

Environmental Ethics, Biocentrism and the Need for Avian Conservation

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This article addresses the issue of environmental ethics, and in particular the idea of biocentrism. The latter half discusses the importance of avian conservation. Attempt is not to build a coherent philosophical system, but rather to develop some of the central ideas of my recent research and provide the reader with new ideas for further research. The underlying concern of in this article is ethical. My sincere hope is to contribute to a better understanding of values connected to the natural environment by approaching the issue from various directions. I have elsewhere written more specifically on birds and environmental destruction in Japan (see Merviö 2001) and therefore in this article I focus on more general issues. The reason why this article uses birds as an example to illustrate the need for a radically different approach to nature and conservation, is that, in addition of simply being fascinating, birds are probably the only large animal group that is well known and closely studied in terms of their biology, behaviour, and unfortunately for some, their extinction processes.

It is also noteworthy that birds have a special role in many cultures and belief systems in the world. In many parts of the world the birds' ability to fly has been connected with a closeness to spirits of heaven. For instance, the feathers in the hats of Korean shamans symbolise similarities in the roles of shamans and birds (for birds and Korean shamanism, Covell 1986: 137–139). In fact, many peoples in the northern parts of Eurasia have a special cultural relationship with waterbirds. It is interesting to observe that in the vast area from Korea in the east to Finland in the west waterbirds play a prominent role in belief systems and folk art. In East Asia, the common myth about the “marital fidelity” of mandarin ducks has added different meanings to some waterbirds. In Finnish tradition, waterbirds have no less an important role than the origin of life on earth. In Kalevala the earth is created from the seven broken eggs of a bird called *sotka*, which most likely is the Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) (Kalevala 1999: 8-9, Vähämetsä 1993: 39). In modern Finnish, the Goldeneye is called *telkkä*, but many of its closest relatives have still *sotka* as part of their name (for instance, Tufted Duck = *tukkasotka*, Scaup = *lapasotka* and Pochard = *punasotka*). In addition, the waterbird motif is characteristic in early Finno-Ugric pottery and art testifying to the importance of waterbirds in these ancient cultures (Huurre 1998: 293, 300–302).

In some other cultural spheres birds have been primarily fancied for their aesthetic

value. The Japanese special relationship with the Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*; also known as the Japanese crane or the Manchurian crane) has much to do with its aesthetic beauty. However, even its beauty and ancient sacred position did not prevent it from becoming a prime target for hunting during the Meiji period. Due to hunting and habitat loss, by 1924 the population reached an all time low when there were less than 20 individuals surviving in the Kushiro marshes. However, after that conservation efforts have removed the immediate threat of extinction (see e.g. Yanagisawa 1989: 159-169, Brazil 1991: 117-119). In the United States the plight of the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) resembles that of the Red-crowned Crane. In Japan the Red-crowned Crane, Crested Ibis and to some degree the eagles can be regarded as “flagship species” of nature conservation. All are large birds with distinctive features (Cf. Maeda 1996: 74).

In Japan the interest of the general public has focused on the Red-crowned Crane although two other crane species have important wintering areas in Japan. The White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*) and Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) both come in thousands to winter near the city of Izumi in Kumamoto Prefecture, where they are provided with feeding and have been turned into a prime tourist attraction. However, the general public and many of Izumi’s crane tourists seem to regard these two species as somehow less fascinating than the Red-crowned Cranes. Sometimes a few Red-crowned Cranes join the other cranes on the small field crowded with cranes to the satisfaction of noisy tourists. Interestingly, some tourist literature depict the wrong cranes, the Red-crowned ones, apparently for their better commercial value. For the cranes, it is problematic that such large numbers (at the peak wintering period more than 10,000) are packed close to each other in one field, where diseases could easily spread possibly causing the extinction of both species.

There are several reasons why the cranes are fed next to the “Crane Centre” in such cramped conditions: 1) the field is relatively close to the old wintering grounds (some of which have been reclaimed for farming) and where farmers first provided land for feeding; 2) there are still worries among farmers that cranes cause crop damage and they aggressively protect their produce causing the death of several cranes each year; 3) birdwatchers and volunteers have already reached the limit of their resources in seeking to guarantee the smooth operation of feeding activities; and finally, 4) the cranes are seen by many as primarily a tourists attraction and many tourists simply want to see them all from the front window of the Crane Centre. Of course, the biggest obstacle in the protection of the White-naped Cranes and Hooded Cranes is the difficulty of getting the various governments of their migration route to cooperate in working out effective crane protection measures. Since these cranes are waiting for the Japanese, Russian, South Korean and North Korean authorities to come up with a common plan, it may take some time before minds can be set at ease.

It is clear that traditional cultural values have been unable to protect nature from modern forms of exploitation. However, people give meanings to everything on the basis of their “common history” with their environment, including birds. Worldviews

and ideologies of people tend to have wide differences; attitudes toward the environment is one area, where individual ideological differences are manifest in a dramatic manner. The effects of environmental destruction have quick and visible consequences for avian fauna, it is no wonder that some of the most sensitive members of the human have awakened to the reality of natural destruction having observed the effects on bird populations.

In short, birds provide humans with one of the best chances to understand the multitude of environmental changes that our planet is experiencing. Some of earliest conservation efforts have been related to bird. Moreover, as can be seen with the Red-crowned Crane, relatively modest efforts can sometimes save a whole animal species or subspecies. Furthermore, the birds are a group of animals that have been the target for a many promising international conservation initiatives, some of which may result in a model for more comprehensive international conservation plans and regulations. The BirdLife International's Important Bird Area (IBA) program has been able to set up a widely accepted scholarly global standard and a set of objective criteria which can be applied to local conditions. The BirdLife International has successfully identified and provided documentation on over 20,000 IBAs worldwide. As Queen Noor says in the foreword of the Important Bird Areas in Europe, the beauty of the IBA program is in its simplicity (Important Bird Areas in Europe , 2000.) Even more important, is that in face of firm scholarly data, politicians have begun to a show willingness to recognize the IBAs and give them their proper place in the environmental policy decision-making process. The so-called Bird Directive of the European Union is largely dependent on the IBA program. One hope that the IBAs will be given a similar significance in other political systems. It may be possible that scientific data and clear ideas would have a better chance becoming accepted, in countries where environmental issues have not been raised to the level of "high politics."

Although I remain moderately optimistic that humans can learn from their past mistakes and adopt less destructive approaches to nature, I am afraid that changes in attitudes and behavior are so slow that much of the nature, which is still with us will be lost in the next few decades. From a scientific point of view, it is clear that in a limited space, such as the earth, there can be only limited growth and that it is simple madness to test those limits. Current economic and political systems have been largely unable to cope with the worsening of environmental problems and, judging from social discourse in industrialised countries such as Japan, there is no real sense of environmental crisis.

Biocentrism

In the field of environmental politics, reform has often been criticized as being primarily concerned with human well-being. Some authors prefer to use the distinction between "shallow ecology" and "deep ecology" to describe the difference between the anthropocentric approach of reform environmentalism and a "biocentric" approach, which is motivated by a concern for nature in its own right. These concepts

have become widely used in ecological literature since the 1970s. Most often the credit for these concepts is given to Arne Næss, a Norwegian philosopher and mountaineer (see e.g. Sudō 1998: 152, Haila & Levins 1992: 303 and Nash 1989: 146-149). Moreover, the biocentric approach leads one to think in terms of the interrelatedness of all parts of the universe; ecosystems where even small changes in one area may have substantial consequences elsewhere. Furthermore, the complex nature of ecosystems, and in the end the whole universe, should make one humble in trying to control the environment (Cf. Wissenburg 1998: 49–51, where he analyses the holism and monism of deep ecology movement).

Whatever we wish to call the various attempts to challenge the anthropocentric approaches to politics, these forms of political thought open whole new horizons and represent one of the clearest examples of paradigmatic shifts in contemporary political and social thinking. Sometimes those who have analysed the foundations of “deep ecology” are keen to point out that these forms of thought are based on the realisation that all things in the biosphere or all living things in the universe have an equal right to live and seek their self-realization. Furthermore, it may follow that going beyond anthropocentric thinking can itself be seen as a form of spiritual growth or emancipation of suppressed potential. Humans should be able to discover their true self as part of the biosphere and universe. In some ways that realisation may be similar in its nature to the other emancipation processes that human societies have experienced (Cf. Macdonald 1991: 337–38). Moreover, one can argue that the balanced and peaceful co-existence of humans with their environment is possible and that there is a strong moral and practical argument in favor of making co-existence (*kyōsei*) a high priority.

It may also be argued that in recent decades ecological thought has already had a major impact on social theory. In critical social sciences it is difficult to avoid giving the environment its proper share. As a result, one can see a certain bridging of the gap between “society” and “nature.” On the other hand, it follows that there must be far closer interaction between the social and natural sciences. Of course, this is exactly what is taking place in many university departments that have in recent decades have promoted environmental politics and other environmental studies. In many cases the environmental content is from the beginning mixed with social content. On the other hand most biologists are proud to see their role as providers of basic knowledge and technical judgements but are reluctant to make open value judgements and get involved in practical environmental policy formulation. For many social scientists it is difficult to understand why natural scientists have a strong tendency to equate opinions and value judgements with compromised science. It does not help if scientists overstate environmental problems in order to wake the political elite and public opinion, but it is not too much to ask that researchers try to clarify what the significance of their findings and identify value judgements. Trying to hide one’s ideology may actually interfere with the true intentions of many researchers. What is needed instead of strong disciplinary defense mechanisms is close cooperation between scientists

from different disciplines and policy makers, in the implementation of actual environmental policy. (Cf. James 1998: 15–16).

Of course, one should not equate environmental studies with a “biocentric” approach since many scientists working in this field have openly anthropocentric and human-prudential concerns. However, I am ready to interpret rapid advances in environmental studies as prone to contribute to more biocentric worldviews as well as to challenge established practices in both the natural and social sciences. Within environmental studies, there is tendency that research results cumulate and provide a firm basis for coherent explanations for phenomena which have previously been thought to be almost beyond the reach of “exact” science.

Furthermore, there are theoretical approaches that are based on a new type of evaluation of human co-existence with the rest of the biosphere. For instance, “ecofeminists” must be credited for their contribution show ways to integrate biologically based life sciences with the social sciences (for an introduction to ecofeminism, see e.g. Jackson 1994, Dobson 1992: 186–197 and Barry 1999: 107–126). Without taking a position on whether women are habitually and “by nature” closer to nature than men, I find it useful to study gender-based differences in the ways that societies and social practices relate to nature. Furthermore, women and nature are intimately linked and therefore it is only natural to analyse their domination and liberation together.

There are many researchers who have dismissed as irrational all non-instrumentalist views of nature or valuation of the natural environment (not even to mention gender-blind researchers). For instance, Jürgen Habermas sees that the only alternative to a instrumental-technical attitude to nature is “a dangerous strategy of ‘re-enchanting’ nature via an appeal to some mystical or spiritual worldview” (cited in Barry 1999: 88–90). Habermas is a good example of a scholar who has created a sophisticated social theory which distinguishes in a dogmatic manner the natural and social sciences and consequently has problems in dealing with environmental ethics. The abhorrence of anything “mystical” or “spiritual” says much about the deep sense of “otherness” that these scholars feel in their relation with nature. Of course, we should not blame scholars like Habermas for feeling more at home with other people and scholars than with the rest of biosphere, but it is unfair for them to defend their anthropocentrism by dismissing other approaches as inherently irrational and unscientific. If Habermas knew more about the communication of other species he would probably be less impressed with human communication and the collective rationality of human societies.

The idea of seeking meanings from a possible symbiosis between humans and nature is directly opposed to the whole idea of the modern concept of ecosystem that was first created to free scientific discussion from anthropomorphic and romantic connotations. The concept of ecosystem was (in its modern form) introduced by the British ecologist Arthur G. Tansley to describe how energy and chemical particles flow in nature according to the laws of physics (Rytövuori-Apunen 1995: 179). Any discussion about a “sound” or “healthy” ecosystem, or about “sustainability” in gen-

eral, is bound to make value-judgements about the morality of the politics or management of that particular ecosystem or environment (Cf. *Ibid*: 178–88). It is no wonder that many people who have adopted a worldview based on modern biology have serious problems in accepting some views of “deep ecology.” Of course, another way to challenge anthropocentric conceptions of the world is to reduce even people into a flow of chemical particles.

Analysing this issue from modern biology can make the whole question of the distinct value of human species obsolete. As anyone who believes in the evolution of species knows, ‘species’ is only one category, or class, with its boundary lines being arbitrarily drawn by natural scientists (Cf. Rolston 1995: 63–66). Already Darwin wrote in his *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, “I look at the term species, as one arbitrarily given for the sake of convenience to a set of individuals closely resembling each other” (Darwin 1968: 108). Among natural scientists there is a constant debate over which populations constitute a ‘species’ or ‘subspecies’ and which characteristics should be regarded as defining. In short, it is just a group of scholars who on basis of their own preunderstanding of the world try to arrive at a common understanding as to what is “meaningful” in other species. For instance, in the case of birds, ‘subspecies’ are simply defined on the basis of the most conspicuous differences in appearance and territorial distribution. That means that, for instance, the differences in singing patterns are often almost neglected when it comes to understanding speciating processes and differences between birds.

The consequences of this thought are numerous and most important for our understanding of life. First of all, we may not have as much in common with all the other people and as little in common with other animals as some of us would like to believe — since human “species” is also subject to the constant process of further speciating. Of course, humans (can be seen to) form just one population which is, indeed, astonishingly homogeneous in terms of DNA. However, if we use the common DNA as the marker of humanness, we should, at least, treat chimpanzees as our fellow humans. It is also common among birds that two individuals representing two different species share more than 99% of their DNA. Furthermore, all living creatures on this planet share the same DNA code (indicated by four different letters: G, A, T and C that stand for the chemical compounds discovered by Watson and Crick to form DNA) as the result of having common ancestry, the most distant relationship going back some 4 milliard years, to the beginning of life. Science has discovered that similar sets of genes exist in animals that are different from each other. For instance, so-called Hox genes act as a kind of master switch for activating other genes can be found in both mouse and fruit fly embryos (as well as in countless other species). Mutations in these particular genes cause the appearance of structures in the wrong places, such as leg-like structures to appear on the head, in place of antennae. What this must mean is that the common ancestor of flies, mammals, and segmented worms, and indeed of all bilaterally symmetrical animals, already possessed, some 500 million years ago, a series of Hox genes, acting in different regions of the body

from head to tail, and controlling the development of appropriate structures in these regions, and that these genes have been conserved ever since. The interesting part is that although the Hox signalling system has been conserved, there is little or nothing in common between the structures that it elicits in different groups. There is nothing in humans or earthworms, corresponding to the thorax of insects, with its two pairs of wings and six legs — yet we all are equipped with the same signalling system. The next step that scientists have taken has been to transfer genes between species; for example, between mice and fruit flies (Smith and Szathmáry 1999: 120–122). Mutations take place all the time and, for instance, about one tenth of the 10,000 bird species have been observed to produce hybrids in nature. As for the plants and especially flowers, new species can be born in one day and, consequently, a large number of plants are products of hybridisation of two species. Most flowers are quite indiscriminately collecting pollen from air and it is no wonder that flowers are subject to very rapid forces of evolution.

Some of the most interesting biological research in recent days has to do with study of DNA differences and the ongoing evolution in small (and larger) populations. Much of basic ornithological research already deals with biochemical genetics; especially fruitful has been comparisons of the compositions of a small circular DNA molecule (mtDNA) found in the mitochondria of the cytoplasm. However, construction of the phylogeny based on biological and morphological characters is just the first step towards understanding the evolution of birds (and other animals). Evolution, after all, does not usually take place in a laboratory. The next step is to map all other information ranging from evolutionary trends in behavior, ecology and biogeography (for bird systematics and the genetic divergence and birds, see Gill 1999: 45–61). It is already possible to do all this with various bird populations, usually with an isolated and small enough geographical distribution to arrive at accurate results that show exactly how evolution takes place on an individual level and in a wider bird population. One good example is the work of Peter and Rosemary Grant on finches in the Galápagos Islands, the same birds that helped Darwin devise with his theory of evolution (Grant 1986). Birds are, in fact, ideal subjects for the study of evolution and adaptation to various natural conditions. Birds are also, in general, sensitive indicators of environmental change; due to migration, birds more than most other animals help people to understand the global nature of environmental problems (Cf. Gill 1999: xxvi–xxvii). The issues of environmental change are, of course, closely related with those of evolution and adaptation. Even in such (nominally) protected places of great biodiversity as the Galápagos Islands, human impact plays an increasing role on the environment.

I find it interesting that some of the very basic ideas of Darwinism and biology are yet to fully permeate the mainstream of social sciences. It seems that the bad reputation of the “Social Darwinists” of the early 20th century has served to turn many sensible social scientists away from Darwinism and basic natural sciences. As for the Social Darwinists, they took a few concepts from Darwin’s writings, such as the con-

cept of the survival of the fittest and gave them simplistic and distorted meanings. Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), in particular, confused his ideas of class, race and social change with biological evolution. As for the “survivalist” thesis, in real life there are endless individual and species-specific survival strategies — even if given a central role in the quest for survival. There is no compelling biological evidence to support that an inclination to violent behavior or large body would actually be the key of success in the struggle of survival. Instead, ethological studies can be used to demonstrate the benefits of co-operation and community. Furthermore, a better understanding of the vast potential that is manifest in the biodiversity of DNA should make people respect the different forms of life instead of seeing them in terms of fighting against each other as individuals or species. For the Social Darwinists, life was like the Olympic games where humans won all the races by disqualifying all other participants and after that all humans continued their futile exercise to find out who are the best people.

By referring to genetic differences among people and other living things, I am certainly not advocating any form of social inequality or creating unscientific boundaries such as race between people. Quite the contrary, ‘race’ is just one more example of how easily people fall into thinking in terms of meaningless categories. However, social scientist often seem to be unaware that as much as ‘race’ as a concept is socially constructed non-sense, ‘species’ also should be thrown into the dustbin of history. As for history, ignoring the forces of natural selection is the most ahistorical approach that a living being can select.

Another consequence of going beyond the species-specific worldview is that instead of faceless ‘species,’ we are left with living individuals that represent biolines that go back in history for as long as we regard life or alternatively materia to have existed. These biolines are also the only ones that keep terrestrial life going on in the form that we know it. The consciousness of the centrality of biolines for the continuation of life is an essential part of a biocentric worldview. One practical consequences of this is that individual animals (living things) and their biolines have rights rather than “species” if there is such a thing as a “right” in this world. This certainly makes one re-evaluate the underlying idea of biodiversity and the concept of “right.” Of course, it makes sense to provide maximum possible protection to “species” if it helps to protect life. The more or less commonly accepted classification of species can also serve as a rough guide for measuring biodiversity and seeking support for environmental protection and conservation. However, for scientists and for environmental ethics, the questions are far more difficult: is there anything that makes the humans so special? Who are the humans to judge the value of everything else in the universe? Humans do possess one property that sets them apart from the rest: their capability to clearly see the results of their actions. However, if we judge the humans on the basis of what they have actually done to each other and to the others, their track record is not too good. It is not enough if there are some people who worry about consequences if many others behave as if there were no tomorrow. In particular, the *hubris* of the

modern world system and its underlying ideological foundation serves only to point out that people do not really understand their place in the world. The ancient Greeks knew that *nemesis* is the fate of such humans. I am not qualified to say much about extraterrestrial life within this universum or its theoretically possible brothers and sisters and therefore it is wise to leave open the possibility of other forms of life. Encounter with extraterrestrial life most likely will require us to revise our understanding of natural selection among other things.

Coming back to earth, from the emancipatory perspective it is understandable that many ecologists are prone to seek political allies from those who are primarily concerned with inequitable relationships within the human world. However, it may not always be easy to harmonise the ideas of “social justice” with those of “natural justice,” since we are dealing with two different philosophical approaches that do not share much in common. Any kind of “natural justice” must be based on the idea that the existing humans must assume responsibility for future humans and other species, and “represent” their rights and potential choices. Current political practices do not take into consideration such an understanding of human responsibilities or obligations. As for issues of rights and interests of animals, it has become one of the key issues of environmental ethics. In the case of animate beings it is easy to argue for animal rights, not on the basis that we like animals but because we are animals. Of course, it does not follow that animals must have every right that human being have. For instance, it would be almost impossible to count the votes if the pigs were required to vote in the State of Florida. Some rights apparently make only the humans happy. However, people should understand enough how it feels to be an animal to provide other animals with certain basic rights, the most of important of them, of course, being a right to live. However, in the case of inanimate beings it is more difficult to have clear answers. However, there is a point in claiming that in inanimate nature (such as trees and other plants) there is an inherent goodness as their purpose of supporting other forms of life. Inanimate nature may serve various purposes without being directly useful for human purposes. Every living organism has its place in the vast unity of life and people who are concerned about human rights should also try to find out what are the rights of animate and inanimate parts of non-human nature (Cf. Regan 1982: 165–182).

However, from the point of view of politics the main issue often seems to be how to construct an anti-anthropocentric ideology and put it into practice. As for popular alternatives of politics and political theory, the traditional left and the right have their characteristic shortcomings, both being preoccupied with short-term economic fortunes and piecemeal solutions to problems that require more holistic solutions. Other political forces, such as the Greens, still have a long way to organize as a political force that can promise a clear change to existing political cultures. People have individual interests and humanity has its own interests. In addition, people should make an effort to reach and maintain a sustainable and just balance with the rest of the world — for our own sake and for the recognition of the moral and other significance of the

rest of the world. Furthermore, values of a community or a nation are not an aggregate of individual values and, indeed, the whole idea of collective interests becomes fuzzy when we start to analyze the real interests of each human and non-human individual. Moreover, it is not only values that are constantly being reinterpreted but also entire human cultures. Human societies are masters in creating systems to manipulate and indoctrinate their members. It is often difficult to know how best to protect the interests of future generations when the present generations are so blind to their true interests and future generations could easily be trained to value other things (Cf. Johnson 1991: 245–247, 279–287).

Johnson takes up the case of whether there is good reason to protect Ayer's Rock if some people want to turn it into road gravel. Basically his answer is that some people are able to find value for its own sake in something like Ayer's Rock. Those people are better off in terms of their own life than those who cannot do the same. Johnson also points out that people can be very sensitive to some moral, aesthetic or environmental values while being amazingly insensitive to others. A good example of this is provided by Nazi concentration camp officials who in many cases were devoted to the beauty of classical music (Johnson 1991: 279–287). A great deal is written about Adolf Hitler's fondness for animals, particularly dogs. Some attribute his vegetarianism to his inability to tolerate the thought of animals being slaughtered for human consumption (<http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/h/hitler-adolf/oss-papers/text/oss-profile-02.html>). Indeed, the world is full of moral, environmental, aesthetic and other values and people who are amazingly insensitive to the values and interests of other humans and non-humans. Leading full and balanced lives that would not cause great harm to other living things would require us first to learn from other people and then to do our best to seek a better balance with everything. On top of that, it is important to notice that rocks, birds and people are all different and it would be waste of time to apply ideas to all of them. With the question of turning Ayer's Rock into road gravel, my position is that I do not see any reason to do that and that the question is (and should be seen as) totally unrelated to the issue of deliberately causing the death of living things.

It is easy to criticise the Nazis for their double standards, but when it comes to the environment it still seems that most people in all parts of world fail to see that their personal environmentally dubious choices have a real and political impact. Many persons continue to eat meat and dairy products produced by an industry that has little or no concern for the well-being of the animals involved. An average meat-eater is annually easily directly responsible for the death and treatment of hundreds of animals (for statistics, see Tuomivaara & Purjonen 1998: 95).

In Asia, new prosperity has contributed to larger meat consumption. This has very wide ecological consequences since increased consumption tends to be away from more ecologically sound alternatives. Meat production has most negative consequences for the quality of water and wastes much of the food resources in those countries where there is a scarcity of food (since it would be much more effective to pro-

duce vegetables and grain than animal feed). In East Asia quite radical changes have taken place in the diet of humans in recent decades, but discussion about the ethical consequences of these changes is largely missing. From 1965 to 1995, Japan saw annual meat consumption rise from 6.4 kg to 30.7 kg per inhabitant, whereas 11.4 kg is pork, 11.0 kg poultry and 8.3 kg beef. The meat consumption in Japan used to be relatively small with around 2 kg per inhabitant and much of that was acquired by whaling in the first part of the 20th century. In the years immediately following World War II (1947-1949) the consumption of whale meat was about 45% of the total meat consumption in Japan after which it remained at about 30% in much of the 1950s (<http://www.jfa.maff.go.jp/rerays/12.01.26.2.2.e.html> and http://www.upstarts.net.au/site/non_commercial/whales/whalecon/whalecon_main2.html).

Japanese meat consumption is still far less than in most parts of the world with the most excessive behavior recorded for Danes at more than 70 kg of pork per inhabitant and for Argentines of more than 70 kg of beef per inhabitant. The Chinese pork consumption in the 1990s at 30 kg per inhabitant is almost identical with the United States (which has a significantly smaller population). The South Koreans ate some 20 kg of pork per inhabitant in the 1990s. As for the beef the tables are turned in East Asia and quite interestingly the Japanese in the 1990s ranked first with consumption around 12 kg per capita; the South Korean consumption was of 9-10 kg and Chinese consumption of 3-4 kg per capita. The Taiwanese beef consumption was lowest at the 3-4 kg. level. In terms of world beef consumption the most significant consumers are the Americans, who with their annual 45 kg have created a truly global market for beef. In Europe the heaviest beefeaters are the French with some 27 kg in 1999. However, the new information about the BSE is most likely to make all Europeans think twice about beef consumption (<http://www.mhr-viandes.com/en/docu/docu/d0000359.htm>, [d0000358.htm](http://www.mhr-viandes.com/en/docu/docu/d0000358.htm) and [d0000217.htm](http://www.mhr-viandes.com/en/docu/docu/d0000217.htm)). Of course, there are no easy solutions to the problems of food security in the world. However, for many people the only real contact with animals seems to take place on their plates. Therefore it is only natural to ask people to think about the ethical basis of their food choices.

Most Green political movements and parties have challenged the tenets of anthropocentric approaches to politics and tried to develop their own solutions to reorganise modern societies, economies and politics. However, the most successful of the green parties, most notably the German Greens, have been pushing a platform that seems to be primarily based on reform environmentalism, pacifism and social reformism. One cannot be entirely convinced of the sincerity of the convictions of the German Greens, either. Nonviolence was for many years one of the ideological fundamentals of the German Greens, but changed once they got into government. German armies are once again being sent abroad to fight for reasons largely unknown even to the Green cabinet ministers. Of course, any political party that is operating in an affluent industrial democracy has to adjust to the political realities and maximise its popular support and coalition prospects. However, if even the “successful” Greens seem to be unable to go beyond anthropocentrism or to defend their main values, it does not promise a bright

future for a quick political change in favour of non-anthropocentric or ecological politics. It still remains to be seen whether the German Greens will be more successful in their reform environmentalism now that they have a real chance to influence national decision-making. The eventual decision of German government to gradually abandon nuclear energy provides some hope and demonstrated that the Greens were, after all, able to achieve something. However, the final solution was a diluted compromise and there are even worries that future German governments could try to undo the reached compromise.

However, in some respects the existing Green Parties and movements have already been able to produce tangible results in their societies. Europe has already several countries where Greens are in government and it is noteworthy that Green Parties have also been quick to organise themselves in the Eastern European countries. In Eastern European countries the Greens have to fight against the massive onslaught of most exploitative forms of market capitalism and economic liberalism while the remnants of failed authoritarian socialism are still with them. However, it remains to be seen how significant a role the Greens will get in Eastern European societies.

If we wish to generalize about the role of Greens in democratic industrialised societies, we may come up with the idea that any politically successful Green Party seems to have to refrain from too radical criticism of industrialism and economic growth. In short, the road to power is paved with compromises and reformist political agendas that repeat many of the old anthropocentric virtues. Moreover, it may be true that even the most successful European Greens often think in terms of national politics and have a long way to go to reach the level of a truly global ecological view. In many non-European countries the whole concept of Green politics is still quite unclear or sounds too “foreign”. My experience from teaching environmental politics in Japan in several universities is that only a small minority of students have ever heard about the existence of Green political parties. That, of course, says a lot about Japanese media and general awareness of politics in other countries. If situation is so bad in Japan, a country, which has one of the most sophisticated information networks on earth and boasts one of the most literate populations, one can not expect that Green ideology is about to conquer the whole world anytime soon.

The Need for Avian Conservation

The expanding human populations and the global processes of modernization of human societies in all parts of the world have caused widespread changes for animal habitats and animal populations. The environmental degradation has reached the degree that we can say without any doubt that all habitats have already been affected (to varying degrees). The birds can be found in all parts of the world, already by the simple reason that most of them are airborne and a good number of them being capable of reaching faraway places. The birds also play an important role in many ecosystems and as such they usually respond quickly to changes in habitat. In addition, birds tend to be quite easy to spot, numerous enough and bird species are relatively easy to

recognise, which all have helped the birds becoming widely studied and observed among humans. It is no wonder that some of the earliest warnings about the ongoing environmental destruction were related to observations about birds. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* of 1962 analysed the effects of insecticides and pesticides on songbird populations throughout the United States, but the book has often been given credited with warming the public opinion in the United States to the cause of environmental production and starting or at least greatly contributing to a process where environmental legislation was gradually introduced (Carson 1994).

When it comes to threats that birds are facing, habitat destruction is the greatest of all. For birds, such phenomena as overhunting, pesticides, pollution, increased UV-B, global warming, salinisation, introduced predators, competitors, parasites, diseases and fragmentation of populations can all prove to be fatal (Cf. Fleischer 1998: 29). It is relatively easy to show some declining bird populations where any of the factors listed above has played a major role. Of course, when it comes to the environmental destruction we are almost always dealing with a combination of various detrimental factors. The wildlife conservation efforts are always faced with the fact that it is much easier to protect threatened species before they have reached low population densities and low overall numbers (Cf. Squires, Hayward and Gore 1998: 173). It is, of course, common sense that bringing species back to life from the brink of extinction is a most difficult task to do. However, that is exactly what a good number of conservation efforts are trying to accomplish, sometimes with remarkable successes. At the same time the habitat destruction continues elsewhere and makes all the time more species vulnerable and threatened — and behind the species there are always the individuals representing their irreplaceable and ancient life-lines.

One solution is, the habitat conservation. In most countries the biggest immediate threat to the natural habitats is the rural land-use policy. The modernization efforts have in most countries been accompanied with wide-scale intensification of farming and forestry. This intensification still continues although in most industrialised countries its most visible end-products are the enormous food surpluses and wide-scale soil erosion and pollution of water resources. In fact the logic of the market demands intensification in the use of natural resources. It is often small short-term gains in productivity that have devastating long-term ecological consequences. An effective environmental policy would most likely require a combination of top-down measures to stop ecologically (most) unsound practices and bottom-up measures to provide assistance and various forms of support to farmers/ forest owners who improve their environments for wildlife (Cf. Newton 1998: 307–322). If there is an insufficient public sector support for more sustainable environmental practices it is often difficult or impossible for individual farmers or forest owners to change the whole philosophy of their work, even when they themselves recognize the need for a change. In many countries agricultural and forestry policies provide some of the worst examples of bureaucratic mismanagement done in the name of technocratic utilisation of natural resources. In fact, often bureaucrats are themselves among the first people to admit

that the agricultural policies of most industrialised countries have lacked any rationality and consistency. The habitat conservation in many cases involves the restoration of habitats, which have suffered from past policies. For instance, there are many good examples about the restoration of riparian environment and marshlands. In some cases the good examples seem to provide an impetus for change in other countries, which can be seen, for instance, in the slowly emerging trend in Japan to restore riparian environments (see e.g. Waley 2000: 199–217).

It is never too late to do something to stop the environmental destruction and heal some of the scars of past destruction. It seems that only with the recent advances in gene mapping people have become increasingly aware of the true scope of diversity of life around us. The issue of biodiversity is directly related to the essence of life and therefore the success of natural conservation and protection efforts are of utmost importance for all of us living things, birds and humans alike.

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