

Nature's Place

Human Population and the Future of Biological Diversity

Authors: Richard P. Cincotta and Robert Engelman

Publisher: Population Action International, Washington, DC USA

Year : 2000

Pages: 80

Price: Not mentioned

We are conscious of the intrinsic value of biological diversity and of the ecological, genetic, social, economic, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values of biological diversity and its components, conscious also of the importance of biological diversity for evaluation and for maintaining life sustaining systems of the biosphere....

With these preamble of the Convention on Biological Diversity held at Rio de Janeiro, June, 5 1992, efforts have been increased throughout the globe to safeguard the global biological diversity. But, the living bank for Earth's successful genes is still under immense threat. While our own population is growing steadily, those of our closest relatives, the great apes - have slid precariously towards extinction. Never before, in 3.5 billion years of life in Earth, has a single species chipped away large portions of the entire earthly array of life. Yet that is what human beings are doing today.

Scientists are becoming increasingly convinced that human beings have caused ecosystem change and species

extinction almost since our own species emerged. Between 50000 and 10000 years ago, as early populations of humans expanded across the continent, more than 200 species of large animals disappeared forever. Then, between 1500 and 500 years ago, as human populations reached the farthest oceanic islands, over 1000 species of island birds went extinct. Today's wave of extinction, however, is even more extensive. This is supported by the fact that more than 1.1 billion people now live within the twenty five *global biodiversity hotshots*, described by ecologists as the most threatened species - rich regions of the Earth. And, the possibility of plateau or peak in human population by the middle of this century could prove to be a devastation in future.

Hopeful signs do brighten this dark prospect. Some scientists argue that the threat to biodiversity is unrelated to the recent growth of human population. It is, among a handful of underlying conditions, and not all species are at risk. Recent demographic studies have suggested that, couples the world

over, especially younger women, today desire later childbirth and fewer children than ever before. This could, contribute powerfully to the slowing of population growth, now averaging to 1.6 % annually for less developed regions and 0.3 % for the developed regions.

In these preface the authors have done extremely good job to publish this book in a good time. Starting with the key terms and definitions, the book - printed in quality paper and with appealing production design, has included six chapters all dealing with the anthropogenic factors related to biodiversity loss. However, the authors have not forgotten to describe a plan of action to cope with it in the last chapter.

Lastly, the authors' expression that *the survival of many plants and animal species will depend on investment made today, both directly in biodiversity conservation and in human development efforts that end up, as a side benefit to their main purposes, slowing the growth of human population* should be well taken by all concerned in conserving biodiversity - the precious gift to human beings.

The book is worth reading, and having as a reference by any one interested in demography and biodiversity.

Sushim R. Baral
Department of Forest Research
and Survey

