

Living together in an urban world... Urbanisation and its implications for human-wildlife interactions

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The process of urbanisation has been identified as the most prominent cause of extinctions in the present century. Given that most people on earth now live in large cities, the acceleration on habitat alteration due to the spread of cities is likely to have profound implications on both biodiversity conservation and on the nature of human relationships with nature, especially wildlife. The biophysical and ecological impacts of urbanisation are increasingly appreciated and understood and there are many approaches to addressing these. Among the most important of these impacts is fragmentation of bushland, especially by ever-expanding road networks. Attempts to reconnect severed populations through ecological corridors and wildlife crossing structures are proving surprisingly successful, though not for all species. Far less well understood or appreciated are the long-term implications for our interactions with wildlife as nature becomes increasingly distant and unknown. This 'extinction of experience' threatens to undo the positive influences of generations of close, daily contact with nature, replacing experience with perceptions based on virtual representations and expectations. Early contact by our children may become of critical importance to the future of animal welfare.