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# Wild Times Discovering Life

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by Joe Foy

Breaking news! Scientists combing the night sky for signs of extraterrestrial life have recently found seven Earth-sized planets that orbit the same star about 40 light-years away and could contain water. The possibility that these planets may harbour life is fascinating, and has sparked a cascade of headlines around the world.

But the biggest story about life on any planet remains the one unfolding right here on Earth.

Last year, a study on global extinction rates from the National Autonomous University of Mexico concluded that a “natural” rate of extinction would be two species going extinct worldwide per 10,000 species per 100 years – but that current extinction rates are now eight to 100 times higher. Four hundred and seventy-seven vertebrate species have gone extinct since 1900. Only nine extinctions would be expected at natural rates.

According to these scientists, the Earth is on the verge of its next great extinction episode – the sixth in the planet’s history – all of it driven by human-caused impacts to habitat.



Burning of fossil fuels has powered up a rapidly changing climate, logging for lumber and paper has eliminated vast areas of old-growth forests, as has clearing for urban and farmland development. Wildlife habitat has been going down at an unprecedented rate.

No wonder then that some look to the stars for another planet – and a second chance at life. But our salvation does not lie in the night sky. Our best and only chance to preserve life, including our own species – is on the ground right beneath our feet. What humans have broken may be possible for humans to fix. Here’s three things we must do.

## 1. Say NO to new fossil fuel schemes

In order to slow the changing climate, we need to keep as much fossil fuels as possible in the ground. In BC that means rejecting supersized tar sands pipe dreams, LNG fracking gas pains, and new coal export schemes.

## 2. Say YES to protecting half of our planet

Leading biologists in species conservation believe it’s time to shed the outdated policy that we ought to only protect only the scenic areas as parks. To stop species endangerment, half of a nation’s

lands and waters should be set aside within protected areas.

The good news is that some countries are well on their way towards achieving or surpassing the 50 per cent level of protected lands. Venezuela reports that 53.9 per cent of their total land area is now in some sort of protected area and Slovenia protects 53.6 per cent of of their country. Canada has only protected 9.3 per cent of our nation, trailing the US which has set aside 13.8 per cent of their lands and waters for nature.

In BC we have designated about 15 per cent of the province’s lands and waters as protected areas. That’s a bigger percentage than any other province or territory in Canada – but not enough to stop many wild creatures from starting to disappear. BC and all the other jurisdictions in the world need to protect half their lands and waters for the survival of life on Earth.

## 3. Say YES to a BC endangered species law

BC needs a strong endangered species law that would make protection of habitat mandatory and speed up the process of protecting important areas before they’re ruined. We don’t have such a law yet. 40,000 people also agreed and signed a petition calling for this law. The Wilderness Committee delivered this petition to the BC Legislature on February 28.

There are now 1,900 wild plants and animals on BC’s species at risk list. Some well-known critters on BC’s critical care

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Sockeye salmon in the upper Chilliwack River.

ward include grizzly bear, mountain caribou, spotted owl, killer whale and Vancouver Island marmot. They are suffering from rapidly changing habitats and are in danger of disappearing from parts of the province or slipping away all together.

On May 9, British Columbians go to the polls. Make sure you get out and vote for a candidate that has discovered that life on our planet and in our province is in a fight for its very survival and needs action now on climate change, habitat preservation, and strong endangered species legislation.

Joe Foy is the national campaign director for the Wilderness Committee, Canada's largest membership-based wilderness preservation organization



## WANTED:

Reports of dead bats and of bats flying during winter

White Nose Syndrome (WNS), a fungal disease responsible for the death of millions of bats in eastern North America, has moved to the west coast and was confirmed in Washington State in 2016. Although devastating

for bats, WNS does not affect humans.

The BC Community Bat Program in collaboration with the BC government is requesting the public's help in monitoring the spread of this disease.

The typical first sign of this disease is bats flying during the winter, a time of year when bats are hibernating. Another sign is the appearance of dead bats. The CBP is asking the public to report dead bats or any sightings of winter bat activity. If you find a dead bat, report it to the CBP for testing as soon as possible. Never touch a dead bat with your bare hands.

To contact the BC Community Bat Program, see [www.bcbats.ca](http://www.bcbats.ca), email [info@bcbats.ca](mailto:info@bcbats.ca) or [okanaganbats@gmail.com](mailto:okanaganbats@gmail.com), or call 1-855-922-2287 ext.13.

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