

Dear Students, Colleagues and Friends,

Friday I sent you the story of my encounters with spiders. It was sent as a fun, little informative jaunt into some biology facts impacting us every day. However; it relates to a bigger picture – how we coexist with other organisms of all kinds.

This affects you. It affects you in business. It affects you at home. And you along with me and everybody else, are responsible. This responsibility should not crush your spirit or exhaust you with dismay – not when there are so many things you can do to help. I've listed a few ways you can make change at the bottom of the page.

In Spite of the News, There is Hope for Biodiversity

By Alexander J. Travis, contributor November 03, 2014, 06:30

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from "The Hill" <http://thehill.com/>

Since 1970, over half of all vertebrate life on earth has died. Vanished. Gone. This news, released by the World Wildlife Fund in their [Living Planet Report 2014](#), captured headlines. The staggering reduction in numbers of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish is truly hard to comprehend — both in terms of numbers and the resulting socioeconomic and ecological impacts.

But a far more troubling report came out a few days later and received only a fraction of the attention. In the U.N.'s [Global Biodiversity Outlook 4](#), we learned that efforts to respond to the crisis of biodiversity loss are failing to an astounding degree. We are on pace to meet only five of 53 objectives set to arrest the decline of life on Earth. There are real economic consequences of these losses. U.N. Under-Secretary General Achim Steiner [noted](#) that continued inaction would cost \$14 trillion by 2050.

Why such a bleak picture? We are simply failing to address historical drivers of biodiversity loss — fragmentation and degradation of habitat, overconsumption of wild resources (particularly fisheries), pollution and invasive species — as well as climate change.

There is much evidence that caring about wildlife and the environment is in our collective best interest. A world with whales, cheetahs and elephants is a richer place for our children to inherit. The goods and services that wildlife and ecosystems offer provide billions of people with food, fiber, fuel, shelter, sport and water. In a [prior column](#) for The Hill, I wrote about "One Health," a concept showing that a healthy environment has direct benefits for people's health and well-being.

However, many people remain unconvinced, while others feel powerless to make a difference. For several decades, it has been thought that markets based on wildlife, like ecotourism, could solve both biodiversity and socioeconomic goals. Unfortunately, the history of most integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs) shows dismal results. Given all this, is there any hope at all?

Recognition of the few bright spots for biodiversity matters because those cases can show pathways forward. From a policy perspective, North America's long-held stance that wildlife species are a public trust undeniably pays dividends. The concept of "public trust" means that

you — yes, you — own the wildlife here in the U.S. People have democratic access to hunting and fishing within reasonably regulated limits and without having to be wealthy landowners. Mutual interests make allies out of fishing/hunting groups and wildlife organizations, as evidenced by [recent support](#) for President Obama's proposed climate change and pollution policies from over 300 chapters of hunting and fishing organizations representing millions of Americans.

Yet North American policies don't apply to many of the nations where species are most diverse and being hit the hardest. In these settings, new approaches are needed that turn the ICDP concept on its head and use the strength of sustainable markets that are not based on wildlife to achieve conservation goals at a scale that has true impact.

One example, [Community Markets for Conservation](#) (COMACO) was founded by Dale Lewis in Zambia. In one of the world's poorest countries, COMACO's cooperative agribusiness serves 100,000 households across the Luangwa Valley watershed. By improving farming practices, diversifying crops to promote resilience against erratic rainfall, and adding value to crop products (e.g., jointly making peanut butter instead of individually selling peanuts), COMACO strives to reduce deforestation for farmland and the need to harvest bushmeat or make charcoal to cope with chronic poverty and hunger.

In Otjiwarongo, Namibia, Laurie Marker founded the [Cheetah Conservation Fund](#) (CCF) to save a species whose population has been in free-fall. Here, farmers once killed cheetahs to avoid predation of their livestock. CCF reduces this perceived risk by giving farmers Anatolian shepherd dogs to protect their flocks. Simultaneously, CCF is launching products such as "Cheetah Country Cheese" to provide additional income streams with value added based on coexistence with predators. They also seek to restore up to 10 million hectares of grassland through sustainable harvesting of encroaching thornscrub — a habitat equally unsuitable for cattle and antelope, as well as cheetahs — to make a biofuel log. These efforts are designed to provide jobs, improve the number and quality of cattle that can be raised on a given property, reduce the need for charcoal and improve habitat for multiple wildlife species.

In these examples, two very different organizations adopted a common strategy of using sustainable food and energy markets to have impact at scale. And as a lesson for us all, they show us the power that single individuals with vision and commitment to that vision can have. Perhaps there is hope after all.

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[So what can you do? How can you make a difference? Here are a few ways you can help staunch the flow of species exiting our planet.](#)

- *In business, examine your surroundings. Could you plant native plants (for beauty, to manage storm flow and) serve as homes or food for pollinating insects, birds and perhaps a few mammals? When purchasing, can you examine your supply chain to see that your business is not dealing in materials or products that cause damage to organism populations through habitat fragmentation or destruction? Even if you're not on the management team little things like recycling, using less water and turning off the lights result in positive change if we all do them. I once did a presentation for industry leaders demonstrating the power of 1 (which you can read as a number or your personage – whichever you like). Here is one example: A ¼ pound hamburger (at the time) required 100 gallons of water to grow the beef and get it to your table. If ¾ of Nashvillians (where I was presenting at the time) eat smaller hamburgers once per week we could save 1,208,269,400 gallons per year. That number represents not only an effect on stream flow, but an effect on every living creature who needs that stream flow to live. Notice I didn't suggest we "give up" hamburgers although many have. I'm merely making a point about the degree of impact we could have – if we wanted to do so.*
- *At home, much like the office, you can examine your planting regime, your buying habits and your consumption of things like water and energy and make a sizeable impact. You can also spend a few of your hard-earned dollars to help specific species (as in the article above) or by supporting organizations who purchase remaining habitat native to their region. In the heartland, the [Missouri Prairie Foundation](#) works to purchase and actively manage our native prairies to protect the biodiversity leaving on these grasslands which have been churned up from 15 million acres to 90,000 acres today. If you live in Louisiana, you may help an organization protecting green-draped bayous. If your home is along the coast, perhaps an organization helping coral reefs or wind-swept dunes is more appropriate. The point is you can do something. And after reading the article above, knowing all that you already know don't you think you should? I know my sisters are each getting a little donation in their names to help purchase prairie lands this Christmas. The animals there need land more than my sisters need a new sweater.*

Make a difference. You can.

Cheers,

Margo

Margo Farnsworth

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Give good people good information and they'll do good things.

(If you've just received this single newsletter, it may be because I thought you'd be interested in this particular subject. You may or may not get others. If you want on my list regularly, e-mail me. If you want off my list, e-mail me. Thanks!)