



Evolutionary Perspectives on Environmental Problems

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The twenty-first century presents an increasing number of environmental problems, including toxic pollution, global warming, destruction of tropical forests, extinction of biological diversity, and depletion of natural resources. These environmental problems are generally due to human behavior, namely over-consumption of resources and overpopulation. Designing effective policies to address these problems requires a deep understanding of human behavior as well as ecology. This in turn requires considerations of human nature, and the evolutionary "design" of the human mind.

Evolutionary research on human behavior has profound implications for the environmental sciences. The aim of this collection is to bring together a variety of chapters that show how and why. Part 1, "Human Nature and Resource Conservation," addresses environmental problems from different evolutionary perspectives. Part 2, "The Ecological Noble Savage Hypothesis," examines the notion that our environmental problems are due to Western culture, and that our ancestors and people in indigenous societies lived in harmony with nature until the corrupting influences of Western culture. Part 3, "The Tragedy of the Commons," explores the conservation of common-pool or open-access natural resources, such as fisheries, forests, grazing lands, freshwater, and clean air. Part 4, "The Evolution of Discounting and Conspicuous Consumption," looks at the problem of explaining why people are so ecologically short-sighted and why people in developed countries consume so many resources. Part 5, "Overpopulation and Fertility Declines," addresses the evolution of human reproductive decisions. Part 6, "Biophilia," aims to explain why people cherish nature as well as destroy it.

The goal of this volume is to introduce environmental thinkers to evolutionary perspectives on human behavior, and the new interdisciplinary sciences of evolutionary psychology and behavioral ecology. This reader aims to help bridge the artificial division between the biological and social sciences, and provide a synthesis between evolutionary sciences of human behavior and environmental sciences.

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