

## RED LIST - BLACK DAY

The publication of the IUCN Red List 2009 unfortunately marks yet another Black Day in humanity's calendar. The statistics are sobering - and frightening. 21 percent of all known mammals, 30 percent of all known amphibians, 12 percent of all known birds, 28 percent of reptiles, 37 percent of freshwater fishes, 70 percent of plants, and 35 percent of invertebrates assessed are under threat. And this is just the tip of the iceberg since the majority of species in the world have not yet been assessed and the threats to ecosystems and species are increasing daily. By all rights, it should be a global day of mourning.

For the majority of people, however, these are nothing more than statistics. Too bad, so sad as they say. And when the next Red List is issued, the majority will already be psychologically prepared to see a repeat of the sad news. It's inevitable one may think – more and more species will undoubtedly be reported as being under the threat of extinction. That's the trend, it's unfortunate, but life will undoubtedly continue, because it always does, it seems. There are always winners and losers. No need for alarm. There is no tipping point when life support that nature offers will cease.

But let's stop for a few seconds and try to relate to the meaning of these statistics, on a personal level. The world is *your* home. What the statistics imply is that *your* own home is crumbling, and increasingly rapidly. And there is no other home. At least one third of the materials that make up *your* home are gone, forever. You cannot go to the local supplier and buy more. You perhaps were not aware of or care for what that particular beam or that screw was doing but they were parts of *your* home and they all made it complete and kept it together. They were there for a reason. They had a specific purpose. They helped in their own little way keep *your* home together and functioning. And now they're gone, and gone forever. Another third of *your* home's materials are now of uncertain quality. Your home is malfunctioning, even though for now it's still standing. But you also know that *your* water supply is becoming less reliable and safe. Rats have invaded *your* premises. The roof is leaking. The foundation is cracked. *Your* heating and cooling systems are becoming unpredictable. *Your* waste can no longer be disposed of as before. Floods and hurricanes pose increasing threats to *your* home. In such conditions, in many countries, your home would be condemned. And would you accept this trend? I'm sure that you wouldn't. You would undoubtedly take immediate action.

But the why is it that we care more for our temporary dwellings than we do for the planet that is our collective home, and the present or future home of our children and grandchildren? If something requires maintenance in our own homes, we quickly see to it. And yet we act as if we are ready and willing to accept the progressive demise of our natural home – as if it is really inevitable. It is not inevitable. The extinction of species and life support systems is not acceptable! The course can and must be changed. But perceptions, attitudes and values must change first.

The publishing of the IUCN Red List should not be seen as just the documentation of yet another set of sad statistics, whose impact passes in a day, for those who actually read it. It should be a call for action, a call for all of us to collectively get aware and scared enough to get motivated to demand a coordinated global response to the ongoing extinction crisis, and to personally engage in action to ensure our collective survival.

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