

Sensing the Inherent Value of Natural Ecosystems

By [Ted Mosquin](#)

Reprinted with minor change from **Borealis** Vol. 2 (1), 1990

Since carrying out a study of biological diversity for the Canadian Museum of Nature last year, my opinion on the true value of natural ecosystems has gone up many fold. This is somewhat embarrassing because I have been in the business of studying and reporting on ecosystems and their species all my professional life. Of one thing I am convinced: people have only a vague idea of the terrible damage they are causing to humanity's future when they take natural ecosystems for granted, and destroy them just for the purpose of creating ever more wealth and power for themselves.

The most important of the inherent values of natural ecosystems is that they contain within themselves creative powers which, over large spans of time, have produced the stupendous array of biodiversity the world over. The presence of a species and the things that it can do have a powerful bearing on shaping the environment of all. Organisms help to make the world and then it makes them. Humans are among the most complex of the achievements of the natural forces found uniquely in these creative ecosystems.

Over long periods, the following processes have been learned or have come into being from these systems: food production through photosynthesis; the building of soils; the creation of food chains; water cycles; nitrogen fixation; massive precipitation of oceanic carbon dioxide into limestone; complex food chains; the evolution of thousands of herbivores and carnivores; the recycling of dead organisms; the conversion of toxic chemicals into harmless substances; the creation of thousands of kinds of co-operative, symbiotic and harmonious relationships among species; wondrous bird, insect and animal calls and songs; the stupendous beauty and grace in animal and plant form; insect and bird flight, to mention a few. And through these creative processes of the ecosphere, inconceivable ecosystems (forests, wetlands, coral reefs) have emerged and have persisted and become ever more stable over billions of years. All the above are just part of the Earth's Garden of Eden--a mysterious and miraculous living sphere created through the operation of natural laws.

To most people, the notion that national parks, native woodlots, patches of native prairie, wetlands or wilderness areas possess inherent values that are vitally important to themselves and their children may be difficult to accept. Centuries of culture and learning have taught us that "only people are important." But what alternative is there to setting in motion a series of actions by governments (since they make policy and are in charge of humanity's affairs) at all levels in a major effort to reverse present trends and secure the survival of the natural processes that are found in wild Nature? What alternatives are there to restoring the Earth?

There have been far too many tragic and dangerous losses already--especially in settled regions. Preservation of remaining natural areas in all parts of the world where they still exist should be placed high on government priorities. Regretfully, the Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio Summit) promised a lot but has produced so little in this direction. Programs of reforestation,

reparation, restoration of marine ecosystems, and the like should be recognized for the importance they deserve and carried out on scales that would make a difference. And the government and corporate assaults on our planet such as huge Hydro and flood control dams, clearcutting, and the systematic burning and spraying of forested ecosystems, toxification of agricultural soils and foods should be recognized for the anti-ecological and anti-human acts that they are and stopped permanently. If the current onslaught against natural ecosystems cannot be arrested and reversed, I am convinced that a miserable future lies ahead for all but a few species of life on Earth.

People should read up on ecology, find out more about how our Earth works, and why the preservation and restoration of the natural/normal ecology of our planet is the most important of all things you can do for your children, community, country and Earth.

The next time you walk in a natural forest, sit among grasses and wildflowers of the native prairie, or explore a still wild edge of the sea, try to you are part of the ecology of the place, try to take your mind back in time, think about and give thanks to the natural forces and species at work in these places. Think also of your personal obligation to saving the Earth and its creative systems.

[Other Ecocentric Texts](#)