



ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES

A look at the impact of human development on the health and viability of Nature.

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Bringing Life to Learning

EXTINCTION CRISIS

We are currently amidst the Sixth Wave of Extinction to sweep our planet. Unlike the five

previous mass extinctions in geological history, (the Ordovician, Devonian, Permian, Triassic and Cretaceous Periods) the current extinction

phenomenon is due largely to the

Many scientists and geologists are

geological era on earth from the

order to highlight the substantial

having on the earth, living

The current species extinction

natural rate by 1000 times.²¹ Forty

of extinction, and almost half of

are threatened.²² One in every four mammals and one in every eight birds is facing a high risk of extinction in the near future.²³ Water

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dwellers and shoreline inhabitants face serious threats to survival from the intrusion of the human world into their habitats.



activities of one species—ours.

arguing for renaming the current

Holocene to the Anthropocene in

impact human beings are currently

creatures, and natural systems.

rate is estimated to exceed the

percent of amphibians are at risk

all tortoises and freshwater turtles

As author Craig Childs puts it: “Numbers of lost and declining

species are rapidly rising with no end in sight.”²⁴ Sandra Steingraber

describes the process of creating a polar bear Halloween costume

for her young son and comments on the strangeness of creating a

costume of such an iconic species which may outlast the species

itself. “As I pinned the fabric together, I wondered if his costume

would outlast the species. It was more than possible. It was likely.

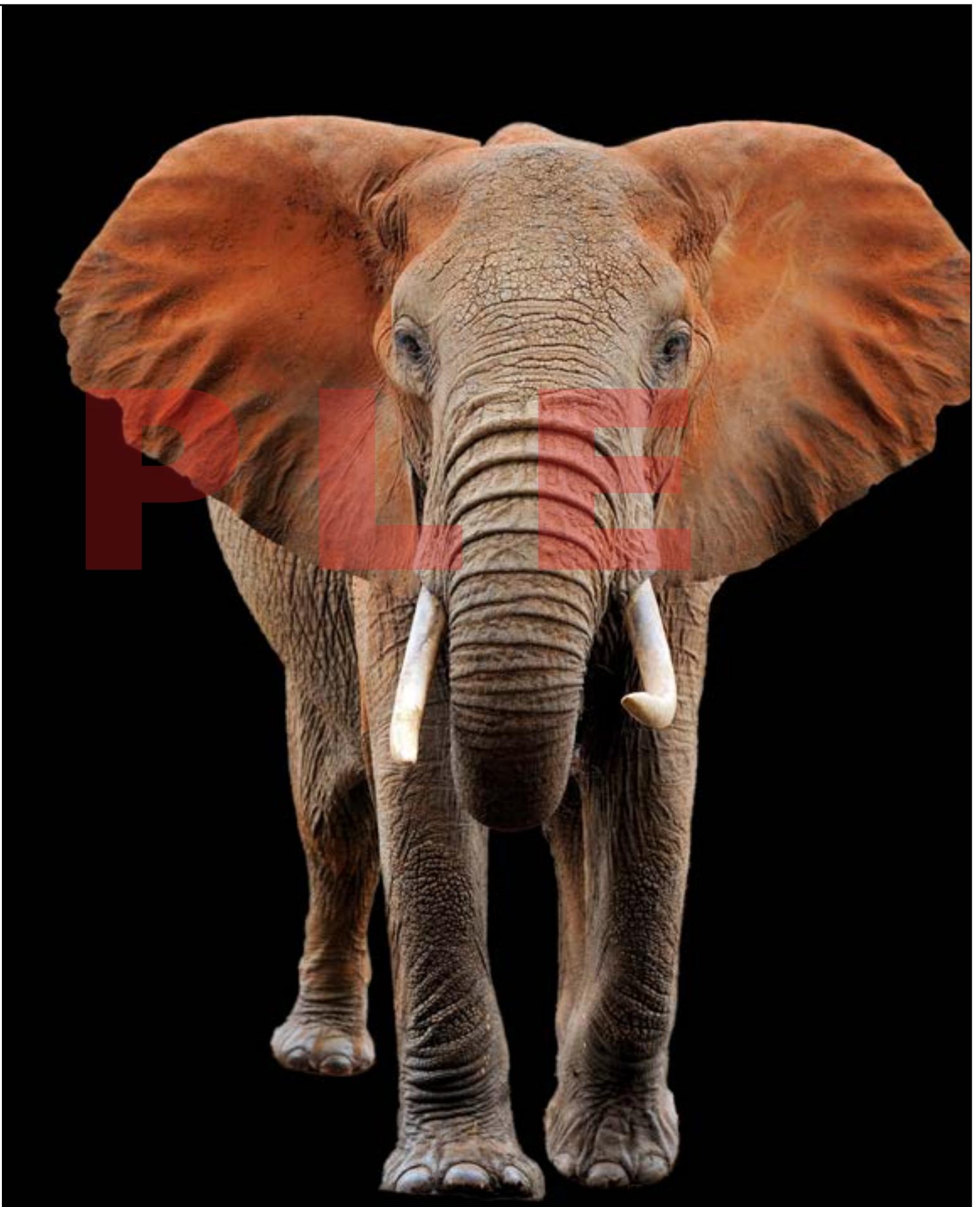
And I wondered if any other mother of any other generation before

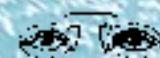
mine had entertained such thoughts. It was unlikely²⁵ . . . (A)nimal

costumes, whose real-life correspondents have been wiped

from the Earth may well become commonplace.”²⁶

Link to CNN slide show on the Extinction Crisis 





READING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Listen to the “About Angels XI” poem by Homero Aridjis on the next page.
2. Read: “The Buffalo Go” on the following page.
3. Read: “Polar Bears’ Path to Decline,” *New York Times*, Dec. 18, 2016
4. Read: Elizabeth Kolbert, “What We Lose When Animals Go Extinct,” *National Geographic*, October 2019

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WRITING EXERCISE #5

Describe your thoughts about and reactions to the reading assignments in this section. Write 2-4 paragraphs.

Write about the Sixth Wave of Extinction and what you think and feel about it. Does it concern you to see the Holocene Era transform into the Anthropocene? Why or why not? Discuss what life would be like without other mammals, birds, amphibians, or other life forms to share it with. Write 2-4 paragraphs.



[Link to view "A Journey Through A Monarch's Life Cycle"](#) ↗

[Listen to Homero Aridjis read his poem *About Angels XI*.](#) ↗

The Buffalo Go, A Kiowa Story

A long long time ago before the white people arrived on Turtle Island, the Kiowa and the buffalo were family. The Kiowa loved the buffalo, and the buffalo loved the Kiowa.

Everything the Kiowa used in their daily lives came from the buffalo—their tipis, their dishes, their clothes, their moccasins, their food, everything. Even their sacred medicine came from the buffalo.

Most of all, the buffalo were the religion of the Kiowa. The buffalo represented all that was sacred, all that was holy to the people.

The people lived in perfect harmony with the buffalo. They treated each other with great respect, praying and talking to them, asking them for permission to let them take what they needed to survive, never taking more than what was needed.

There was perfect balance between the Kiowa and the buffalo. When the people ate the buffalo they became part buffalo, and the buffalo became part human. It was a circle of life, buffalo and human circling all through time in a sacred balance.

Then the white people arrived and built railroads and cleared land for their farms and cattle. But the buffalo helped the Kiowa, and at first the buffalo withstood the white people. They were strong and many. The white people killed them, but the buffalo kept coming. They smashed the white people's gardens and tore up the railroads.

But the white people kept arriving, more and more of them, and their greed and ignorance swept them up, and they killed the buffalo. It was like a frenzy the white people taking, slaughtering the buffalo.

The white people sent shooters whose sole job was to shoot and kill the buffalo. Miles and miles stretched of dead buffalo bones and hides as tall as a man.

One morning a young Kiowa woman woke very early. She was one of those Kiowa still able to move freely on the land. She saw in a vision the last of the buffalo retreating into a green mountain the tribe knew well. The mountain opened up to them, and the last of the buffalo families, mothers and fathers and their calves retreated into it. There they live still today in a land unblemished by greed; a land full of life with ripe juicy plums and clear running streams.