

KILLING THE KOALA AND POISONING THE PRAIRIE

Australia, America, and the Environment

Corey J. A. Bradshaw and Paul R. Ehrlich

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AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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Killing the Koala and Poisoning the Prairie

*For K. & little C., Anne & Lisa—
who make life worthwhile*

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*Australia and the United States play somewhat different roles in both problems and
solutions, but are firm allies in attacking civilization’s life-support systems*

*What needs to be done is obvious: Empower women, reduce overconsumption by the
rich, treat the symptoms, fix the energy problem, completely revise disastrous capitalist
economic systems, greatly improve national and trans(inter)national governance
frameworks and institutions, revamp education, separate religion and state, and base
policies on evidence, not faith*

Laud the good guys and shame the bad, and end the history hangover

Parting words

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Map of Australian states and major cities.

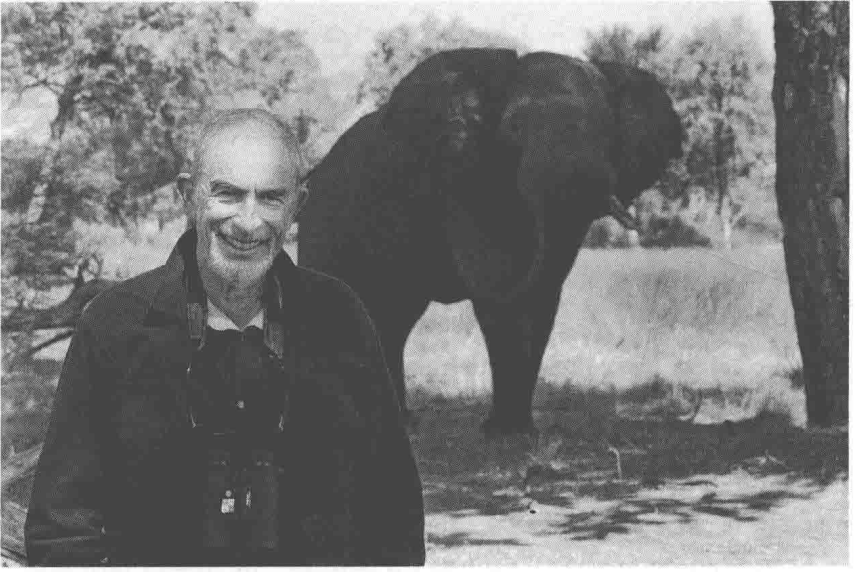


Map of United States and major cities mentioned in the text.

Preface

For much of the last century, Australia, like many other nations, looked at the United States from afar in a sort of confused awe. America's seemingly endless wealth, the can-do-anything-no-matter-how-crazy attitude, and its scientific and technological prowess and military power made little old Australia feel far away and inadequate. Another source of Australian fascination concerns US politics—no matter how much disdain Australians can generate for their own politicians, they always seem to cheer up a little when they see just how crazy American politics can get. For most Americans, Australia probably does not even rate on the foreign Richter scale (which unfortunately represents their attitude to almost every other nation), apart from some vague notion of bouncy, pouched animals, crocodile hunters, and endless deserts and beaches filled with countless dangerous, pointy, and poisonous creatures. Australians, on the other hand, have been spoon-fed a large amount of pop-culture drivel from American television and movies, and so most have at least a superficial knowledge of what appears to make—or fails to make—the United States tick.

In reality, the relationship between the two countries is profound on many cultural, political, and military levels. Australia and the United States bonded during the Second World War; for the first two years of the war, the Australian Army fought in Greece, Crete, and the western desert. The “diggers,” as Aussie troops are known, were heavily engaged fighting Nazis when the Japanese struck southward in 1942. Australia seemed very much exposed, as the Japanese triumphed seemingly everywhere, even capturing the British Empire's “eastern Gibraltar” at Singapore (which had welcomed units of the Royal Australian Air Force a year before¹) in mid-February 1942 in a brilliant and brutal campaign. But the American strategic naval victory at the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 4–8 blunted the Japanese advance and



P.R.E. in Botswana. African elephants are in deep trouble because of the ivory trade, but this one in the Okavango delta of Botswana just seems curious about biologists. Photo by John Schroeder.

kept the sea lanes to the east open, thus allowing US troops and supplies to reach Australia. Like the United States, Australia has only been directly assaulted once since 1900—also by the Japanese—with an aerial bombing campaign in 1942 on its most northern city, Darwin.

The Americans were generally welcomed to Australia with open arms as a bulwark against invasion, despite occasional violent disagreements over who should be dating Australian women. A very friendly attitude of Australians toward Americans persisted—it was obvious to Paul (henceforth P.R.E.) and his wife and collaborator, Anne, when they spent a delightful sabbatical year in Sydney in 1965–66 that led to lifelong friendships and many returns to Australia. Today Australia still looks to the US military to protect its interests in Southeast Asia,² much to the chagrin of Australia's major trading partner, China. Any Australians who have traveled to the United States have probably experienced a similar sense of camaraderie and acceptance, especially when speaking, apart from being asked incessantly to repeat their requests.

When we met, we discovered immediately that beyond sharing a



C.J.A.B. on Macquarie Island in the Southern Ocean. C.J.A.B. once studied elephant seal populations and was based at Macquarie Island station for four years. This seven-year-old female is fast asleep from anesthetics for measurement. Photo by Michele Thums.

deep appreciation of good wine and erudite company, we also were fascinated by the similarities and differences of our two nations (Paul, United States; Corey, Australia), which happened to be the two nations we both knew best. We have observed the similarities and differences of Australia and the United States firsthand. We see that our countries are friends, but that they do not necessarily learn from each other's mistakes—in fact, recent history suggests that we do exactly the opposite and parrot each other's failures. The eyes we see through are trained as those of environmental scientists and evolutionary biologists, and we both have beautiful wives (only one each), brilliant daughters (again, only one each), and the reputations of being gentle

souls who strive never to express a strong opinion or give offense. If you believe that last clause, you should put this book down and go have a glass of wine instead. In a series of conversations enlivened and lubricated by some lovely wine at Ngeringa Vineyards³ in South Australia, we came up with the idea of comparing and contrasting the environmental pasts and futures of our homelands, something that deeply interested, concerned, and stimulated us both. Then it occurred to us that we could combine that enterprise with an opportunity to tell people the unvarnished *Truth*—in other words, our personal opinions backed up by a substantial body of scientific evidence—about the human predicament: the perfect storm of problems confronting civilization. That was the genesis of this book.

Prologue

Do you believe that our universe containing some hundreds of billions of galaxies made of perhaps 300,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (300 sextillion) stars was created some 6,000 years ago by a supernatural entity that retains a strong interest in your sex life? Do you feel that people with dark skin are genetically inferior to those with beige skin? Do you think that scientists are perpetrating a global-scale climate-change hoax? Do you agree with the *Wall Street Journal* economists who think that the human population and the economy can grow forever? Do you idolize Rupert Murdoch for his pursuit of truth in the media? Do you believe that women should be submissive to men? Do you think that environmentalism is a greenie, communist plot to bring down capitalism? Do you feel that worrying about species' extinctions is an unnecessary distraction from society's "real" problems? Did you learn in school that the Boston Tea Party was "anti-government"? Do you think that Australia is a small country in Europe?

If so, you should buy this book, but be prepared to become skeptical about many of your most cherished ideas. At first you might just be enraged, because it has been written by two scientists who are sufficiently furious at the state of our global environment and society to forget about political correctness. We are ecologists who are willing, even eager, to disagree with you on all the points listed above, and we unashamedly attempt to recruit you into the growing mass of people who are determined to divert society from its "business as usual" path toward disaster. We are friends who both know and love Australia and the United States, and feel like jilted lovers (well, not to each other). We are fed up—nay, disgusted—with the way politicians and the press ignore the realities that civilization is sliding toward irreversible damage, that universities are not providing any leadership to change our course to destruction, and that too many of our academic colleagues