



Bugs: Man's New Best Friend

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Much is said these days about the state of our natural environment and little of it is good. In the papers and measured commentary of cable news programs we're constantly hearing about the latest problems human beings are unleashing on the planet; global warming is the current buzzword, but the old standbys of pollution, resource depletion and habitat loss are still looking strong. Unfortunately, while the impact of these environmental degradations on us humans isn't good, it looks like our animal friends are the ones taking the brunt of these changes. Indeed, if my National Geographic pictorial essays are to be believed, many of our colorful little buddies are pretty well screwed.

This raises a dilemma. While I'm sensitive to the plight of the Gunnison Sage Grouse, I'm also a big fan of leaving all the lights on when I leave a room in case I need to come back into that room sometime in the next few hours. Similarly, while I'd like the California Red-legged Frog to keep frogging along, that doesn't mean I'm going let my lawn get all brown in the summer. Finally, while I appreciate that caribou need to calve somewhere, as a Los Angeles resident I can safely say the average Angeleno would probably beat a caribou to death with a rusty shovel if it meant paying ten cents less for a gallon of gas. If animals are counting on our inherent decency to outweigh our self-interest, well, they haven't been paying very good attention for the past 40,000 years.

When you look at it this way, the problem seems unsolvable. We want these animals around, but aren't willing to make any of the sacrifices necessary to do so. But, what if there was a way to sort of have these animals around without making any sacrifices at all? Impossible? Only if you're not willing to think small enough. So, what is the answer for all our environmental problems?

It's simple: bugs!

Specifically, as a society we need to develop an appreciation for insects that will allow them to take the place in our hearts of all those loser animals that can't hack it anymore. This will work for a variety of reasons. First, bugs are small. While modern animals generally need hundreds of thousands of acres of unspoiled land to preserve their precious "ecosystems," bugs do just fine with a couple of big rocks in the back yard to hide under. Hell, you could fit an entire bug zoo in the space one elephant uses to take a nap. Ivory cufflinks anyone?

Second, most of the time animals are just doing things bugs do better anyway. Take birds—who needs them? Bugs can fly, they lay eggs, and, even better, they aren't the ones chirping away in the sugar maple outside your bedroom window at five in the morning when

you're trying to get some sleep. Nor, might I add, do they shit all over your car.

A larger comparison only helps to prove bugs' unquestionable superiority over every type of animal. After all, what are ants but moles without the damage to your lawn? What are wasps but snakes that can fly? What are butterflies but parrots with a more compact splendor? In the grand scheme of things, it's difficult to see how roly-polys are anything other than a more efficient armadillo. Proportionally, a flea can jump far higher than a kangaroo could ever dream of doing, and they suck blood too. They're like some kind of miniature vampire marsupial. How cool is that?

Despite bugs' obvious benefits, I'd be foolish to argue that the transition will be painless. It will be difficult to see our simian brethren, the chimpanzees, succumb to the bush hunter's cookpot, or to watch as whales, the noble symbol of the open seas, become instead the tasty essence of Purina Dog Food. It will take time to learn to substitute the slick antennae of Cocky the Cockroach for the plush fur of Rin Tin Tin. But if Cocky the Cockroach keeps me from having to take public transportation, I'm sure I'll learn to manage.