

# Keep Wildlife in the Wild?

These latest reports give sound challenge to the misguided demands from the "keep wildlife in the wild" people who want to eliminate even our domestic cats and dogs from private care.

## **RATES OF FOREST LOSS - The Naturalist**

Rainforests cover less than two percent of the Earth's surface, yet they are home to some 40 to 50 percent of all life forms on our planet - as many as 30 million species of plants, animals and insects. The rainforests are quite simply the richest, oldest, most productive and most complex ecosystems on Earth. As biologist Norman Myers notes, "rainforests are the finest celebration of nature ever known on the planet." And never before has nature's greatest orchestration been so threatened.

## **GLOBAL RATES OF DESTRUCTION**

- 2.4 acres (1 hectare) per second: equivalent to two U.S. football fields
- 149 acres (60 hectares) per minute
- 214,000 acres (86,000 hectares) per day: an area larger than New York City
- 78 million acres (31 million hectares) per year: an area larger than Poland

## **IN BRAZIL**

- 5.4 million acres per year (estimate averaged for period 1979-1990)
- 6 - 9 million indigenous people inhabited the Brazilian rainforest in 1500 In 1992, less than 200,000 remain.

## **SPECIES EXTINCTION**

- Distinguished scientists estimate an average of 137 species of life forms are driven into extinction every day; or 50,000 each year.

## **PROJECTED ECONOMIC VALUE OF ONE HECTARE IN THE PERUVIAN AMAZON**

- \$6,820 per year if intact forest is sustainably harvested for fruits, latex, and timber
- \$1,000 if clear-cut for commercial timber (not sustainably harvested)
- \$148 if used as cattle pasture

While you were reading the above statistics, approximately 149 acres of rainforest were destroyed. Within the next hour approximately 6 species will become extinct. While extinction is a natural process, the alarming rate of extinction today, comparable only to the extinction of the dinosaurs, is specifically human-induced and unprecedented. Experts agree that the number one cause of extinction is habitat destruction. Quite simply, when

habitat is reduced, species disappear. In the rainforests, logging, cattle ranching, mining, oil extraction, hydroelectric dams and subsistence farming are the leading causes of habitat destruction. Indirectly, the leading threats to rainforests ecosystems are unbridled development, funded by international aid-lending institutions such as the World Bank, and the voracious consumer appetites of industrialized nations. If deforestation continues at current rates, scientists estimate nearly all tropical rainforest ecosystems will be destroyed by the year 2030.

### **TROPICAL MOIST FORESTS: PRESENT STATUS IN SELECT COUNTRIES**

<b>COUNTRY</b> sq km	<b>ORIGINAL EXTENT OF FOREST COVER</b> in sq km	<b>PRESENT EXTENT OF PRIMARY FOREST COVER</b> in sq km	<b>CURRENT AMOUNT OF ANNUAL DEFORESTATION</b> sq km / % per year
<b>Bolivia</b> (1,098,581)	90,000	45,000	1,500 <b>(2.1%)</b>
<b>Brazil</b> (8,511,960)	2,860,000	1,800,000	50,000 <b>(2.3%)</b>
<b>C. America</b> (522,915)	500,000	55,000	3,300 <b>(3.7%)</b>
<b>Columbia</b> (1,138,891)	700,000	180,000	6,500 <b>(2.3%)</b>
<b>Congo</b> (342,000)	100,000	80,000	700 <b>(0.8%)</b>
<b>Ecuador</b> (270,670)	132,000	44,000	3,000 <b>(4.0%)</b>
<b>Indonesia</b> (1,919,300)	1,220,000	530,000	12,000 <b>(1.4%)</b>
<b>Cote D'Ivoire</b> (322,463)	160,000	4,000	2,500 <b>(15.6%)</b>
<b>Laos</b> (236,800)	110,000	25,000	1,000 <b>(1.5%)</b>
<b>Madagascar</b> (590,992)	62,000	10,000	2,000 <b>(8.3%)</b>
<b>Mexico</b> (1,967,180)	400,000	110,000	7,000 <b>(4.2%)</b>
<b>Nigeria</b> (924,000)	72,000	10,000	4,000 <b>(14.3%)</b>
<b>Phillippines</b> (299,400)	250,000	8,000	2,700 <b>(5.4%)</b>
<b>Thailand</b> (513,517)	435,000	22,000	6,000 <b>(8.4%)</b>

### **Press release 05/09/2001 HALF THE WORLD'S NATURE RESERVES HEAVILY FARMED**

Two of the world's leading environmental and agriculture groups reported today that almost half of the world's 17,000 major nature reserves, which are intended to protect wildlife from extinction, are being heavily used for agriculture. They also report that extreme malnutrition and hunger are pervasive among people living in at least 16 of the world's 25 key biodiversity hotspots, where wildlife is most at risk.

Some of the most biologically diverse areas on earth are also home to the hungriest humans, according to a new report released today. The findings, documented

in an unprecedented joint report by The World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Washington, DC based agriculture organization Future Harvest, are called "alarming" by the researchers. Given that clearing and using land for agriculture is the chief cause of biodiversity extinction and that widespread hunger is persistent in areas with the world's richest biodiversity, many plants and animals will go extinct unless ecosystems are managed to feed people and protect wild species simultaneously, the report warns. Biodiversity refers to the entire array of wild plants, animals, insects and microorganisms found in nature, which are important to global ecology and are also valuable to science and industry.

### **Press release 05/11/2001 LESTER BROWN LAUNCHES EARTH POLICY INSTITUTE**

Today, Lester R. Brown, announced the formation of a new organization: the Earth Policy Institute. Brown will continue as Chairman of the Board of Worldwatch Institute and will become a Senior Fellow at Worldwatch.

"During the year since I moved from President to Chairman of the Board at Worldwatch, I've had more time to think," said Brown. "Three things have become much more apparent. First, we are losing the war to save the planet. Many battles have been won, but the gap between what we need to do to arrest the environmental deterioration of Earth and what we are doing continues to widen. Somehow we have to turn the tide."

### **Press Release 05/07/2001 GOVERNMENT PROTECTION CAN'T SAVE INDONESIAN FORESTS**

Indonesia's conservation program seemed well planned but then came political turmoil. Now scientists predict that Indonesia's lowland forests could soon disappear completely. Twenty years ago, the Indonesian government took a long hard look at the country's forests, which accounted for more than 70 percent of its land area. They designated different areas for conservation, water-shed protection and production, based on the principles of sustainable forest management. But those ideals couldn't be farther from reality today, according to a new commentary in Science. "If the current state of resource anarchy continues," an international team of scientists write, "the lowland forests of the Sunda Shelf, the richest forests on earth, will be totally destroyed by 2005 on Sumatra and 2010 on Kalimantan."

The lowland forests are home to several species of large mammals such as the Sumatran rhinoceros, the Sumatran tiger and the Asian elephant. Forest destruction may threaten their very survival. The authors point out that immediate action is needed but concede that there is no easy solution to the problem. "A change from large-scale, company-based exploitation to lower-impact joint ventures will require a complete rethinking of forest profitability and beneficiaries," they write. —*Harald Franzen*

## **AMSTERDAM MEDIA ALERT**

### **Challenges of a Changing Earth, Conference on Global Change, 10-13 July, 2001**

Planet Earth has entered an era that has no precedent. Scientists often point to the many human-driven changes that are modifying the global environment. But it is now apparent that these changes are cumulative and interacting and could accelerate the Earth into a different state with implications for its habitability.

This striking message comes from global change scientists around the world as they prepare to meet in Amsterdam in July for one of the biggest and most international conferences ever held in this growing field of science.

#### **Friday, June 15, 2001 By David Suzuki ENN News**

Last week, two reports in the journal *Science* pointed the finger squarely on human activities as the culprit in this mass extinction, and a similar one that occurred in Australia 35,000 years earlier.

The reports both found that human hunting and related activities are the most likely cause of the extinctions. Those losses included 73 per cent of the plant-eating species in the Americas, and all of the Australian land mammals, reptiles and birds weighing over 100 kilograms.

This issue has been debated for years, as some scientists contend that a relatively small human population armed with stone-age weapons could not have been responsible for such widespread species losses. Instead, they argue that changes in climate, or an emerging disease of some sort, were the likely culprits.

But the North American report's author, John Alroy of the University of California, says that no matter how stupid and slow his models assumed the hunters were, they still ended up as the driving force behind the extinction of most species. He concludes, "Human population growth and hunting almost invariably leads to a major mass extinction."

If that was true 13,000 years ago, then it should come as no surprise that the rate of extinction today is so high. According to the World Resources Institute, human activities are driving species to extinction 100 to 1,000 times faster than what would occur naturally. Worldwide, more than 5,000 known animal species are threatened. And in North America, one in every three known plant species is threatened.

**From the PBS documentary "Earth on edge" by Bill Moyers  
06/18/2001**

"We are pushing our planet to the absolute limit of its ability to function," says Dr. Melanie Stiassny, one of the biologists interviewed whose findings suggest that Earth is approaching critical environmental thresholds that may be irreversible."

**So Much for Conservation Effectiveness...** According to news reports one of the world's last great rainforests is to be laid waste by loggers working for Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe, and his ruling clique who, not content with responsibility for exterminating more than 250 million people, now have a new plan. It's to kill off everything still alive! Associates of the increasingly despotic 77-year-old are planning the biggest ever logging operation in the precious tropical rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The 85 million acres (almost 1.5 times the area of the United Kingdom) that Mugabe hopes to exploit are the heart of an area recently designated one of the most important forests on the planet by the United Nations.

**From Pacific Institute for Studies in Development,  
Environment, and Security.** Friday, January 11, 2002

"The aim of this new assessment is to look ahead at four critical emerging threats to the world's freshwater resources," stated Dr. Peter H. Gleick, director of the Pacific Institute of Oakland, California and the report's lead author. "And when we do, the picture is not pretty. Growing populations, increasing water pollution, and the wild-card of climate change all point to an upcoming crisis."

Freshwater is essential for human survival, for agriculture and for the survival of our planet's plants and animals. But pollution, climate change, water-related disease, and the destruction of natural systems all threaten the purity and availability of our most precious resource. Despite the pressing nature of these threats, water institutions and policymakers have, so far, been largely unable to develop the tools and approaches needed to address these problems.

"Governments have failed to adequately address these problems. The impacts of water-related diseases on the world's children, and the coming risks of climate change are especially threatening. Changing weather patterns may dump too much water into barren areas and leave our massive networks of dams and reservoirs with only drops. We've got to prepare for tomorrow today."