

The Dominant Animal:
Human Evolution and the Environment

By Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich; Island Press, Washington, D.C. 2008; 428 pp.,
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In the *Dominant Animal*, population biologist Paul Ehrlich, and conservation biologist Anne Ehrlich weave the threads of a sweeping range of scientific and economic disciplines into an intricate tapestry of the evolution of our planet and the rise of our species to dominance. Their book is a high-decibel wake-up call to humanity that brilliantly outlines both the severity and the complexity of our current predicament.

The book begins with a discussion of the evolution of life on Earth, differentiating between genetic mutation and selection as driving factors. For readers unfamiliar with the dynamics at work, the authors present a clear and readily accessible primer, illustrating the positive and negative feedback loops that influence the direction of evolution and shape the biological and physical environment.

Building upon this framework, they launch into a multi-disciplinary outline of the rise of our species' ecologically, culturally and technologically. The evolution of large brains, self-awareness and intricate communications provided our species the technological capacity to manipulate every aspect of our global environment. At the same time, however, the evolution of our cultural norms has not kept pace. We remain mired in belief systems and social structures that are better suited to small-group animals than to a global population.

Humans continue to consume the planet's resources as if they were limitless. We expect that the economy to grow forever. We treat human beings in other groups as if they were less important than members of our own. These premises reflect an ignorance to the fact that we are now a Global community and only as strong as our weakest members. The authors argue vigorously that our social perceptions and small-group culture must be modified if a sustainable global society is ever to be achieved.

Much of the core material presented will be familiar to environmentalists with interests in evolution and population studies. Though the manner in which the material is presented offers a beautifully compiled and intricate study on the state of ecological science and the present human predicament.

Unfortunately, the book may have benefited from greater restraint in its attacks on former President George W. Bush. The clearly hostile tone they take toward not only Bush, but at times, the prevailing social and economic norms of the American public may serve to alienate their more skeptical readers—perhaps the ones who most need to hear their message—and throw a pall of perceived bias upon the rest of the material presented.

None-the-less, this book deserves to be read by everyone and should be added to required reading lists for undergraduates regardless of course of study.