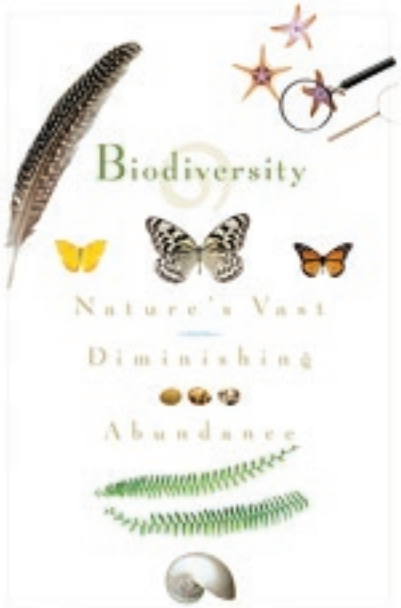

Our world is full of wonders
—strange and beautiful almost beyond
our comprehension.

Wherever they are undisturbed, plants and animals, microbes, bacteria, and fungi fill every conceivable niche on the surface of the earth, from mountain peaks to ocean depths, from lush steamy tropics to barren icy poles.

The astonishing richness of their variety extends from the genes within species to the species themselves to the communities and ecosystems in which they live.

Endangered Habitats

Diversity is everywhere. And it is quickly disappearing. An incalculable number of species are already gone forever and a large percentage of the rest are threatened with extinction. Unless we humans change the way we treat the earth, from a quarter to a half of the species still living could become extinct by the end of this century. Little more than one of our kilometers — More [illegible] extinctions have occurred — at least five times

below to the history of the world.

Unless we humans change the way we treat the earth, from a quarter to a half of the species still living could become extinct by the end of this century. Little more than one of our kilometers — More [illegible]

Why Should We Care?

Below the discovery of [illegible] years ago, human beings lived like other species within the ecosystems that sustained them. When they moved on to other places, or [illegible] they learned all they could about the new ecosystem, how it worked and what it might offer them. Since then, they have learned more, they have found ways around them, they understood [illegible] and the connections between the health of the environment [illegible] And and there was well being.

How many more species are hidden in rainforests we do not yet know about? Many may become extinct before we have a chance to find them.

What Can Be Done?

Even though species are disappearing fast, all is not lost. In every part of the world, governments, organizations, and individuals are hard at work trying to save as many of the remaining species as they can.

One important way of conserving plant species is to [illegible] them from their native habitat or agricultural setting and protect them in botanical gardens, arboretums, and gene banks. [illegible] the International Board for Plant Genetic Resources [illegible]

In every part of the world, governments, organizations, and individuals are hard at work trying to save as many of the remaining species as they can.

Coral Reefs

Coral reefs are explosions of biodiversity, filled with a stunning variety of species. Although reefs occupy less than one percent of the area of the oceans, they are home to more than twenty-five percent of all marine species—hundreds of thousands of them, less than a tenth of which have been identified and described. [illegible] Some coral reefs are small, but some are [illegible] the largest structures made by any animal on earth. The largest of all, the Great Barrier Reef, [illegible] all the oceans

Although reefs may seem to be underwater, coral polyps are [illegible] extremely sensitive to the chemistry of the water around them.

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The Rain Forest

Tropical rain forests are teeming with an uncountable host of plants, animals, birds, insects, bacteria, and fungi that have assumed splendidly diverse and beautiful shapes and forms. Although rain forests make up only seven percent of the earth's surface, they contain at least half of all the earth's species. A single tree in a rain forest in Brazil may be home to several hundred species of beetles, forty species of ants, and fifty or more species of orchids and other epiphytes. These forests cover

The Importance of Wetlands

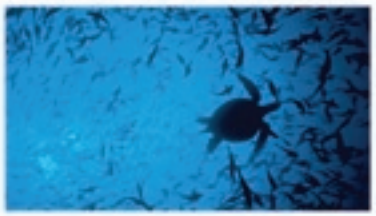
Wetlands are found in every part of the world and in every type of climate. Covering about six percent of the earth's land surface, they range from large estuaries and lagoons to tiny mountain pools and bubbling springs. These waters can be either still or flowing, fresh or brackish. They include coastal tidelands (freshwater marshes, large fens, floodplains, and swamps. And they are among the most important and productive ecosystems on earth. In coastal

The Arctic

Many people think of the Arctic as a vast empty wasteland, frozen and forbidding. The truth is quite different. Many Arctic plants and animals, in fact, are abundant in the extreme. A great variety of mammals, including polar bears, foxes, lemmings, two kinds of caribou, musk oxen, and two kinds of reindeer, live here year-round. And enormous swarms of plankton fill the Arctic seas. The total diversity of life is not as great as in warmer climates, but the species that do

Ocean Fisheries

The oceans that cover three-quarters of the globe are absolutely vital to all life on earth. If any single system keeps the planet running, it is the oceans, which basically determine weather patterns through their interaction with the atmosphere. They also help keep us breathing, since plankton floating near the surface of the ocean produce a large percentage of the new oxygen released into the atmosphere every day. Even though it is all



The Web of Life

All life on earth is connected. Every species depends on — and could not live long without — other species in its ecosystem. No ecosystem is able to exist on its own. Each is tied inextricably to all the other ecosystems in the region of the world. And all the regions themselves come together to form the biosphere — the thin layer of air, soil, and water that is home to the entire, interwoven, astoundingly diverse web of life.

Some ecosystems in the natural world are strongly

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