

EcoLogic

The Green Hornet on Population

I guess any discussion about the environment and ecology really wouldn't be complete without considering the impact of the population. In fact if we weren't so prolific, man's influence on the planet wouldn't necessarily even be a consideration.

The subject of population, specifically human population, touches on theology, ecology, morals, politics and all sorts of other sensitive matter. Any discussion of constraints on population can conjure up images of fascism, eugenics and human rights violations. It is counter to certain religious doctrine and can be very divisive. Yet our increasingly clever technology is pushing the envelope further, and faster, and coming to grips with its effects may happen sooner than later.

We are in competition with other species but we're smarter so we win out, at least that's been the case so far. One of two things I remember from my bouts with calculus is the number 'e'; actually 'e' seems more like a letter but apparently it's a number too. I remember that it could be used in forecasting population growth and that it is exponential and the value increases very rapidly; beyond that 'e' just comes at the end of a lot of words making the vowel in the middle long.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the human population was 1 billion; in the 1980's it was five billion and now we are well over six billion with some projections of over nine billion by the year 2050; where will it end? Some people think that nine billion is the limit of what the earth can maintain and others think it can go to 12 billion and beyond. One thing is for sure, and that is that there absolutely is a limit.

The limit will most likely evidence itself in the form of our manufactured waste suffocating us and, on the other end, not being able to grow/produce enough food to sustain the planet's human inhabitants. History has proven that wars are fought and cultures die out because of resource scarcity. Migration is also a method of coping with the results of depleting the resources in a given area but we don't have that many other places to go; in fact I think our options are just one at this particular point in time.

So I guess we'd better continue to recycle and drive less; maybe \$4/gallon gas might be a good topic next time. If you'd like to see the US and world populations in action try this link:

<http://www.census.gov/main/www/popclock.html>