
observations, this situation may illustrate what Canadians do not wish to be. They do not wish to be Americans or American copies.

The implication for applied anthropology is to ask what a custom means in terms of a group's social or ethnic identity. To the American fishermen, there may be more than a little pride in the fact that an effective piece of equipment was invented and spread locally that provides an extra margin of safety and convenience. To the Canadians, rejecting the bar by not outfitting themselves with it may have social meaning, too. It may be part of their identity to indicate who they are by not borrowing what they apparently perceive as another culture's custom, despite the boat bar's obvious utility.

It would be interesting to see, through further research, if the differential use of the boat bar is connected to any corresponding differences in social or cultural values, such as individualism or nationalism. In the meantime, American use of the safety boat bar among commercial fishermen in the Rainy Lake/Lake Namakan region of Minnesota and Ontario remains a little known but distinct cultural difference between the United States and Canada.

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REVIEW

EXTINCTION: The Cause and Consequence of Disappearance of the Species, by Paul and Anne Ehrlich. New York: Random House, 1981. 305 pp. \$15.95.

"So what if a few more square miles of rainforest are chopped down? There's lots of rainforest left. So what if one more mountain in Colorado is dug up, ground to powder and stuffed into the local valley? There are other mountains, valleys. So what if another stretch of stream is rendered lifeless by solvents pouring from industrial plants?..." These questions and statements are examples of homocentric thinking tackled by Anne Ehrlich in *EXTINCTION*, a book collaborated with her husband, Paul. Homocentric thinking is a short-sighted view of ecological systems and their benefits, rendering natural resources useful only as economic ones. Homocentrism does not consider a world view; the past, present, future; nor does it consider humanitarian objectives. An example Anne cites is the Montana lumberman's motto: "The only good tree is a stump."

This type of thinking has been around a long time. But since the Industrial Revolution hundreds of species have been permanently lost due to habitat disruption...plant and animal species aren't being created as fast as they are disappearing. How many more years can ecosystems survive rapacious practices that stem from rapacious thinking? Paul and Anne, as well as other leading environmental scientists, estimate twenty-five.

Even though *EXTINCTION* is a collaboration of husband-wife's efforts, husband-wife's scientific experience, it is narrated by Anne and she has written it with respect for every living organism. Take, for example, mites. Who needs them? They

are noxious, horrible pests! With care, illustrated in a number of vignettes, Anne points out their role in ecosystems...as decomposers. In extracting energy for themselves, they release important nutrients for microorganisms to live in and plants to feed on.

Technically, scientists have discovered a great deal about the past, the present, about plants and animals; but there are literally hundreds—thousands—of untapped natural resources. "For example, according to conservationist Norman Myers, only two percent of the flowering plants—some 5,000 species—have been tested for alkaloids." In the 1950s, alkaloids, vincristine and vinblastine, from leaves of a periwinkle plant in Madagascar proved effective in treatment of Hodgkins disease. Digitalis, used in treating chronic heart failure, is derived from Foxglove leaves. Again, the Ehrlichs' message reads loud: We, citizens of the Earth with futurist vision must care for plant and animal species and their environments.

The history of conservation in the US started, possibly, in the 1600s when "the father of American botany," John Bartram, showed great concern over indigenous flora and fauna. In the 1800s, we risked losing the entire herd of 60 million American bison due to rampant slaughtering. In the late 1890s, the first laws to protect animals were passed. By that time, bison herds had dwindled to fewer than 500! The bison's plight and the passenger pigeon's story adequately illustrate how, no matter their great numbers, a species can quickly disappear if not protected. Conservation efforts picked up in the 1940s, reached a peak in the late 1960s. Somewhere between then and now, our national focus has shifted. EXTINCTION is timely. It mentions mistakes, lessons to learn, what lies ahead if we heed warnings—and if we don't! Mostly, the book reminds us that if *Homo sapiens* is to survive, we must care for and maintain natural ecosystems. Environmental protection is more than cleaning up pollution, driving smaller cars, passing laws. It is changing homocentric thinking—accepting the challenges and the responsibilities.

Paul and Anne Ehrlich are members of the Stanford University Biology Department. They also have travelled extensively doing scientific research. Paul is the author of *THE POPULATION BOMB* and *THE END OF AFFLUENCE*. *EXTINCTION* is written with a global view and can be read once, twice, 10 times and still be fresh.

...K. Dakota

