

# Introduction

## Echoes and Appeals from the Heart & Mind

This collection of essays represents 3 years of articles published largely in our Forbes “Green Conversations” blog series with a few additional pieces from the on-line Eco News Network. While some of the data, circumstances and situations may have changed to varying degrees (for example, some 228,000 people have been added to the planet every single day since these essays were written, a continuing trend), the core spirit and essence of these diverse ecological, natural sciences, humanities and arts essays and discussions remain true to their original purpose.

Our hope is to intimate and spell out representative concepts and details that collectively enshrine the state of the world, primarily from an ecological set of perspectives. We hope to make clear how thrilling, remarkable and critical this generation is to the goal of stabilizing a planet that is, in far too many respects, under siege. Our goal is quite forthright: To underscore a very basic realization, namely, that the biological splendors of this Earth are precious, and have been, in many instances, ignored, misjudged, inappropriately exploited, or worse, for far too long.

“Sustainability” has become a universal appeal, from Wall Street to the Rio + 20 United Nations Summit; from Ecuador to the United States; from across Asia and Africa to Europe; from Syria to New Zealand. Everywhere, the challenges of nurturing a healthy planet confront all of humanity, and hence, the enormous geographical breadth presented herein.

Moreover, the myriad of scientists, educators, key government and agency representatives and activists all speak to the great promise, but also the peril that now confronts the human species, and those tens of millions of other species with whom we co habit this miraculous planet. The science, ethics and artistic expressions of the urgency of our times could not be clearer. Every individual with whom we have had conversations, as re-published in this collection, speaks eloquently and passionately to many of the most pressing issues of our time, and we feel strongly that there is no better overview of this unanimous summons than the very basic statement, “Why Life Matters.”

## The Challenges to Our Humanity

Our very humanity is confronted by fundamental questions and necessities, as ecosystems increasingly reveal enormous gaps, and human-induced change. The moral compass every individual chooses to live by; our consumer habits, fertility trends, levels of tolerance in an age of great biocultural diversity all go to the Chinese aphorism suggesting that this is, indeed, an interesting time in which to live. Interesting, but challenging. The inequality gap is before us, with fewer than 90 individuals laying claim to some 50% of the global economy.

**Part One** of this book examines some of the most salient opportunities before the global commons in the form of human economics and how economics is, as California Governor Jerry Brown once made abundantly clear, a sub-set of the needs of nature, not the reverse. We examine bio-economics with the goal of suggesting how socially conscious investing, impact investing and the future of business ethics hinges upon firm incorporation into the crucial sub-stratum of natural capital; and why consideration of the ecological bottom-line in any corporate standard operating procedures is now fundamental to the sustainable auguries and durability of any business.

**Part Two** continues in the economic vein with an emphasis on climate change, energy use, and some of the mechanisms that might best enable one society after another to customize their cultural norms in ways that are less infictive on the most vulnerable people and ecosystems. This is an interdependent world, and most pollutants do not recognize political borders any more than migratory birds or watersheds do. In the case of Ecuador, significant changes have occurred—from the time these essays and conversations were first published—that further challenge an ideal set forth by that country in an effort to reduce its exploitation of natural resources. But the future is yet to be written in terms of Ecuador's biologically stellar Yasuni National Park and the world's ongoing prayers for her unwavering stewardship.

**Part Three** considers human health, and the health of the environment as clear co-dependents. A healthy planet makes for a healthy person, and vice versa. With an emphasis on the food we eat and where that food comes from, Dr. Neal Barnard conveys a lucid and up-to-date account of some of the most pervasive issues in human consumption around the dinner table. Medical currents are also examined in terms of pharmaceutical companies and the latest challenges and successes within the realm of integrative oncology.

**Part Four** focuses explicitly on human demography and what the ongoing trends indicate from region to region. The unambiguous causes and effects of human population pressure on biodiversity are echoed from the U.S. to parts of Africa and Asia. Our unrelenting growth paradigm is examined with an eye towards its equally relentless pressure upon every single biome on the planet. Calls for human rights coincide with an emphasis on the pressing need to do away with the nutritional segregation that has meant the marginalizing of women and their children, particularly

young girls, in many parts of the world. Without equal rights and full access to contraceptive choices, the population explosion is likely to continue. While demographers debate the tipping and tapering points, there is no question that we remain “in the throes of” an unsustainable number of human consumers worldwide. Those interviewed in this section offer us a way out of what too easily resembles, at times, an intractable labyrinth.

**Part Five** is dedicated to individuals who are making profound differences for humans and other species, from Cambodia to India; from South Africa to nearly every country on Earth where the United Nations is engaged. We call such individuals “Ecological Heroes” because they really are. Against often unbelievable odds, their courage and tenacity should give each one of us not merely hope, but pragmatic options for the short- and long-term viability of a measurably higher quality of life for all sentient beings.

**Part Six** is representative of the complex challenges confronting such heroes, from China and Japan to England and all those countries where there are at-risk species. From England’s National Trust, to the Alliance for Zero Extinctions, to China’s new embrace of what its leadership has called “ecological civilization,” the trends have been made manifest in country after country: we must embrace new paradigms that can better fashion a workable union between human cultures and all other life forms.

In **Part Seven** some of those “life forms” are analyzed in specific reference to what is generally thought of as the cause of *animal rights*. This phrase encompasses animal protection, animal welfare and animal liberation. It harkens back to many of the world’s greatest spiritual traditions, and asks that we re-examine our often supremacist notions of a self-important human species and come to a much broader sensitivity with respect to other feeling, thinking, vulnerable beings whose lives are not merely biological, but also biographical.

**Part Eight** considers some of the critical solutions to ecological illiteracy, and to the melding of human culture with conservationist appeals. How does one create a national park in a country like Haiti, where human poverty, and corresponding deforestation, is rampant? How can we engender an emphasis on tolerance and compassion in our school curricula? What buy-ins by countless communities, often in economically marginalized parts of the world, can be facilitated in win/win conservation models? An in-depth discussion with one of the world’s foremost primatologists, Dr. Russell Mittermeier, President of Conservation International, as well as with the former Executive Director of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, Dr. Ahmed Djoghla, offer critical blueprints for what can be done, and what it will take to succeed in halting the loss of precious biodiversity.

**Part Nine** concludes with a diverse set of profiles of elegant personages and their examples of deep and personal commitment to nature. Through their philanthropy, their art, and their belief in ecological and social reform, these environmental luminaries demonstrate unconditional commitments to the natural world, and by their example proffer a love of nature that is truly inspirational and galvanizing.

## **The Sum of Its Parts**

We recognize that no single anthology can do more than serve as a window on the expression of any number of ambassadors for an equal number of causes. What brings this collection of pieces into a singular focus is the lens of nature. We have found a clear unified vision shared by all those with whom we have had the good fortune to dialogue. Their own trials, tribulations and successes are indeed critical signposts along the way towards engendering a universal harmony that spells peace in every language.

We are grateful to everyone who so generously shared in the making of this modest collection of essays and conversations. Their time is precious, and we respect that far beyond the words and images on these pages. We also note that these essays obviously are mere “snippets” of vastly broader realms of knowledge, experience and expertise. But we hope that the sum of its parts, the quintessence of so many deep thinkers, great activists, generous souls and brilliant visionaries is lodged firmly in this book, and that its wonderful diversity will give readers everywhere a timeout in which to re-evaluate the possibilities before us in the twenty-first century as humble members of a vast biological collective.

Why Life Matters

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