



Journey to Planet Earth

**Transcript for Episode 09:
State of the Planet's Wildlife**

Abridged Version

Journey to Planet Earth is produced by

**Screenscope, Inc.
4330 Yuma St, NW
Washington, DC 20016**

OPENING TEASE

Next on *Journey to Planet Earth*, are half of the world's wildlife species on the brink of extinction? Why are tigers and primates disappearing and is global warming a death sentence for Polar Bears? In Montana the grizzly makes its last stand while in the Everglades help is coming from an unlikely source. I'm Matt Damon, all this and much more as we investigate *The State of the Planet's Wildlife*.

UNDERWRITING CREDITS

Major funding for *Journey to Planet Earth* was provided by the National Science Foundation: "America's Investment In The Future." Additional funding was provided by the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations: "Dedicated To Strengthening America's Future Through Education," and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation: "To Help People Help Themselves."

(Gorilla Rainforest)

There's a place in the world where a lush rainforest, with open meadows, bamboo thickets and fresh running streams provides a safe haven for a group of endangered lowland gorillas. In this jungle sanctuary highly threatened animals survive without fear of being stalked by local poachers. It's a place where the affects of extreme poverty and civil unrest seem a world away. But what really makes this patch of wilderness so extraordinary is the fact that it's not located in a remote part of Africa, but rather here, in New York City.

(Zoo)

The Bronx Zoo's gorilla exhibit is one of the city's most popular attractions, providing visitors with a rare and intimate glimpse of the natural world. However realistic the experience appears, the jungle sounds are prerecorded, much of the food the gorillas eat comes from local markets, many of the trees are made of metal and epoxy, and the forest that lies behind these thick walls of protective glass is essentially a theatrical illusion.

Matt Damon (On-Camera)

What's not an illusion is the approaching reality that the zoos of the future may be forced to become urban sanctuaries for some of our planet's animals. For years scientists have been telling us that in this century as many as half of the world's wildlife species could become extinct.

(Wildlife montage)

Once, not so very long ago, the Earth was a place of great and unspoiled diversity – home to the rich tapestry and elegance of the natural world.

Once, not so very long ago, ours was a world with vast stretches of uninhabited and protected wilderness areas, where our polar regions supported an abundance of sea and land mammals and the oceans exhibited a healthy biodiversity.

Once, not so very long ago, our tropical rainforests supported an almost infinite variety of species, and the savannahs and grasslands of the world sustained great herds of wild and migrating animals.

But now scientific research indicates that something is terribly wrong with our environment - that much of our planet's wildlife is in danger of disappearing.

Robert Engelman

Population Action International

Every kind of species, every broad type of species, every broad type of habitat is under threat now in a way that wasn't true in all of past human history.

Lester Brown

Earth Policy Institute

We've kind of taken over the planet and there's just not much room left for many of the other species. So we're seeing these extraordinary drops in populations.

Steve Osofsky

Wildlife Conservation Society

Right now we know that at least 25% of the world's 4000 or so mammal species are threatened or endangered. Two out of three bird species are in decline worldwide.

THE SIXTH EXTINCTION...

(Fire and Asteroid)

Wildlife extinctions are not a new phenomena. During our planet's long geological history, on at least five occasions, catastrophic events wiped out vast numbers of species. The last great extinction happened sixty-five million years ago. That's when a giant asteroid crashed into the Earth, sending enough ash into the atmosphere to cool the planet and seal the fate of over seventy-five percent of the world's plants and animals. But today, the threat of what scientists call the sixth extinction, won't come from a volcanic eruption or outer space. The next extinction could be the result of human activities.

Elizabeth Bennett

Wildlife Conservation Society

We're one of perhaps a hundred million species on the planet, but we're the first species ever to have the control of the fates of other species in our hands.

Charles Kennel

Scripps Institute of Oceanography

There were always side effects from human activities, but they were always small compared to the scale of nature and now we are altering the surface of the Earth.

Bob Cook
Wildlife Conservation Society

And while there have been other extinction crises this will be a dramatic alteration that will fundamentally threaten the future of humanity because we are all linked. We are all part of this web of life.

Matt Damon (On-Camera)

How could we have allowed this to happen? How could many of our planet's animal species be on the brink of extinction? Perhaps it's best to begin with the link between population pressures and the loss of wildlife habitat.

(Shanghai)

Shanghai is a mega-city of steel and glass, the commercial and financial center of China, fueled by around the clock images, symbols of consumption, powered by a global economy. Even when the glow of neon finally gives way to the sobering reality of daylight, nothing slows the city's booming economy.

Lester Brown

We have been saying that the United States, with 5% of the world's people consumes a third to 40% of the world's resources. That was true for a long time. It is no longer true. It is no longer true because China has now overtaken the United States in the consumption of most basic resources. We look at the food economy grain and meat. And of all those commodities now China consumes more than the United States and that could create a serious problem for the world.

(Food market)

Shanghai's food markets overflow with fresh produce and once unimaginable luxuries like eggs, poultry, and meat. In fact, China accounts for more than one quarter of the world's consumption of meat. Simply put, 1.3 billion consumers can have a major impact on the world's economy.

(Cattle Grazing)

The windswept prairies of Northeastern China have sustained herders and nomadic horsemen for thousands of years. Normally they would stay in one location as long as there was enough grass and water for their animals. Then, as the grass and ponds became exhausted, they would move their herds to new pastures.

To exploit China's sudden and growing appetite for meat the herders increased their cattle, sheep and goats from 100 million head to over 400 million. But, there's not enough pasture to support this increase in livestock. Extreme over grazing has created a crisis. Without the protective cover of grass the herders can't keep up with the demand for meat.

(Duck farm)

This has forced the Chinese to increase their production of pork and poultry, requiring massive amounts of feed grain made from soy beans. But farmers can't meet the demand, and in their search for soy beans, China is, in a sense, burning up the forests of the world, particularly the rain forests of the Amazon.

(Amazon)

TURF WARS...

Each year millions of acres go up in flames. The devastation caused by local farmers is unimaginable. Gone is irreplaceable habitat that helps support the greatest diversity of wildlife in the world. Gone is important genetic information of plants and animals that could lead to the development of new drugs and cures for diseases.

And in its place are smoldering pockets of land -- land that gives way to cattle pastures and soy bean farms. But once it's cultivated it doesn't take long before the nutrients of the forest floor become exhausted. Soon the land is abandoned, the ranchers and farmers move on, and the burning begins again, only this time, deeper into the rainforest.

Signs of the devastation can be seen all along the region's major highway, the Amazon River. Timber, cut from the heart of the rainforest heads downstream on the way to local sawmills and then onto North America. Cattle raised on exhausted farmland are destined for the food markets of Europe. And soy beans, grown on the charred remains of the forest floor, are loaded into cargo containers that make their way to the pig and poultry farms of Asia. As a result Brazil has become the world's largest exporter of soy beans and their biggest customer is China.

In the era of globalization, deforestation is increasingly driven by the dinner tables of the world. And if 1.3 billion Chinese decide to eat more pork and poultry but lack the land to grow soy beans, then the Amazon simply becomes their new farmland.

Thomas E. Lovejoy
The Heinz Center

The Amazon year after year is being eaten away by major deforestation. And what we're getting closer and closer to is a tipping point which will affect the whole system. And so if you do lose the entire Amazon, you are losing probably one fifth of all the wild life species on earth.

THE PRICE OF POVERTY...

But elsewhere in the world poverty and hunger play an equally dramatic role in the loss of wildlife. A South African lumber mill hasn't had a job opening for nearly a year. The hours are long and the pay is marginal. Yet each morning the plant manager must turn away dozens of applicants.

Allen Robertson

Some of the men came to me from homes that literally had no food at all, and they said, “We’re quite happy to work just for food alone, if you’ll just give us food, and we will show you that we can work, and after the second or third month if you feel we’re worth our wage, please pay us.” I had to really sadly turn people away, and it’s a heart rendering exercise to go through and ask these folk to leave because you just haven’t got work for them. And some of the men actually said, “You don’t know how hungry we are -- we desperately need food.”

Many move to urban centers in search of work. But the big cities of Africa have little to offer the rural poor. Nairobi is ringed with impoverished shantytowns like Kibera. Over seven hundred thousand migrants live in squalor. There are very few job opportunities. Unemployment is over 80%. Here in Kibera, hunger is a stark reality.

(Wildlife preserve)

Yet just a few miles away animals are free to roam on a protected game preserve. But when people are hungry wildlife become targets of opportunity. It’s happening all over the world.

(Poaching and wildlife trade)

Each year millions of animals are killed so the poor can earn enough for the bare necessities of life - while the world’s tigers are going extinct. Each year millions of animals are killed to feed the hungry – while the world’s primates are going extinct. Each year millions of animals become trophies for the wealthy - while their body parts are turned into remedies and tonics. Each year hundreds of millions of animals are caged and sold as exotic pets. And the loss of bird species is astonishing.

Elizabeth Bennett**Wildlife Conservation Society**

What we’re essentially doing is creating what’s known as the empty forest syndrome. And this means that we’re getting forests which look fantastic. They’re full of wonderful trees but they’re losing their wildlife from inside them because it’s being hunted out. And that means that we’re losing pollinators, dispersers, browsers and that’s likely to have a domino effect within the forest and will cause other species to go too, including species which are very important for medicines, for timber. So if we lose those animals the wider repercussions for the whole ecosystem could be very significant indeed and we don’t know the full ramifications of it.

A GLOBAL MELT DOWN...

(Glaciers)

From the air the world's glaciers are an extraordinary sight, a treasure of natural beauty, with endless formations of ice and snow seemingly frozen in time. But now take a closer look. Something seems to be going wrong. The world's glacial regions are melting and it's because of human changes to our environment. We now live in a world where ice and snow are melting at unprecedented rates and where temperatures are rising faster than at any time in recorded history.

In Montana's Glacier National Park, about one hundred and fifty years ago, there were over 150 active glaciers. Today there are 27. In a few decades, scientists tell us, they'll be gone. In South America, the glaciers of the tropical Andes are also melting. The alarming fact is that they are melting three times faster than they were fifty years ago.

Parts of Africa are also showing the affects of climate change. Mount Kilimanjaro dominates Tanzania's landscape. Its peak has been covered with ice and snow for nearly 11,000 years. But recent satellite images show a dramatic melting of its glaciers. Scientists now expect that they will be completely gone by the year 2020.

Matt Damon (On-Camera)

The melting of the world's glaciers is also an early warning signal, a vivid reminder that the sixth extinction could be only decades away. Yet there is a place where it may have already begun, and it's happening in one of the world's coldest regions -- the arctic.

(The Arctic)

Sheila Watt-Cloutier
Inuit Circumpolar Conference

Climate change is not a theory. It's a reality here in the Arctic. We are getting ice forming much later in the year and breaking up much earlier in the year. We are getting insects that have never been up here in the Arctic before. We're getting birds, species of birds and fish that have not been up here before. Our whole world is being altered up here in the Arctic and I think the world has to pay heed to that.

(Polar bears)

For polar bears, climate change may be a death sentence. To hunt for seals, which is their primary source of food, the bears must first swim long distances until they find stable sea ice.

Without the ice, the bears cannot survive. Their hunting technique is simple. The bears stake out breathing holes carved out by seals. They wait until the seals must come up for air, and when they do, the bears pounce. Polar bears spend months gorging themselves. They hunt with a sense of urgency. The bears know that when the sea ice melts they must go months without food -- until the ice returns.

But now scientists say their frozen habitat is rapidly warming and the Arctic Ocean could be ice-free within decades. Without ice floes to hunt seals from the polar bear will surely become extinct. Though the bears can swim non-stop for as long as a hundred miles, already many are drowning from sheer exhaustion in their desperate search for sea ice.

Matt Damon (On-Camera)

Though the full impact of climate change may be decades away, wildlife habitats continue to deteriorate at alarming rates. This leaves animals with few options -- either face extinction or migrate to safer wilderness areas. But too often these wildlife corridors are blocked by human development.

Thomas E. Lovejoy

We have to move past the old model of having isolated national parks and wildlife preserves here and there, not connected with the rest of nature. And so basically it's really important to stitch these all together into sort of a matrix with corridors running between the protected areas.

(Rocky Mountain Front)

ESCAPE FROM EXTINCTION...

They call this the Rocky Mountain Front. It's where the grasslands of the Great Plains meet the towering peaks of the Rocky Mountains. Located in northwestern Montana, this is a gateway to one of the largest wilderness areas in the United States.

This is also where grizzly bears still roam free. Two hundred years ago the west was home to over 100,000 bears. Today, there are about a thousand. Human development has turned their feeding grounds into suburban backyards and public sentiment threatens to exile the grizzly bear to isolated wildlife preserves. Yet it is here, in these remaining patches of wilderness, that these endangered grizzly bears must make their last stand. In a world where game preserves offer little protection there is a place where much is being done to keep wildlife corridors open.

(Blackfoot River Valley)

Montana's Blackfoot River valley is a community of about twenty-five hundred families. Most are ranchers, and they treasure a rural lifestyle that hasn't changed very much for generations. Through the center of their valley runs the crystal clear waters of the Blackfoot River, celebrated in the book and movie "A River Runs Through It."

Hank Goetz

Lands Director, Blackfoot Challenge

I think Norman Maclean's phrase, "the river runs through it" is so, is so true because it binds the people in the community together. Some people use it for agricultural purposes, others use it for recreational purposes. It's a thing that brings us together.

Several decades ago the community decided they'd rather live with grizzly bears than cut off their wildlife corridors and isolate them into extinction. To help save the bears, they formed a grass roots alliance called "The Blackfoot Challenge."

David Mannix
Rancher, Blackfoot Challenge

Where grizzly bears and cattle, you know, both share habitat there's conflict. Our ancestors got rid of that by getting rid of the grizzly bears. What we're trying to figure out now is how that we can have both cattle and grizzly bears.

The community also turned their attention to the grizzly bear's most important habitat -- the vast tracts of forests that surrounded the valley.

(Archival Footage)

In the past, clear-cutting wiped out huge sections of woodlands. For decades old growth trees were torn from the valley's slopes. But in the process, tens of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat were sacrificed to meet the nation's growing demand for wood.

(Logging)

The sounds of logging still echo throughout the Blackfoot River Valley. But today trees are harvested using newer techniques. Rather than indiscriminate clear cutting the forest is thinned out. Left behind is a healthier and larger habitat for birds and other animals, especially for grizzly bears. To help avoid serious confrontations between humans and bears, a local biologist keeps track of their migration patterns.

James Jonkel
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

Grizzlies have always been back in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. In the last ten years or so they're starting to come out here on the south end and a lot of this is private land and a lot of it is land that hasn't had grizzly bear activity in the last 20 or 30 years but they're starting to move back in.

At times Jamie Jonkel uses radio collars and tracking devices to monitor the more active bears.

James Jonkel

We have a large male grizzly, male 107 that's on the ranch right now. He came down here about a month ago just because it was a good place to come if you're a bear and he's very close and his signal is just booming in. Sounds like he's about a quarter mile away. And they kind of come off the mountain face here and they come down into the flats. But he's definitely down here on the ranch.

(Grizzly bears in zoo)

Thanks to a community's deeply held respect for the natural world, the grizzly bears of the Blackfoot Valley are doing well. But there still remains a larger and more serious question: on a planet teetering on the brink of the sixth extinction are the grizzly bears and all the other animals living in the natural world ultimately doomed to survive only as popular attractions in our zoos?

Bob Cook

The large cats, the tigers, are a terrible risk and zoos may be the last place where there are genetically pure representatives of these species. But will they be wild animals? For me they won't be. They'll be an aberration. They'll be the remnants of human thoughtlessness and inability to heal the planet.

Matt Damon (On-Camera)

However difficult it is to protect wildlife, it's a testament to the power of human ingenuity that we are finding ways to co-exist with the animals of the natural world. But in the end perhaps the biggest challenge to the state of the planet's wildlife is recognizing the seriousness of the problems that lie ahead.

THE STATE OF THE PLANET'S WILDLIFE...

Elizabeth Bennett

The state of the planet's wildlife, at the moment, is very alarming. Some species are going so fast and we either need to do something about it very quickly or we're going to start seeing some pretty massive extinctions of species that we really care about.

Bob Cook

But it's going to be a horse race between those changes that will be irreparable and our ability to do good and alter the way that we use the resources on our planet.

Steve Osofsky

I would say that the state of the planet's wildlife is precarious and I think the decisions we make in the next few years will be very important in terms of determining which way things go.

The urgency to avoid a sixth extinction presents us with enormous challenges. What we need now are the efforts of people everywhere, all those who are willing to find ways to strike the right balance between what we want and what our planet's wildlife can endure.

Matt Damon (On-Camera)

Though separated by distance and culture, for the six and a half billion people who draw sustenance from the rich diversity of the natural world there are common bonds -- bonds that are renewed by each generation, bringing new ideas, new attitudes, new hope for the state of the planet's wildlife.

(Closing)

Planet Earth. This is our home. This is where our journey of discovery must begin.

#####