen-carbon-dioxide balance wind-pollinated plants do not need animals at all, so they could survive regardless of which other species exist, as long as at least one of them is an animal. Insect-pollinated plants need at least one insect species in addition and the totally unendangered bee will do for all plants we use. Very few animals absolutely need one particular plant. True enough the koala bear could not live without eucalyptus trees, but that tree is not exactly uncommon and our more conventional cows are so valuable precisely because they can live on the most simple stuff and a pig can eat anything at all. In general most herbivorous animals could utilise a wide selection of plants and if they have access to perhaps 10 types of plant species, they will not suffer. (Try to offer grapes to a herbivorous animal, keep them on offer all the time and watch how long it will take before any other food will even be considered.) And as long as there are those plants and the herbivorous animals, carnivorous and omnivorous ones will not suffer. An ecology of say 100 species, plants and animals including *Homo sapiens* is perfectly feasible and indeed this will even be admitted by supporters of ecology such as Isaac Asimov, who frequently suggests that people living in space stations may develop a reluctance to have too much contact with earth because of its over-complex and messy ecology.

So no, there should be no protection of the number of species and we should not be prepared to suffer what conservationists have

in mind for us; otherwise we will not be allowed to keep the standard of living where we can afford to have sparrows eat what we drop. We will have to get down and lick it off the street ourselves.

Free Life