



Overpopulation and human greed, the two enemies of biodiversity

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Our planet's biodiversity is under threat and ironically, we humans are the main offenders - the same species that depend the most on it, is behind the destruction. Slowing down biodiversity loss is perhaps one of humanity's greatest challenges today.

The age of our planet is estimated to be 4.5 billion years, of which human beings have only existed for 200,000 years, i.e., for not even 0.5 per cent of the time and yet compared to any other species, we have had a far greater impact on our planet's health.

In recent years, the human population has grown exponentially, yet the landmass available to us remains the same.

By some estimates in the last 50 years itself, our species population has doubled. The growing number of humans has led to a growing demand for resources, which has led to overexploitation of the earth's natural resources. Our demands have mostly been achieved at the expense of forests, wetlands & marine ecosystems worldwide.

Numerous forests have been levelled to accommodate our species' growing population, disrupting ecosystems, and causing tremendous loss to biodiversity.

One of the primary demands, food, is behind the largest negative impact. To meet the growing demands, agricultural expansion happened, terrestrial land use was changed. Almost 50 per cent of

the global land area is used for agriculture, causing an estimated 80 per cent extinction threat to animal and bird species.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of The United Nations, agriculture accounts for up to 80 per cent of global deforestation and is the number one cause of deforestation. But, the loss of forests happens for many purposes:

To clear space for the production of crops like wheat, maize etc.

To create a grazing pasture for animals reared to fulfil the rising demand for meat.

For logging purposes, i.e., to meet the demand for wooden products like furniture or the production of charcoal.

Forests are also cleared up for mining, as most of the precious resources like Oil, gold, diamond, copper etc are found in and around forests. Not only that, but the chemicals used in the mining process also degrade the quality of soil and ends up in water bodies, polluting them and harming the riverine ecosystems.

Forest fires. According to experts, climate change & deforestation are drying out forests, making them more vulnerable to fires.

Unsustainable human activities like these are continuously degrading and destroying forests worldwide. According to World Resources Institute data, we have witnessed the loss of almost ten per cent of tree cover since the beginning of this century. In the year 2020 itself, we lost 4.2 million hectares of forest cover, i.e., area equal to the size of Netherlands, a twelve per cent jump from 2019.

By relentlessly exploiting the earth's natural resources, we have not only wiped out forest cover globally but also choked our water bodies and in doing so we have driven many species of flora and fauna towards extinction. Excessive use of pesticides in food production, oil spills etc has not only led to soil depletion but the runoff of these artificial fertilisers from the fields has also polluted water bodies causing excessive growth of algae leading to fatal effects on aquatic life forms.

Today, with about 60 per cent of the world's major marine ecosystems being exploited unsustainably, it is estimated by the year 2100 more than half of the world's marine life forms may face extinction.

A United Nations report from 2019 suggests that an average of almost 25 per cent or around one million species from the animal & plant kingdom face an extinction threat, many within decades if nothing is done to reduce the biodiversity loss.

It's a vicious cycle, human population growth leads to a decrease in per capita income growth, which tends to lead to an increase in poverty, which is in turn linked to Poaching.

Humans have led many a glorious species to their end, one of the most shameful examples of which is the Dodo bird. A flightless bird native to Mauritius, it was discovered in 1592, and within merely seventy years it went extinct.

Another example is the Tasmanian devil, a species made popular by the cartoon Looney Toons. But do you know, due to hunting and human encroachment the species went extinct in 1936? Now, the only reminder of this large marsupial can be found in a children's animated cartoon.

Illegal poaching has brought all kinds of precious wildlife to the brink of extinction. Some examples are Pangolins, Rhinoceroses, Tigers, Hawksbills turtles and many more.

Try and comprehend this, all this damage was done merely out of greed.

Rapid population growth also causes intangible damage like Climate change, which is yet another important factor behind the deteriorating biodiversity & ecosystems.

By the end of this century, World temperatures are expected to rise by 3° to 8°C, which will have a devastating impact on the planet.

Experts warn that decades of unsustainable human activities are bringing the Amazon forest a.k.a. lungs of our earth to near a tipping point. This forest's canopy cover plays a major role in regulating the global climate, with a carbon sink capacity of around 90-140 billion metric tons. With the current deforestation trends, the release of even the smallest portion can lead to an acceleration in global warming.

Biodiversity loss also has a direct bearing on the rise of zoonotic diseases, studies suggest that around 60 per cent of the emerging diseases in humans are a result of pathogen spillovers from animals to humans.

It is important to remember that biodiversity is an important part of this planet, without which there is no future for humanity. While no one wants to imagine this planet without all the thousands of amazing life forms that make up our ecosystems, mass extinction is a very real threat. Only through sustainable living, sustainable development and sustainable population growth can we combat this threat and save our planet.

As Mahatma Gandhi once said, "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."

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