

Suzuki addresses challenge

Author's note: Dr. David Suzuki was selected as the keynote speaker at the Tourism Industry Association of Prince Edward Island's luncheon on Thursday, March 24th as part of P.E.I.'s Touch Nature tourism theme for 1988. The following article is meant for those who were not fortunate enough to attend that luncheon. It attempts to cover some of the major points made by Dr. Suzuki during that address. J.D.M.

Dr. Suzuki opened his address with complimentary remarks about the Island and Islanders closeness with the land. He noted that P.E.I. was light years ahead of the rest of Canada, in part because the long history of development had eradicated all wilderness and focused attention on the need to work with the balance to ensure its conservation. He commended the Government for developing Canada's first Conservation Strategy and he thanked the tourism industry for their support of the concept. He then addressed "the challenge of how much further we have to go".

The address itself started with a story of a trip Dr. Suzuki took to the Toronto Metropolitan Zoo with his children during the recent teachers strike. The trip reminded him of the fundamental role his first trip to a zoo made in his life and how he dreamed afterwards of trips to the Serengeti Plain or to tropical jungles. The questions of his 8 year old daughter on how close each animal they seen was to extinction were a chilling reminder of how far we have gone towards eradicating many animals from the face of the earth. "Did you realize that there are more rhinoceros in the Cincinnati Zoo than on the Serengeti Plain today? Why is it that everything in the world is disappearing?" In less than 15 years there will be no wilderness areas in Coastal British Columbia. In 30 years there will be no wilderness. Ecologists for years have known that Islands of wilderness are not stable, that these Islands must be interconnected. The situation has now reached the stage where biologists place extinction second only to nuclear war in its threat and they predict that 60 to 80 percent of the species alive today will be extinct in 100 years.

With statements that "Man is the major problem on the face of the earth; Prince Edward Island is so progressive because you've been where we're going"; and an analogy of people to fruit flies, Dr. Suzuki introduced the concept of choices. He noted that while human beings are the only creatures that realize there is a future and that individual choices affect this future we seem to have lost the ability to deal with issues that affect us. Dr. Suzuki then listed and expanded on "the most pernicious sacred truths".

The first is "the need to maintain steady growth". For anyone who has looked at exponential growth they know this is not possible. Using the analogy of a population living in a test tube filled with enough food to last a population doubling in size every minute for 60 minutes he noted that at 59 minutes it was half full and that at 55 minutes only 3 % of the space was occupied. If when it was near being full three more test tubes were available they would only last the population 2 more minutes despite the quadrupling of the food supply. How can politicians argue that there is a glut of oil on the market when many biologists including Dr. Suzuki believe the human population has passed its 55 minute mark! The arguments of politicians on free trade are a denial of the reality of human foresight. People must talk about negative growth, not zero growth. Canadians use 100 times the resources of India and one fifth of the world's population uses four fifths of its resources. The Maritimes must realize that they are in the vanguard of this reality in Canada.

The second pernicious truth is the "belief that science can understand and