**Sam Potts**

**MSc Zoology**

Biodiversity Conservation

I’m Sam, I am a master’s Zoology Student. My main interests are in global biodiversity conservation, specifically in the tropics and rainforests - as well as livelihood resilience of Indigenous people and local communities. I will be discussing species extinction and the disconnection from nature.

We are currently causing the sixth mass extinction, with the disregard that both past and current generations have of living organisms and our environment. All species, from bacteria to fungi to plants and animals, have all evolved and adapted in equilibrium to their ecosystems over millions of years. Since the earth was formed over 4.5 billion years ago, environments have been ever-changing. This has caused species to gradually evolve, or in some cases become extinct, due to natural selection. What is not natural is the human-induced extinction rates, that animal and plant species are experiencing today; extinction rates are 1,000 – 10,000 times higher than they would be in the absence of humans. This equates to 150-200 species per day dying off.

Habitat loss and destruction is accelerating, as well as sudden changes in climatic conditions. These impacts are occurring too fast and harshly for species populations to tolerate and adapt to, therefore we are losing them. It is estimated that 1 million species are at risk of extinction. This puts human health, livelihoods, and our economy at severe risk, which we have already seen gradually happen across the globe. Since 1970, an average of nearly 70% of wildlife populations have plummeted, with the worst impacted areas being in Latin America and the Caribbean which have seen a decline of 94%. All species, big and small, have immense ecological value and play specific roles in their ecosystem. The complex networks in the biosphere are all connected, and these disruptions change community compositions. Therefore, everything we do has consequences.

**Connection with nature**

So, the problem is the way in which humans “dominate” the planet and many of us see themselves as members of a superior species, separate from nature. Most social structures are obsessed with consumption, mass production, overexploiting and depleting resources along the way. It is too easy to disconnect ourselves from where in the world products we use day to day are sourced. Many products are luxuries. This system lacks responsibility for nature, as well as respect for it. Our earth has been significantly altered by our activities, specifically 76% of land and 66% of the ocean have been modified. There is very little stewardship, especially in comparison to some Indigenous and local communities, who still rely on their environment more heavily and directly, than we do in the West. The land is sacred to them and has many spiritual and cultural significance.

Our behaviours and lifestyles have disconnected us from nature, we now live in a technology and science dominated world, with little spiritual or cultural meaning to life. Everything receives a monetary justification/evaluation. The logic of waste by which we structure our economic and social systems is increasingly disproportionate with the regenerative logic inherent in natural systems. This is what Karl Marx called the “metabolic rift”. We need to be reminded that we are part of nature.

Living in America and your line of work - have you worked directly with First Nations in the Pacific Northwest, and what is your experience of those societies having a superior environmental ethic that lends itself better to intergenerational justice?

* What is the main thing the western world can learn from this?

**Personal**

Climate change and the biodiversity crisis are linked. They are both a crisis of colonisation and a result of our disconnection from nature. If we can develop a collective consciousness that respects nature, then there might be a future for generations to come. Because if not – What am I supposed to tell my daughter when she grows up? That we let corporate greed steal a habitable future? That there were once forests and oceans, and that they were full of life. Or will she only ever be able to experience this “life” on a tv screen, like many of us already do. We have a responsibility for nature and need to protect it.

Question: What can we be teaching our children, in both our education systems and as parents? How do we have to restructure our education system to address this issue of an increasing disconnect from nature and a lack of awareness due to the so-called ‘shifting baseline syndrome’?