

Joe Student
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Jason Nix
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The human population is rapidly overcrowding the planet, to the detriment of all the native flora and fauna. In the past 50 years alone, our world's population has more than doubled, from just over 2.5 billion in 1959, to over 6 billion in 2006. Overpopulation touches every other social and economic problem we have. The more humans there are, the more we eat. The more we eat, the bigger the ecological imprint we make, the more the natural world suffers. If, for example, women had one child per couple, the birthrate would be below the magic 2.1 child per female needed, and in a generation, the overpopulation problem would be well on its way to being fixed.

Overpopulation has many contributing factors, and many detriments. As more people come to an area, they stress the local plants and animals to the breaking point, and most often, beyond. They consume the animals past the point that they can regenerate, so they begin to die off. As the animals die, or are forced out of their habitats, the plants and other organisms that depended on them are also wiped out. This wasn't always the case.

In Paleolithic times, the cycle was stable, and animals flourished. With the rise of the Neolithic Period, the cycle reversed. Agriculture and population soared, and as a consequence, the environment began to decline. Animals' habitats degraded, transported species overran native ones, pollution, and over harvesting slowly killed them.

China, as one of the population superpowers, is one of the main problems facing humanity. It relies heavily on irrigation with water drawn from its aquifers and rivers. The greatest impediment is geographic. Two-thirds of China's agriculture is in the north,

but four-fifths of the water supply is in the south, principally in the Yangtse River Basin. Irrigation and withdrawals for domestic and industrial use have depleted the northern basins, from which flow the waters of the Yellow, Hai, Huai, and Liao Rivers. Added to the Yangtse Basin, these regions produce three-fourths of China's food and support 900 million of its 1.5 billion population. Starting in 1972, the Yellow River channel has gone bone dry almost yearly through part of its course in Shandong Province, as far inland as the capitol, Jinan, and then all the way to the sea. "In 1997 the Yellow River stopped flowing for 130 days, then restarted and stopped again through the year for a record total of 226 dry days" (Wilson 36). Because Shandong Province normally produces a fifth of China's wheat and a seventh of its corn, the failure of the Yellow River is of no little consequence. The crop losses in 1997 alone reached \$1.7 billion.

Wilson, a Harvard entomologist and environmentalist says,

"The people of the developing countries are already far younger than those in the industrial countries and destined to become more so. The streets of Lagos, Manaus, Karachi, and other cities of the developing world are a sea of children. To an observer fresh from Europe or North America the crowds give the feel of a gigantic school just let out. In at least sixty-eight percent of the countries, more than 40 percent of the population is under fifteen years of age.'

Meanwhile, the groundwater of the northern plains has dropped drastically, reaching an average 1.5 meters (5 feet) per year by the mid-1990s. Between 1965 and 1995 the water table fell 37 meters (121 feet) between Beijing itself. Faced with chronic water shortages in the Yellow River basin, the Chinese government has undertaken the building of the Xiaolangdi Dam, which will be exceeded in size only by the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River. The Xiaolangdi is expected to solve the problems of both periodic flooding and drought. Plans are being laid in addition for the construction of

canals to siphon water from the Yangtze, which never goes dry, to the Yellow River and Beijing respectively.

Overpopulation is the chief cause of ongoing environmental damage. As the number of humans on the planet rose, human consumption and the development of new, more powerful technology enlarged our impact on the biosphere. With the huge benefits we would receive from lowering the population by even a fraction, it seems childish that more hasn't been done to combat the issue. If humanity reduced the global population level to, say, 2 billion or the equivalent population as it was in the 1930's, the benefits would be numerous. All the advantages of modern technology would continue, but most of the environmental deterioration would cease. The Earth would have its much needed time to regenerate.

The global sentiment on overpopulation has been pushed aside by many countries. None of them want to face the issue, so they don't. For thousands of years, humanity has viewed itself in a struggle for survival against a harsh natural world. Because of this, many cultural values and institutions have always favored the growth of human numbers. Religions support population growth by going against birth control and putting limits on immigration into more prosperous countries. The real estate industry want more people because they need housing, and housing raises real estate prices. Banks want rising real estate prices, because that cements the need for mortgages. Immigration lawyers want more people too, as it is good for business. Governments want more people because it reduces public debt, and they support less strict immigration laws in hope of getting support from recent immigrants. As a whole, the world overlooks overpopulation, and wants to adopt a policy of global redistribution as a cure-all.

All these groups have a vaulted interest in continual human expansion and population growth. Politicians are manipulated, lobbies are formed, and dissenters are intimidated and publicly ridiculed, placing their own interests above humanity's future.

Overpopulation is also the chief reason that sustainable development remains a sought after dream. According to a March 2004 release from the United Nations Secretariat, "demographers have changed their assumptions by lowering anticipated fertility rates in many parts of the world, and now project, that before 2050, approximately 80 percent of the world's population will have fertility levels below replacement" (Cassils 3).

"The pattern of human population growth in the 20th Century was more bacterial than primate. When Homo sapiens passed the six-billion mark we had already exceeded by perhaps as much as 100 times the biomass of any large animal species that ever existed on the land. We and the rest of life cannot afford another 100 years like that."

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