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Response to Don Ludwig 2000. "Crisis and Transformation"

In Search of Intelligent Life ...

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Dr. Ludwig (2001) frames the problem with his opening sentence: "These are stressful times for ecologists, as we attempt to counter threats to cherished places and species." In the third sentence from the end of his editorial, he again accents the "places" occupied by species: "We ecologists are not alone in our concern for the earth's ecosystems."

The problem is that most of us ecologists, educated in biology departments, have been trained to focus on species. Thus, an interest in "cherished places" and Earth's "ecosystems" enters our minds mostly as an afterthought, of secondary importance and vaguely associated with the fuzzy term "habitat." We have not attached great importance to the "matrix sciences" such as geology, geomorphology, pedology, hydrology, and climatology, which may explain why it was left to a geophysicist, Lovelock, to reveal that Planet Earth is a functional ecosystem composed of functional subsystems.

Ecology's fundamental insight is that species do not stand alone. Organisms as such cannot be maintained and preserved. Only Earth's geographic ecosystems, of which organisms are one component, can be maintained. Whether under our guidance these volumetric, place-specific ecosystems are completely tame, semitame, semiwild, or wild will greatly influence the evolutionary diversity and adaptability of the organisms preserved within them.

Dr. Ludwig's quote from Leakey, "... the fact that one day *Homo sapiens* will have disappeared from the face of the Earth does not give us license to do whatever we choose while we are here," suggests that ecologists should speak out more strongly against further taming and simplification of Earth's ecosystems which, if carefully tended, might yet produce intelligent life.

RESPONSES TO THIS ARTICLE

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LITERATURE CITED

Ludwig, D. 2001. Crisis and transformation. *Conservation Ecology* 5(1):11. [online] URL: <http://www.consecol.org/Journal/vol5/iss1/art11>

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