

Man and the Natural World

Prince Bernhard

March 26, 1972

Our world today stands in grave danger of losing many animals and plants which have given joy to countless generations. They need not be lost if we manage our affairs properly, for it is man's own interest to see that the natural world, which is, the root of his own existence, survives for his children and their successors.

My eyes were opened over three visits to the Lake Manyara area of Tanzania. On our first visit to this beautiful area we were surrounded by thousands of antelope, zebra, wildebeest, and many other species. The next year there were noticeably fewer, and on our third visit they had become so few that we could easily count them. Seeing this decline, and the development of agriculture around Lake Manyara, made me realize how rapidly man was destroying something that I felt must be preserved. Meeting this challenge has become one of my principal preoccupations, and it is why I am proud to be president of the World Wildlife Fund.

The fund is only 10 years old, but we feel that we have already made our mark helping to save both living species and the wilderness areas which are their home, and which are so threatened by man's population explosion and the technological revolution. To the end of 1971 the World Wildlife Fund had contributed \$7.3 million to 550 projects in 60 countries. This effort stimulated governments and authorities to contribute an equal amount to this great task.

The prestige achieved by the World Wildlife Fund has enabled it to use its influence to promote the launching of national conservation programs in several countries, and to inspire second thoughts about development proposals which could have endangered wild nature and would often have been of less economic benefit in the long run.

We believe we have improved the prospects for survival of critically endangered species such as the orangutan, the Arabian oryx, the Javan rhinoceros, the Hawaiian goose, the aye-aye, the white-winged wood duck, Morelet's crocodile, and the marine turtles, to mention a few.

Natural areas have been purchased and rented, or the authorities persuaded to protect them all over the world. In the United States the rich New Jersey wetlands have been purchased so that they will remain a haven for bird and water life, and provide a satisfying and restoring glimpse of wild nature for our urban humans. Just recently the World Wildlife Fund contributed \$190,000 toward the purchase by the French Government of land in the Camargue, the Mediterranean delta of the Rhone, which will be preserved as one of Europe's richest nature reserves.

The famous national parks of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Congo, Zambia and Ethiopia have received grants, and we have supported eight projects in Madagascar, which is a unique biological area with distinctive plant and animal life. Cousin Island in the Seychelles has been purchased to save its rich bird life.

This is just the briefest of glances at some of the things we have done.

"So what?" you might say. "Does this mean anything in terms of human existence?"

We believe it has a great deal to do with human beings.

The life we know today evolved over millennia through the complex interplay of, natural forces. They form a web, some obviously supporting others—others not so

obviously doing so. Man has been able to control much of nature and other life, but he has not risen above dependence on them. Crops and domestic animals, and many of our medicines, are direct products of the natural world.

I personally believe we have only scratched the surface in finding natural medicines. Even products like petroleum, which we now see as much as a threat as a blessing, come from natural processes. Oxygen comes from photo synthesis in the seas and plants. Soil is enriched by natural waste as it recycles it. Plants feed the animals we eat.

The species and land the World Wildlife Fund has saved are perhaps insignificant strands. But there is nothing insignificant about the fact that over 900 species of animals and 20,000 plants are in danger of extinction. This is the time to be concerned—man is in danger of losing vital supports for his own life.

We have chosen the natural world as our special sphere of activity, but we give our support to those tackling other environmental problems, of which the human population explosion is the real root. The World Wildlife Fund has directly called on all heads of government to stabilize their populations as soon as possible. Within this century—only 30 years to go—today's four billion people will become six billion, with all the consequences of pressure on land for food and other resources. Either we bring this under control or there will be disaster—almost certainly within the lifetime of our children and grand children.

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