

# Stuff the tiger



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As the population of China becomes more wealthy, demand for illegal tiger parts is booming. Up to 600m Chinese people believe that tiger bones, claws and even penises will cure any number of ailments, including arthritis and impotency. And as a result we've just been told, for about the hundredth time, that if nothing is done extinction looms.

Well, not complete extinction. Obviously tigers will continue to exist in Las Vegas for many years to come. And in Asia there are so many backstreet big cat farms that they outnumber cows. But they will cease to exist in the wild.

Right. And what are we supposed to do, exactly? Send an international force tooled up with the latest night-vision gear and helicopter gunships to hunt down and kill the poachers?

Really? And what are these mercenaries supposed to say to the locals? " Yes, I realise that you have no fresh water, no healthcare, little food and that your ox is broken, but we are not here to do anything about that. In fact we're going to put an end to the only industry you have."

Yes, say the conservationists, who argue that unless this is done now our children will grow up never being able to see a tiger in the wild. And that this is very sad.

Is it? I have never seen a duckbilled platypus in the wild or a rattlesnake. I've never seen any number of creatures that I know to exist. So why should I care if my children never see a tiger? In fact, come to think of it, if they're on a gap year trekking through the jungles of Burma I fervently hope they don't.

There's an awful lot of sentimentality around the concept of extinction. We have a sense that when a species dies out we should all fall to our knees and

spend some time wailing. But why? Apart from for a few impotent middle-class Chinamen, or if you want a nice rug, it makes not the slightest bit of difference if Johnny tiger dies out. It won't upset our power supplies or heal the rift with Russia. It is as irrelevant as the death of a faraway star.

So far this century we've waved goodbye to the Pyrenean ibex - did you notice? - and the mouthful that is Miss Waldron's red colobus monkey. Undoubtedly both extinctions were blamed on Shell, McDonald's, the trade in illegal diamonds, Deutsche Bank or some other spurious shareholder-led attempt to turn all of the world into money and carbon dioxide.

But if we look back to a time before oil, steam and German bankers, we find that species were managing to die off all on their own. The brontosaurus, for example. And who honestly thinks it's sad that their children will never get to see a tyrannosaurus rex in the wild?

In the 19th century 27 species went west, including the great auk, the thicktail chub, the quagga, the Cape lion and the Polish primitive horse. Apparently the Poles tried their hardest but it was no good. It was just too primitive.

Between 1900 and 1919 eco-mentalists ignore the fact that we lost most of the young men in Europe and prattle on about the passing of the passenger pigeon, the Carolina parakeet, and the Tasmanian wolf.

Honestly, who cares because there are quite literally millions more fish in the sea. Only last week we heard that scientists in the South American rainforest have found 24 previously unknown species including 12 dung beetles, a whole new ant, some fish and a rather fetching frog.

It may not be as cuddly as a baby tiger or as primitive as a Polish horse, but it is groovier since its purple fluorescent hoop markings appear to have been drawn by Steve Hillage himself.

So is the world rejoicing at the sensational news that we've been joined on earth by a hippie frog? Is it hell as like. What the world is doing instead is crying into its eco-handkerchief because of what's going on in the Arctic.

We're told that because of the Range Rover, HSBC and Prince Bandar all the ice at the North Pole is melting and that as a result the polar bear has nowhere to live. Apart that is for the 3m square miles of northern Canada that are completely untouched by any form of human encroachment.

Anyway, ignoring that, we are told that the polar bear is now at risk and as a result we're all supposed to kill ourselves.

Why? Contrary to what you may have been led to believe by Steiff's cute and squishy cuddly toys, the polar bear is a big savage brute; the colour of nicotine, with a mean ugly pointy face and claws that, if they were to be found in Nottingham on a Saturday night, would be confiscated as offensive weapons.

If the polar bear dies out it will make not a jot of difference to you or anyone you've ever met. The only people who'll even notice are the Innuits, and its passing will actually improve their lives because they'll be able to go out fishing and clubbing without running the risk of being eaten to death.

I do not believe that we should deliberately kill stuff because we find it ugly or offensive. Unless it's a virus or a mosquito. But I do wish the world's conservationists would learn a lesson from some of the more enlightened

species in the animal kingdom: that when push comes to shove, the only creatures that really matter are those in our social group. And our children.