

BBC News article featuring the Guanaco 1 project:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3047253.stm>

bbc.co.uk Home TV Radio Talk Where I Live A-Z Index Search

BBC NEWS WATCH BBC NEWS IN VIDEO

About the versions | Low graphics | Help | Contact us
Last Updated: Wednesday, 21 May, 2003, 19:12 GMT 20:12 UK

News Front Page
World
UK
England
Northern Ireland
Scotland
Wales
Business
Politics
Health
Education
Science/Nature
Technology
Entertainment
Have Your Say
Magazine
In Pictures
Country Profiles
In Depth
Programmes

RELATED BBC SITES
SPORT
WEATHER
CBBC NEWSROUND
ON THIS DAY
NEWSWATCH

E-mail this to a friend Printable version

World 'losing battle against extinctions'

By Alex Kirby
BBC News Online environment correspondent

Humans have done too little to find sustainable ways of sharing the Earth's resources, a US scientist says.

Dr Peter Raven, says the rich world in particular is not confronting the extinction crisis.



He believes we know scarcely 15% of animal and plant species alive today.

And most of those we are driving to extinction will vanish without us ever having known they were here.

Dr Raven is director of the Missouri Botanical Garden and Engelmann Professor of Botany at Washington University in St Louis.

Deep ignorance

He was delivering the Darwin lecture in London on Wednesday, the eve of the UN-designated International Biodiversity Day. His lecture was entitled Our Choice: How Many Species Will Survive The 21st Century?

Dr Raven said there were perhaps 10 million species alive today, of which only 1.5 million had been recognised and named scientifically.



Humans knew no more than one in six of the Earth's animal and plant species. We know so little about fungi, he said, we had no accurate picture of their geographical distribution.

In the tropical rainforests, only one species in 20 had so far been catalogued, scientists estimated.

Over the last half-century, Dr Raven said, drastic human changes to the Earth included:

- about a fifth of arable land lost to over-fertilisation, deserts and urban sprawl
- roughly a third of the forests cut down and not replaced
- atmospheric carbon dioxide increasing by a sixth, contributing to climate change
- the loss of 6-8% of the Earth's protective ozone layer.

"We are using the Earth's productive systems at an unsustainable rate, one that we cannot really afford," Dr Raven said.

SEE ALSO:
Rich 'must pay to save nature'
21 May 03 | Science/Nature
Digital Noah's Ark launched
20 May 03 | Bristol
Wake-up call on extinction wave
19 May 03 | Science/Nature
Species face tough fight for survival
07 Oct 02 | Sci/Tech

RELATED BBC LINKS:
The Extinction Files

RELATED INTERNET LINKS:
WildCRU
Darwin Initiative
Missouri Botanical Garden
Convention on Biological Diversity

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites

TOP SCIENCE/NATURE STORIES
Ultrasound to treat war wounds
Last chance for China's dolphin
Hubble trouble pressures shuttle
RSS | What is RSS?

"We are likely never to have seen or to be aware of the existence of most of the species we are driving to extinction."

It was not "morally or ethically right" to destroy things as we were. Yet despite the 1992 Earth Summit, relatively little progress towards sustainable development had been made.



South Africa's penguins need monitoring

Dr Raven said the industrialised nations had not generally risen to the challenge – and if everyone lived at their standard, it would take another two planets to support the Earth's population.

His prescription was simple and demanding: a stable population, a globally sustainable consumption level, and acceptance of social justice as the norm for development.

Dr Raven described the UK's Darwin Initiative, which has provided £30m (\$49.25m) to biodiversity conservation projects in developing countries, as "a brilliant concept".

Mistaken perception

The meeting heard details of one Darwin-funded project, which seeks to protect lion populations in Zimbabwe.

It is led by the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU), University of Oxford, working with the Zimbabwe wildlife department.

Professor David Macdonald, director of WildCRU, told BBC News Online: "People think lions are common, but a survey to which we contributed came up with a very different picture.



Orang-utans are at risk

"There may be as few as 20,000 lions left across Africa – a terrifyingly small number, and a plausible one.

"The lions we're looking at in Hwange are killed by farmers, and by trophy hunters, and it's mainly males who die.

Knock-on effects

"Lions live in extremely complex societies. If you kill one male, the lion who replaces him will usually kill his cubs.

"And we found males serving three, four or five prides of females, not just one. So the take is completely unsustainable because the consequences of one kill just cascade.

"We've managed to get the hunting quota halved, and local youths are getting the conservation message across in the villages."

Another Darwin project is trying to save the guanaco, an animal of the high Andes which is thought to be the ancestor of the llama.

Other species to benefit include orang-utans in Sabah, Malaysia, South African penguins, and fruit bats in Madagascar.

 [E-mail this to a friend](#)

 [Printable version](#)

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

[E-mail news](#) | [Mobiles](#) | [Alerts](#) | [News feeds](#) | [Interactive TV](#) | [Podcasts](#)

[News Front Page](#) | [World](#) | [UK](#) | [England](#) | [Northern Ireland](#) | [Scotland](#) | [Wales](#) | [Politics](#)

[Business](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Science/Nature](#) | [Technology](#) | [Health](#) | [Education](#)

[Have Your Say](#) | [Magazine](#) | [In Pictures](#) | [Week at a Glance](#) | [Country Profiles](#) | [In Depth](#) | [Programmes](#)