

Wives of the Bishop of Worcester

The Ecological Society of America and Globalist Copoutism

BY STUART H. HURLBERT

To halt ecosystem simplification worldwide, population growth in North America has to be stopped. It is unreasonable to expect other parts of the world to arrest population growth when policies of federal governments in North America accept (United States) or specifically encourage (Canada) exponential growth in human numbers.

—Peter Saloniuss, 1999

The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of non-human life requires such a decrease.

—Arne Naess, *The Ecology of Wisdom*, 2008

An army of wives

In November 1859, after almost three decades of exploration, research, thought and writing, Charles Darwin published his world-shaking *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. This quickly became, and still remains, a major foundation for all of biological science, and a strong influence on most other areas of human thought as well.

In June 1860 the British Association for the Advancement of Science convened for its usual annual meeting. Not surprisingly this became, indeed was planned as, the first direct confrontation between the new evolutionary view of nature and traditional ideas derived from religion. Key debaters included anatomist Thomas Huxley and botanist Joseph Hooker on the pro-evolution side and anatomist Richard Owen and the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, on the anti-evolution side. Darwin stayed

home, a reclusive, mild-mannered fellow indisposed to harsh confrontations. Gould (1986) and Maitland and Johnson (1989) give good accounts of events.

The rhetoric of the meeting was hot indeed. Darwin had not yet written anything explicit about human origins, but the implications of his theory, together with anatomical similarities between man and other higher primates, already were clear to scientist and non-scientist alike, even if the human fossil record at that time was almost non-existent. And the pugnacious Huxley did not hesitate to make the implications explicit in his debate with Owen.

“Descended from apes! My dear, let us hope that it is not true, but if it is let us pray that it will not become generally known.” This was the reported reaction of the wife of the Bishop of Worcester to the debate, though exactly when and where she made the statement remain unknown.

Whether apocryphal or not, that statement is much beloved of biologists as a caricature of the censorious and anti-scientific attitudes of those who in 1860 and for 150 years since then have attacked evolutionary biology on political and religious grounds.

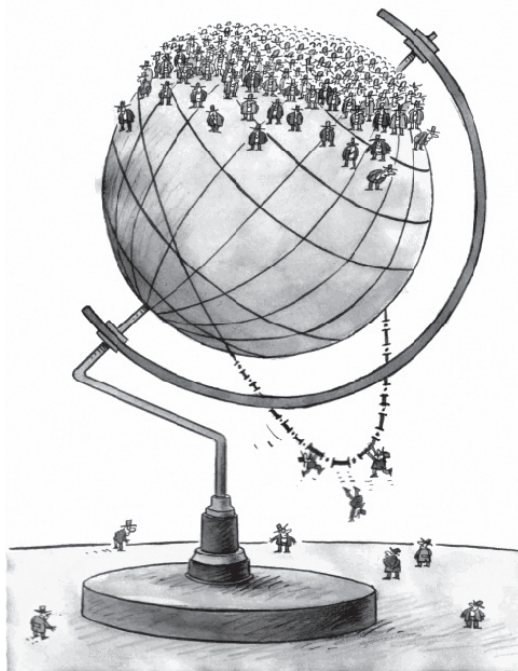
Yet for the last few decades, it is biologists, most notably the Ecological Society of America (ESA) and its leaders, who have behaved like an army of wives of the Bishop of Worcester. They have turned a blind eye toward the impact of high immigration rates on U.S. population growth and environmental values, and they have actively suppressed discussion of such matters. In this essay, supplemented by others in this special issue of *The Social Contract*, I document the charge, partly by reviewing my own sporadic and unsuccessful attempts over the last 15 years to educate and/or unseat this “army of wives” in the ESA.

Sustainability and thrice — imposed self-censorship

Over the last twenty years ESA committees have issued three major position papers dealing with the importance of developing environmentally and eco-

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nomically sustainable societies and how ecologists — if given enough money — can contribute to that objective via their research, teaching, and other professional activities. Unfortunately, each committee self-censored on matters relating to the incompatibility of the present U.S. population size and sustainability, let alone U.S. population levels projected for the future. No demographic information was presented, no solutions were mentioned, and the critical need for a national population policy was ignored. Where population was mentioned at all, the references were always superficial, fatalistic ones to global population levels.



The sustainable biosphere initiative (SBI; Lubchenco and 15 co-authors, 1991) summarized discussions and debates that began in 1988 to “define research priorities for ecology in the closing decade of the twentieth century.” The document itself was intended as “a framework for the acquisition, dissemination, and utilization of ecological knowledge to ensure the sustainability of the biosphere.” One of its three high-priority areas for research was “a greatly accelerated and expanded effort toward developing sustainable ecological systems.” Those statements, taken at face value, would suggest there would have been much substantive attention given in the document to the population stabilization component of sustainability. But other than lip service in a phrase here and there, this topic was taboo and the overall focus narrow and reflective of the scientists’ self interest.

That aspect of the report was criticized by a few.

Ludwig et al. (1993) opined that “Such a claim that basic research will lead to sustainable use of resources in the face of a growing human population may lead to a false complacency: instead of addressing the problems of population and excessive use of resources, we may avoid such difficult issues by spending money on basic ecological research.”

Pulliam and Haddad (1994) noted SBI’s neglect of the population issue and felt it reflected a fear of controversy widespread among ecologists. They concluded:

[W]e feel the SBI is remiss in not explicitly calling for ecologists to study human population growth and the question of human carrying capacity. Accordingly we call on the ESA to reconvene the Research Agenda Committee that originally drafted the SBI report and to charge the committee to develop research recommendations aimed at improving our understanding of the ecological factors determining human carrying capacity and influencing human population growth and distribution.

Neither of these two papers said anything at all about U.S. population levels or trends or about immigration. Pulliam and Haddad (1994) did, however, suggest that “an analysis of carrying capacity is currently more realistic at the national [as opposed to global] level.” That in turn implies that population control or management must also be a national concern and responsibility (e.g. Hardin 1981, 1989, 1993, Vallentyne and Hamilton 1987, Vallentyne 1994, Salenius 1999, Beck and Kolankiewicz 2000, Cafaro and Staples 2009). Pulliam, interestingly, was one of the co-authors of SBI.

Much later, with the SBI as “exhibit A,” I grouped the ESA with the Green Party of California and the Sierra Club as

prime practitioners of the globalist copout... [which] states that since overpopulation is a global problem, the ways of dealing with it must be primarily global or international in nature. It is okay for individual nations to attempt to control their own birth rates. But they should not control or reduce their immigration rates, even if immigration is the major cause of their population growth. It would be ‘unfair’ if one country were able to stabilize its population ahead of other countries, especially if it were an industrialized western country. So goes the ‘reasoning.’ (Hurlbert 2000)

What these three organizations have in common

is that they are all U.S. organizations, all “big talkers” about environmental protection, and all determined to suppress information on the contribution of immigration to U.S. overpopulation and environmental degradation.

In May 2004 a new ESA committee issued a new report on *Ecological Science and Sustainability for a Crowded Planet* (ESSCP; M. Palmer plus 19 co-authors, 2004).

Very different in character and tone from SBI, it proposed three main areas of action for the ESA: “enhance the extent to which decisions are ecologically informed; advance innovative ecological research aimed at the sustainability of an over-populated planet; and stimulate cultural changes within the science itself that build a forward looking and international ecology.”

Can you imagine that?! A U.S.-based organization having the temerity to suggest that reducing the size of the U.S. population might be critical to the economic and environmental sustainability of the U.S.? Was this organization that free of ideologues and censors? It is widely understood that the U.S. can eventually achieve environmental stability only if immigration to the U.S. is greatly reduced. The same applies to Canada.

“Sustainability” is mostly used as a vague mantra. The 20 authors, with no hint of irony, even refer to “the sustainability of an over-populated planet.” The ESSCP was less about moving toward true sustainability than getting funds to study the consequences of, *inter alia*, overpopulation and ways to mitigate them *without reducing population*. Just as did the SBI, it ignores population stabilization and reduction as a key component of sustainability, and it ignores published criticisms of SBI for that omission. When a call went out in 2003 for input to the developing ESSCP report, I sent the committee several articles on the relevant population issues, and these too were ignored.

Finally, the ESA Governing Board officially adopted in August 2009 a statement on *Ecological Impacts of Economic Activities* (EIEA; ESA 2009). This was drafted by a secret committee that included no ecological economists and then modified after input from the Governing Board and other ESA members. It proved yet a third official document that completely ignored population policy changes as critical to a sustainable society. This even though a section titled *Sustainable development: Strategies for achieving ecologically sustainable*

growth makes up about half the document.

The idea for and initial draft of such a position statement was first put forward by wildlife biologist and ecological economist Brian Czech and many of his colleagues. But they were then excluded from the process except as last-minute kibitzers. Czech summarized the outcome as follows for his gang of 84 (B. Czech, email of July 24, 2009):

The ESA Board of Governors has adopted a position on economic growth, for the ESA, that is basically the alternative position developed by the committee the board appointed in response to our original proposed position. As such it contains almost none of the framework of ecological economics that we proposed. Instead, it oxymoronically ends up calling for ‘sustainable growth,’ the very type of rhetoric we’d attempted to debunk in our efforts.

In addition to the shortcomings of the position, the process was inconsistent with principles of democratic governance and sound science. Our group was kept at arm’s length, despite our collective expertise on the subject and despite numerous calls by numbers of us to help with revisions. Meanwhile, the identity of the committee was cynically kept secret. Politically and neoclassically derived gray literature was quoted (by someone) over the rigorous, peer-reviewed literature demonstrating the fundamental tradeoff between economic growth and environmental protection. The process and position were clearly designed for political expediency — in and out of ESA — rather than ecological soundness.

Over time, the weakness of the position will be widely revealed and will reflect a similarly weak episode of ESA governance. Those of us who will continue to apply sound science and macroeconomic policies that affect the environment must decide whether to continue doing so within an organization that does not.

Czech had pointed out in an earlier email message (May 20, 2009) to the ESA Governing Board, that another ecological society, the North American Benthological Society (NABS), had just developed a policy statement on economic and population growth. He thought that had been approved by the NABS Executive Committee on that day, May 20, and passed along a copy of it to his colleagues. He praised it as being “consistent with positions taken by several other professional, scientific

societies ...[and] antithetical to the position that was developed by the ESA public affairs group.”

It was indeed at least the latter. The final statement in that early draft NABS document was:

NABS...[s]upports a markedly reduced footprint for much of North America by deliberately moving towards zero then negative population growth and economic growth in the U.S.

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Sadly, however, the censors eventually arrived. The current document, *NABS Draft Economic and Population Growth Policy* (DEPGP; NABS 2010), is on the organization’s website. The NABS Executive Committee voted “8 to 1 (with 7 abstentions) to post [it]...on its website for a 60 day member comment period.” It was posted on February 1, 2010. The online discussion forum for it has been accessible only by NABS members.

The blunt recommendation quoted above has now been replaced by a watered down, globalist one:

Economic policy tools for human population reduction and stabilization may be carefully and gradually introduced for purposes of achieving sustainable, healthy economies and sustainable, healthy aquatic ecosystems.

The U.S. and its politicians are taken off the hook with respect to development of sane immigration policy. The meaning of “economic policy tools” was made clear in an earlier paragraph of DEPGP:

No credible set of economic policy recommendations for sustainability would be complete without addressing population growth. All else equal, population growth results in economic growth and is, along with economic growth, unsustainable. As with aquatic ecosystem conservation, population growth may be addressed with economic tools. For example, certain aspects of the U.S. and state tax codes provide incentives for having children. The most obvious example is a per-dependent tax break for parents. Tax breaks could be provided for having no children, or for the first child and eliminated for further children.

Though immigration has for some time been the major source of U.S. population growth, change in immigration policies is implied *not* to be politically acceptable to the NABS membership. Tax incentives for small families *are* a desirable “economic tool.” But by themselves they have zero potential for bringing the U.S. even close to zero population growth let alone to negative growth. The document’s obscuring of this fact is simply irresponsible.

NABS appears to have joined the ESA and those other scientific societies who have opted for the globalist copout.

Rejection of informational initiatives for ESA membership

Independent of responses to ESA reports, twice I encouraged ESA leaders to provide ESA members and the wider public with more information on U.S. population growth and on policies and legislation driving it. Both efforts failed.

On September 25, 1995, I emailed the ESA Governing Board and others a message that said, in part:

This note is to urge immediate ESA action on a major, critical environmental issue that, as far as I am aware, has been completely ignored by the Society to date. The issue is the environmental consequences of high immigration rates into the United States.

This issue falls just as squarely into our domain of expertise as does the issue of endangered species legislation, and I would hope that ESA could put out a “scientific consensus report” on the topic just as it is doing for the Endangered Species Act.

The issue is timely in that Congress is now considering major new legislation to deal with both legal and illegal immigration, and I suspect will be continuing to do so into the near future.

Clearly the issue should be treated by the ESA in the more general context of the environmental consequences of high rates of population growth, regardless of the cause of that growth. But immigration is the reason the U.S. has the highest rate of growth... of any industrialized nation — and the ESA has an obligation, it seems to me, to be clear and forceful in pointing out to Congress the consequences of such a growth rate in a country that has the highest per capita rate of resource

consumption and of waste generation.

If immigration is not reduced and brought under control, the species or patch of land or water quality we save today will have to be sacrificed for “development” tomorrow.

Mary Power of the University of California at Berkeley, though not then on the Governing Board, immediately and succinctly responded (email, September 28, 1995), “I strongly agree with you about this issue (we both live in the Malthusian state of California, don’t we?).” She later apparently had a change of heart. In 2009, as ESA President, she voted to prevent similar ideas (Hurlbert 2011b) from being published in an ESA journal (Inouye 2009, Hurlbert 2011a).

ESA President Gordon Orians replied (letter, October 25, 1995):

Your message regarding ESA action on the environmental consequences of immigration was discussed by the Governing Board at its October 20-22 meeting in Washington, D.C. The consensus of the group was that, although the topic is not amenable to a formal society consensus report, it might well be a suitable one for the special series of papers for a broader public that David Tilman is editing. Therefore, I am sending a copy of your memo to him to begin a dialogue on the topic. Thank you for bringing this important issue to the attention of the Governing Board.

No more was heard on the matter. In a rational world there would be no reason why a “consensus report” with straightforward factual content would not be feasible. But even if the Governing Board itself thought so, it probably was clear to the Board that the censorious tendencies of many ESA members would frustrate such a project in practice. Solicitation of a rigorous, uncompromising presentation of facts by one or a few well-informed ESA members would indeed have been a good way to go.

My second initiative began with a May 12, 2007 email to the ESA Director of Public Affairs, Nadine Lynn, and copied to the ESA Governing Board. It was titled *Should ESA go beyond self-interest?* Lynn replied that my message “generated discussion among the ESA Governing Board members who plan to continue this discussion when they meet during the August Annual Meeting.”

Lynn also recommended I post the message on the ESA blog, ESA News and Views. This I did, with slight modifications, on May 17, 2007, under a new title, *Will*

the Ecological Society of America bite the population bullet? This message is presented in full elsewhere in this issue of *The Social Contract* (Hurlbert 2007[2011]). It thus needs little further comment here, other than to say that it was inspired by ESA’s system of *Action Alerts*. These are sent out to the ESA membership whenever there is a glimmer of new funding or reduced funding for ecological research and education. But they are never sent out when Congress is considering specific immigration legislation that would greatly increase the rate of U.S. population growth. That timid, irresponsible behavior persists today, and Lynn has indicated to me it will not be altered under current (2010) ESA leadership.

Sledgehammer censorship and its pretexts

My most recent misadventure with ESA censors resulted from their invitation to me to submit an essay on immigration control and ecological impacts in the U.S. and Mexico. This was to be published in the ESA journal, *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*. The invitation came as a surprise. The ultimate rejection of my essay did not. Both the essay (Hurlbert 2011b) and an account of the behavior of the journal’s editors, editorial board, and the ESA Governing Board (Hurlbert 2011a) in the episode are presented in this issue of *The Social Contract*; nothing more need be said here.

Recently, prompted mainly by the battles over rejection of my essay by *Frontiers* and ESA’s statement on *Ecological Impacts of Economic Activities* (ESA 2009), there has been a flurry of editorials and commentary by ESA leaders (e.g., Power 2009, Lynn and Silver 2010, Kinzig 2010) trying to justify the suppression of fact and opinion and the lack of balance in ESA position statements documented here. They do not succeed. Their specious arguments merit more detailed rebuttal than can be given here. The authors seem greatly concerned that ESA, or perhaps even individual ESA members, not be seen as policy advocates in *certain* controversial areas. *They seem unaware that suppression of fact and opinion highly relevant to a topic under discussion (e.g. sustainability, population growth, effects of immigration controls) is one of the strongest, most devious, and most irresponsible forms of advocacy possible.*

Conclusions

Perhaps it would be a good idea, as the ESSCP report urged, to develop “a major public information campaign to bring issues and raise awareness of ecological sustainability before the general public.” But to judge from the SBI, ESSCP, and EIEA reports and *Frontiers’* censorship, the ESA does not evidence the

qualifications and lack of ideological bias needed for the intelligent conduct of such a campaign that would merit the respect of decisionmakers.

Allison Power (2009) captures the essence of the problem in her statement that “ESA members can play an important role by speaking as a collective voice of ecological knowledge and experience, expressed through position statements that reflect majority opinion.” I believe ESA members can indeed “play an important role” in these matters, but not by way of the mechanism suggested.

None of these three reports criticized earlier can claim to “reflect majority opinion” of the ESA membership. And even if they did, it would be meaningless: the great majority of ESA members have no expertise and no record of scholarship on most of the topics treated in the documents. That is doubtless true even for the ESA members who serve on these committees. We must be sanguine about the competence of large committees in general to produce cogent reports on large and controversial topics. Separate reports by individuals with different viewpoints and expertise or by *small* committees of experts on more focused topics would collectively be so much more valuable.

Another root of the problem may be the notion that in order to identify research priorities and ask for more government funding, ecologists feel obliged to engage in hyperbolic, grandiose claims on the one hand and to avoid controversial topics on the other. So the topic of U.S. population growth is taken off the table immediately; and then some ESA committee ends up talking about, in the language of Power (2009) and without irony, “rebuild[ing] the economy for practical, long-term sustainability.”

To regain its integrity, perhaps the ESA should just stick to honest scholarship and to fundraising with neither hyperbole nor timidity. ■

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