

Where have all flowers gone

[Environment](#)



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BUSTER**

Gone to kudzu every one. When will we ever learn? With my apologies to Peter, Paul, & Mary, we asked Dr. Stuart Pimm and Dr. Clinton Jenkins about the current explosion in extinction rates and what should be done about it. Their answers are simple and complex all at once: stop messing with the environment and where you have messes with it, fix it. Drs. Pimm and Jenkins wrote “Sustaining the Variety of Life” in 2005 to discuss the global problem of extinction and the local and international solutions that will be required to fix it.

The problem, quite simply put, is that man is having too large an impact on the environment around him and as a result is destroying other species at an alarming rate. Some of the destruction is the result of carelessness and some is a result of direct action taken against the environment (Pimm & Jenkins 2005; Campbell, et al. 2007) The authors went to Brazil to a cattle ranch on the edge of the rain forest to write about and talk about the politics involved in saving species, but ultimately determined that the answers may be beyond their control (Pimm & Jenkins 2005)

The problem, according to the doctors, is that we humans have an alarming effect on our environment (Campbell, et al. 2007). First, we decide to clear the land and remove the native vegetation. We replace old-growth forests with homogenous tree farms designed for lumber or wood products and not as an environment. Then, we decide to play god. Yup, that’s right, we know more than god or Mother Nature or a billion years of evolution and decide kudzu would be a great way to stop the soil erosion in the southeastern United States (Campbell, et al. 2007).

Never mind that some of those states were formed by soil erosion in the first place, clearly we need to protect the environment. What? Kudzu's an invasive species and hard than heck to kill? Well, why didn't you tell us that before we brought it in? Invasive species are non-native plants and animals brought into an area by human interference. Sometimes, like with the kudzu, we think we're doing a good thing. After all, stopping soil erosion is a good thing, right? Well, sort of. The problem is that the presence of humans is leading to the extinction of other species, rapidly.

According to study in 2000, eleven different species of moa, a flightless bird closely related to dinosaurs and native to New Zealand, were driven to extinction within the first hundred years of their encounters with human (Holdaway and Jacomb 2000). But nothing new is happening way too fast now. Turns out that there is more to saving the planet than just trying to prevent one little environmental issue that we caused. The kudzu dealt with the soil erosion pretty well, but it spread like wildfire and not even wildfire can kill the stuff.

In Middle America, the native prairies and old growth forests are gone replaced by softwoods planted during the Great Depression and the days of the Civilian Conservation Corps (Campbell, et al. 2007). While that means we have trees in the Midwest, we don't have oak and walnut and birch and other hardwoods, we have new growth. To get back to the hardwoods forests will take generations and cultivation. So, yes, doing something about the environment is a good thing, but we must take into consideration how we go about the reintroduction of species.

The other thing we must consider is how to avoid accidental introduction of invasive species. It turns out that some boat or other brought fire ants from South American to an American Gulf of Mexico port and the fire ants liked here and started moving north. And, they destroyed the local ants. (Campbell, et al. 2007) One ant's the same as another, right? Oops. Wrong again. Depending on their food sources and behavior patterns, ants can affect the rest of the local food chain.

The other downside for humans is that these ants are not the friendly; join you for a picnic type. These ants are aggressive and destructive and they hurt unfortunately, these ease with which we travel around the world means that it is easy for Caspian Sea zebra mussels to end up in the Great Lakes and for British Starlings to end up taking over for all the native song birds in New York. (Campbell, et al. 2007). If we want to have a positive effect on our environment, Pimm and Jenkins said the first thing we must do is stop presuming that we know more than nature does.

Wild kangaroos do not belong in the central United States and it would not be cute to release them there (no matter how much I like them better than deer). (2005). We must also be willing to deal with the international implications of our decisions and willing to work internationally for solutions (Pimm & Jenkins 2005) And, we must be prepared to study what once was there and put it back, not what we think might look nice of fit in with the local condominiums (Campbell, et al. , 2007). It is vital that we consider all aspects of the ecosystem when attempting to return an area to its native condition.

For examples, if we want to reintroduce song birds to a region, when we need to consider their foraging habits, nesting habits and even what eat them (Campbell, et al. , 2007) Some states have faced this issue when introducing large game animals. If there are no natural predators, then there must be provisions in place to see that the animals are regulated in another manner, either via control of the food supply, via disease or via human population controls like hunting. The effort to save species from extinction must be global and soon (Pimm and Jenkins 2005), but we cannot act hastily and without regard for the natural way of things.

We must consider the results of our actions and thought here may not be alligators in the New York sewers from tourists who flushed them as in the old urban legend, we must actually educate people about the proper disposal of unwanted exotic pets. (Campbell, et al. 2007). Mostly though, if we want to save the species, we must save the planet: reduce our carbon footprint, recycle and find better ways to interact with the environment without destroying it. Ultimately, Pimm and Jenkins said, we have to realize that the words of Chief Joseph more than a century ago are true and what we do to the animals, we soon do to ourselves.