

The Journal of Population and Sustainability

ISSN 2398-5496

Article title: *Anthrozoology: Embracing Co-Existence in the Anthropocene*. Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison. Cham: Springer, 2017. ISBN 978-3-319-45963-9 £24.00 (GBP). 338pp.

Author(s): Paul R. Ehrlich

Vol. 2, No. 2, (Spring 2018), pp. 63-65.

Anthrozoology: Embracing Co-Existence in the Anthropocene

Michael Charles Tobias and Jane Gray Morrison. Cham: Springer, 2017.

ISBN 978-3-319-45963-9 £24.00 (GBP). 338pp.

PAUL R. EHRLICH¹

Department of Biology, Stanford University

Following this review (page 66) is a previously privately circulated explanation of IPAT – “A Brief History of “IPAT”” – written by John Holdren in 1993 and published here with permission.

Most thoughtful people understand that very fundamental changes in the global culture of *Homo sapiens* are required if civilization is to persist. That means ending the wrecking of its life-support systems, of which the microorganisms, plants, and other animals of our planet are critical parts, and becoming a civilization *not* focused on money, competition, consumption, efficiency, and colonialism.

Following work summarized in this brilliant book, in Carl Safina’s superb volume *Beyond Words* (2015), and in David Montgomery’s excellent *Other Half of Nature* (2015), many of us are already altering our views of the living world. We are realizing that people are basically cooperative assemblages of human and microbial cells, that other organisms (the “Others” in *Anthrozoology*) are often more “sentient,” “conscious,” “intelligent,” or “feeling” than usually assumed, and that humanity’s insane *growthmania*, combined with its uncaring annihilation of other life forms, is leading civilization directly toward collapse.

Tobias and Morrison, the authors of *Anthrozoology*, are both leading ecological philosophers and friends of mine (full disclosure), and I share many of their attitudes and conclusions. Nonetheless, I found this a tough but entrancing book

1 This review and the following paper by John Holdren, was previously published on the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and Biosphere (MAHB) blog: <https://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/review-anthrozoology/>

– forcing me to reexamine many of my own feelings, even while agreeing with its general thrust. More and more people are recognizing that there is a crying need for reexaminations of humanity's ethical duties to other human beings and (if any) to the other organisms with which people share Earth. *Anthrozoology* is a reexamination of the latter – basically a long poem to the Others, and a long indictment of *Homo sapiens* for its ignoring of the Others' needs and wants in service to humanity's culturally-evolved wants. And at the moment the most obvious of those wants is also lethal to civilization and to most of the visible Others (what will happen to Earth's microbes is a more complex issue). That lethal want, the perpetual expansion of human numbers and per capita consumption, also turns out to be impossible, as a horrific collapse will sooner or later amply demonstrate.

In many of today's cultures some of Tobias and Morrison's ideas will be pleasant if different. That a parrot can communicate much to human beings, and even change their lives for the better and alter their thinking in significant ways, is a good example in the book. More difficult to deal with are issues like vegetarianism (should the deaths of billions of chickens annually for human consumption be considered a "holocaust"?) and whether the feelings and desires of worms, cockroaches, or even Norway rats, should be a subject for human consideration. Such questions are examined in *Anthrozoology* from a stunningly broad array of perspectives, including, literature, philosophy, religion, psychology, ecology, and evolution. It deals with topics as diverse as Dunbar numbers and pyromaniac hawks to the art of Albrecht Dürer.

Science certainly gives little guidance in answering many of the questions *Anthrozoology* raises, but its poetry may be helpful. In the end, though, much depends on the receptivity of the person and society to the themes of the poem. Ethics are agreed-upon standards of behavior about what is good and bad. They are entirely human decisions and become norms when there is broad concurrence. Such concurrence requires advanced language with syntax, about the only major species feature that still can be viewed as characteristic only of *Homo sapiens*. So we can have Jain ethics and SS ethics but (sadly) no Bonobo ethics. Most human beings have decided that the unquestionable suffering of chickens being slaughtered is balanced by the nutritive and satisfaction benefits consumers receive – just as they (if they ever think of it) find that a captured impala's terror and pain is balanced by the lion's survival and satisfaction. But having known a few

chickens personally, and having watched a lot of impalas in the field, I can't find an answer so easily. When we're considering the fates and feelings of individuals we can relate to (frightened pigs about to be slaughtered) or we can learn to relate to (brilliant octopuses that can sometimes outwit us), it becomes more difficult to continue long-established dietary habits.

There are a few places where I thought I detected mistakes in *Anthrozoology*, and then I thought: "*There really can't be mistakes in a poem.*" All would be trivial, even in an essay. At one place, though, Michael and Jane jabbed me right in the ego. They write (loc. 781) of the "famed Paul Ehrlich, John Holdren, Barry Commoner I=PAT equation." The equation was actually developed by Holdren and Ehrlich to show how ridiculous was Commoner's continuous claim that population growth and increasing consumption were *not* important in causing environmental problems, only faulty technologies were to blame. With that claim, widely believed by non-scientists, he was probably the scientist who did the most to block solving humanity's environmental crisis. The details of his ideology and gross dishonesty need not concern us here, but John Holdren, just retired as head of the Government Office of Science and Technology Policy and President Obama's science advisor, has permitted Millennium Alliance for Humanity and Biosphere (MAHB) and the JP&S to publish his 1993 memo, "A brief history of IPAT" following this review (page 66).

I find myself uncertain or ambiguous on many of the themes of *Anthrozoology*, but of its most basic themes I'm convinced. The human enterprise – a product of numbers of people and how much on average each consumes – is much too large, and our treatment of the Others is much too cruel and unthinking. What to do? Read *Anthrozoology* and then discuss it with your friends.

References

Safina C. 2015. *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel*. Henry Holt.

Montgomery D.R., Biklé A. 2015. *The Hidden Half of Nature: The Microbial Roots of Life and Health*. WW Norton & Company.