

A RATIONALE FOR NATURE PRESERVES

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As a preface to my limited remarks on the subject of nature preserves, I want to make some observations on humankind's attitude to their environment and attitude to the web of life of which we are a part. As far back as recorded history goes, our species has had one dominant attitude. Humans have for a long time, and perhaps always, looked upon themselves as the centre and zenith of creation, a little lower than the angels - demigods.

This self-important 'mind set' no doubt had survival value in past centuries when humans were few and far between and tended to be outnumbered and overwhelmed by other forms of life. However, this 'mind set', over several centuries, has made it devilishly difficult to accept new insights into proven reality. While our ancestors could not accept our small role in space, we cannot accept our small role in time.

We find it hard to accept that our ancestors of a mere 4,000 years ago were, at least, in some cases, just as intelligent as we are today, and were able to plumb the mysteries of the relative motion of the earth, moon and sun by such intricate structures as Stonehenge and Avebury. We find it very difficult to accept that our recorded human history of, say, 6,000 years is only about three per cent of the human story.

All plants and animals are part of the complex web of life, and all animals and plants depend directly or indirectly upon each other for continued existence. Due to the 'mind set' I have been talking about, I believe that most people, and especially urban people, have as yet been unable to make that huge leap in thinking that lets them realize the truth that, although we consider ourselves human and intelligent, etc., we - you and I - are still part of the complex interdependent web of life.

Until we can do that, we will not approach other life forms, with the respect, almost reverence which befits the Creator's handiwork. This feeling of superiority often prevents us from admitting that our species, in the long run, is subject to the unforgiving laws of nature like every other species.

I have often noticed that the average human cannot visualize the effects of a geometric progression. That, perhaps, is why people and their governments are so prone to fall victims of debt and the consequent interest payments, inflation, and the world population explosion.

We are already, I think, after sheep, the most numerous large mammal on the face of the earth, and we have already passed the slow part of our multiplying - now we are at the explosive stage of our increase. Yet we continue to make our every effort to protect ourselves from natural forces that limit numbers of every other species. In a surprisingly short time - a few centuries - I think, if we keep this up, there will be standing-room only on the land mass of the earth.

How can a society plan, or how should it act in a forest of exponential curves, all of which are now going almost straight up - costs, public debt, population.

Well, I think, we should salvage a little of our natural heritage while there is yet time. We should have some inkling of what virgin Prince Edward Island was like before the white man arrived, by saving a few imperfect examples of what it was like. Only in this way, by having a sample for comparison, can we have any real idea of what changes we have already made on other strands of the web of life on our island.

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