

The Living Planet

The State of the World's Wildlife

Since 1970, there has been an overall decline in wildlife populations in the order of 52%. Freshwater species populations have declined by 76%, species populations in Central and South America have declined by 83% and in the Indo-Pacific by 67%. These are often not complete extinctions, but large declines in the numbers of animals in each species, as well as habitat loss. This presents us with a tremendous opportunity, before it is too late to rescue many species. This book documents the present state of wildlife on a global scale, using a taxonomic approach, and serving as a one stop place for people involved in conservation to be able to find out what is in decline, and the success stories that have occurred to bring back species from the brink of extinction – primarily due to conservation management techniques – as models for what we might achieve in the future.

NORMAN MACLEAN is Emeritus Professor of Biology at the University of Southampton and a lifelong wildlife enthusiast. He has visited and studied wildlife in more than 50 countries around the world and has given numerous radio and TV interviews on the subject. He is the editor of *Silent Summer* (Cambridge, 2010), co-editor of *Austral Ark* (with Adam Stowe and Greg Holwell, Cambridge, 2015) and author of *A Less Green and Pleasant Land* (Cambridge, 2015).

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NORMAN MACLEAN

University of Southampton



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Preface

Like the wildlife which it discusses, this book has an evolutionary history. Back in 2010, a book which I had edited and partly written was published. It was entitled ‘Silent Summer: The State of Wildlife in Britain and Ireland’. The book was multiauthored and chapters on all the major wildlife groups and the factors affecting them were written by acknowledged experts in these areas. It proved to be a publishing success and its structure a winning formula.

There followed in 2015 a book with a similar structure entitled ‘Austral Ark: The State of Wildlife in Australia and New Zealand’, to which I made an editorial contribution. I initially planned to compile similar books on the wildlife of all the major world continents, but this proved to be an impossible task. After taking stock I determined to try to compile a book which discussed the world’s wildlife in toto, and this is the book that has now emerged. Its compilation has been a long haul but finally proved possible.

Writing such books poses a major problem for the contributing authors, namely that wildlife is not doing well, and so the books could easily become catalogues of woe. Aware of this dilemma, we have tried to provide an honest and informed account, but to partly balance the bad news with accounts of modern nature conservation and the many species which have prospered as a result of such activity. Thus, the cessation of whale hunting by most countries has led to a dramatic increase in the numbers of most whale species.

There is little doubt that *Homo sapiens*, supposedly wise, has not proved to be very smart in managing Planet Earth and its resources. So what with climate change, widespread pollution and agricultural intensification, the effects on wildlife communities have been fairly disastrous. I personally think that it is too late to completely reverse the damage, but even partial recovery will be a most happy prospect. Let’s hope that we can make it happen.

It is perhaps appropriate for me to share with our readers where my passion for wildlife has come from. It began in my early boyhood. I was brought up in a very strictly religious family, which meant that I could not play sport at school or even read novels (until my English master mercifully explained to my father that without reading novels, his son could not hope to pass an exam in English; when my father gave in on this, I read classical novels as other boys read comics!). Nor did we have a radio at home and the cinema was prohibited. But my home in a village on the outskirts of Edinburgh was set amongst fields

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and farmland, and as a somewhat lonesome boy, I became fascinated by the local birds, insects and flowers. Thus was initiated what became a lifelong interest and passion, for which I remain ever grateful.

I should not conclude this preface without mentioning IUCN, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. This is the body which gives a red listing to species threatened with extinction, and other listings to species less threatened. All the chapters in the book which are devoted to particular groups of animals and plants include an introductory section detailing the IUCN status of the relevant species. In addition, many of the authors are themselves affiliated to IUCN in some way, and the organisation has given me much help and advice personally. So, without IUCN this book would never have seen fulfilment.

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Dr Gyulin Hwang, who used to be a member of my research team, has also made a great contribution to the preparation of many of the chapters.

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