



Noah's Choice: The Future of Endangered Species

By Charles C. Mann

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An objective look at the debate over actions to preserve endangered species examines the controversy over the Endangered Species Act and calls for a new set of principles to serve as a guideline for choosing which endangered species to save. 17,500 first printing.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In Oklahoma, a highway to improve access to a hospital that serves poor people was delayed for more than four years to protect a beetle. In enforcing the Endangered Species Act, do we put insects above human needs? Mann and Plummer, coauthors of *The Aspirin Wars*, argue that trying to save every species is unethical and impractical, that we have to make choices. They cite case histories of ecological conflict: the snail darter in Tennessee, the Karner Blue butterfly in New York and Wisconsin, a bird habitat threatened by home-building in Texas. When the act passed in 1973, few people—least of all, Congress, the authors say—understood its ramifications, especially the cost. The act is up for renewal this year. Mann and Plummer offer suggestions for making it more practical in this provocative, timely and reasonable study.

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From Library Journal

A beetle puts a stranglehold on the construction of a highway that would have provided Native Americans reasonable access to a hospital; a minnow almost stops a dam from being built. Mann and Plummer, who also collaborated on *The Aspirin Wars* (LJ 10/1/91), highlight these and other examples in their discussion of the difficult choices that must be made with increasing frequency between human needs and the preservation of biodiversity. The writing is clear and entertaining, and the authors' key argument—that the Endangered Species Act doesn't allow for enough flexibility based on values—is compelling, cogent, and highly controversial. Included are excellent summaries of the concepts of island biogeography and species, the history of the Endangered Species Act, and current thinking on the rate of extinction. Highly recommended. [Other recent books on the excesses of environmentalism include Greg Easterbrook's *A Moment on the Earth* (LJ 2/1/95) and Charles T. Rubin's *The Green Crusade* (LJ 2/15/94).—Ed.]—Lynn C. Badger, Univ. of Florida Lib., Gainesville.

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From [Booklist](#)

This year the Endangered Species Act is up for congressional renewal. As it stands, the act has fallen short of its noble purpose, for the endangered species list has grown steadily in the years since the act was passed in 1973. The Lord's command to Noah was quite clear; there were no choices to be made regarding what should be saved. Noah had a blueprint. The authors of this book stress that saving every species is impossible, given the steady encroachment of modern life on nature, but that is what the Endangered Species Act commands. Taking the reader through compelling case studies of ecological conflict—a beetle in Oklahoma threatened by a highway to a hospital, a bird endangered by the spread of new homes in Texas—the authors conclude that to save biodiversity we cannot avoid making tough choices: "When we pick nature, we must recognize the human losses; when we choose to satisfy human desires, we should shut the door in the ark with as much wisdom and compassion as possible." Perhaps this book will fuel public debate on an issue of vital interest to us all. *Bonnie Smothers*

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From reader reviews:

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