

Review: The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History
By Elizabeth Kolbert

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Kolbert, Elizabeth. *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*. Picador: New York. 2014. 319 pp. ISBN: 9781250062185, paper. US\$ 16.00; Illustrated; includes bibliographical references and index.

In 2015, Elizabeth Kolbert, a contributor to *The New Yorker*, won the Pulitzer Prize for her book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, a treatise on the impact we have on the other creatures of the planet told in the context of the history of extinction on the planet Earth. We are now in what many believe is the sixth major extinction in the planet's history. The book is both an international and historic tale, which puts our history on the planet in context. It explores the history of life on the planet before we got here, and the ideas of many famous naturalists like George Cuvier and Charles Darwin are chronicled.

Each chapter tells the tale of a different species that has been impacted by the thrust of evolutionary competition and the damage we have caused to natural systems. The author writes about creatures from many areas of the world, ranging from small ants to coral reefs, to ancient mammoths, to imperiled African Rhinos. Though easily consumable, the author tells a sad story about the change we have caused to the progression of life. Much information is presented to tell the story in a broader context.

The Sixth Extinction is very accessible, and though dense, one does not feel that they are in this dreadful tale due to the light style and execution. The history presented is a hard one and it is sad to see what we have done. That extinction has happened before us does not take too much away from our feelings of responsibility for what we have caused by the end of the book. Here both the historical play and the terrible modern act are presented.

Kolbert reminds readers of the present human-altered age:

“One of the defining features of the Anthropocene is that the world is changing in ways that compel species to move, and another is that it's changing in ways that create barriers—roads, clear-cut, cities—that prevent them from doing so.” p. 189

The result is mortality for other things. Kolbert, however, does not beat the reader over the head with it. There is some wonder and humor presented about a world that we cannot fully understand. It is wonderful that the Pulitzer Prize committee picked a book about the need for preservation in an age where environmentalists are criticized for caring about the right things. It seems somehow strange to care more about animals than environmental justice and people, but others need to speak for animals and plants

that do not have a voice for themselves. It is nice that some of the original concerns of the Environmental Movement, e.g. Preservationist, are championed here.

This great book helps argue that we should care about the other creatures of the planet and should probably behave differently. It is important that people are reminded of the impact we have on the other creatures on the planet. The book will help inform readers who don't get it and will even inspire some.

The Sixth Extinction is recommended to the general public, to students, both the non-major student in a natural history class and students who plan to pursue careers in the environmental field, as well as interested friends and family members. Students in the field might want more details about what is presented. They may want charts and tables and numbers rather than pictures and anecdotes.

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Electronic Green Journal, Issue 39, Fall 2015, ISSN: 1076-7975