

11. The Importance of a Strong Relationship with Nature

Residents are more likely to be motivated to pursue individual actions that protect the environment or support public policies that mitigate greenhouse gas pollution, if they feel connected to the natural world. Several speakers addressed this theme.

Gail Mackay spoke to the importance of each of us having a relationship with nature and the land, if we are going to protect our future. She particularly focused on promoting youth's relationship to the land as a way to help them retain hope in the face of climate change. She described how the universal experience of awe is an awareness of a power beyond human comprehension. "Self-knowledge in relationship to the land helps a person feel comfort and serenity of being", Gail said.

Gail emphasized that as parents, teachers and mentors we can offer youth the experience of being in nature, so they may interpret awe in their own way. We can make time for them to experience solace in nature, and give them respite from a digital environment. She suggested we need to trust nature to teach them, and to trust youth's yearning for self-knowledge and their energy-charged disposition to fulfill the responsibilities of their stage of life. "We can give youth the chance to press the limits of their energy and abilities. We can provide opportunities for them to do work and take action that is recognized and celebrated as significant and valuable." Gail cited the examples of the kind of work that is being done in educational programs such as Ecoquest and Ecology Camps at the University of Saskatchewan.

Anthony MacKay, a grade eight student in the Ecoquest program, presented his ideas about the importance of ecological education and connecting with nature. He talked about his experience of hands-on learning about the Earth, beginning in preschool where they had weekly visits from a naturalist, an assortment of class pets, and regular field trips to learn in the natural environment.

Anthony talked about the Ecoquest way of learning, where the learning environment is frequently outside the formal classroom. He explained how an ecological education helps a person to know how they can interact in an ecosystem without causing harm to other species. Learning about nature also means learning how not to fear animals or the environment, he said. He reminded the hearings of a quotation by Chief Dan George, who wrote "what you do not know, you will fear. What one fears, one destroys."

Anthony MacKay emphasized that "an ecological education helps a person feel connected to a place as their physical and spiritual home. Our generation, by learning more about nature through ecological education, may help the effort to slow the destruction of the environment which we are all dependent upon", he concluded.

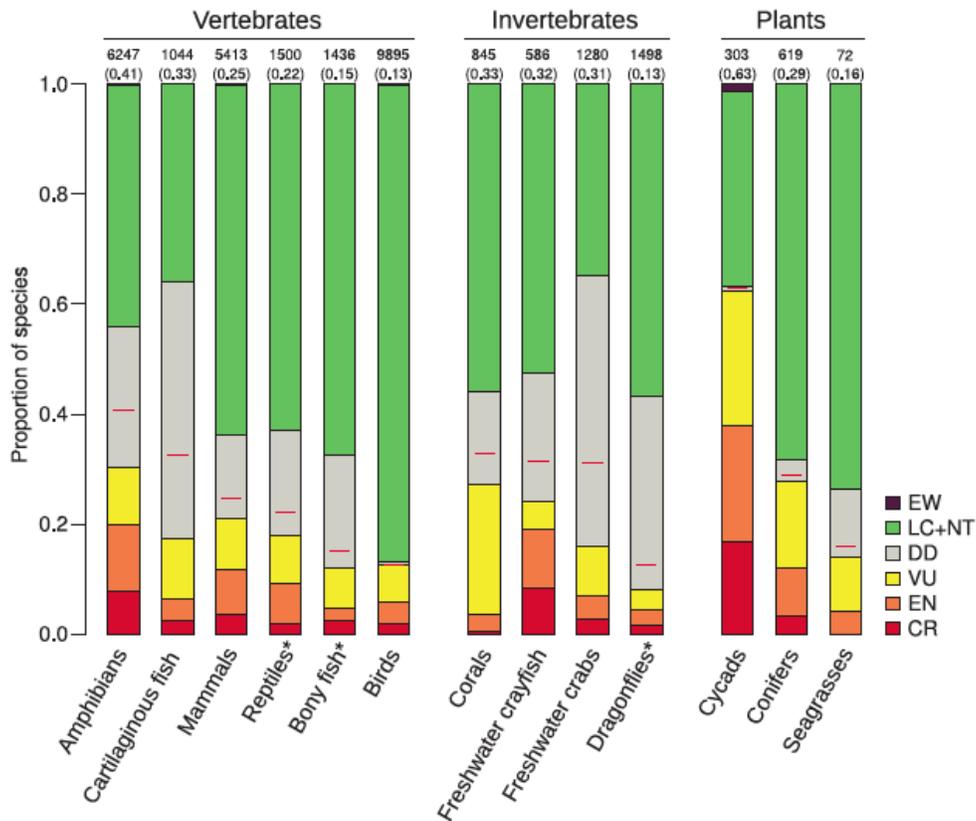


Fig. 1. The proportion of vertebrate species in different Red List categories compared with completely (or representatively) assessed invertebrate and plant taxa on the 2010 IUCN Red List (15). EW, Extinct in the Wild; CR, Critically Endangered; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient. Extinct species are excluded. Taxa are ordered according to the estimated percentage (shown by horizontal red lines and given in parentheses at tops of bars) of extant species considered Threatened if Data Deficient species are Threatened in the same proportion as data-sufficient species. Numbers above the bars represent numbers of extant species assessed in the group; asterisks indicate those groups in which estimates are derived from a randomized sampling approach.

SLIDE PRESENTED TO THE CITIZEN HEARINGS BY CANDACE SAVAGE

Candace Savage pointed out that the human population of the Earth is becoming increasingly urbanized. Canada is no exception. 81% of Canadians now live in urban areas. In the urbanization process, there is a risk that citizens can become cut off from nature, and therefore care less about preserving it.

Candace drew our attention to the rapid increase in the number of species that are threatened with extinction due to a variety of environmental factors including fragmentation of habitat, pesticide use and climate change. The numbers are deeply concerning as the chart below illustrates.

Candace Savage therefore proposed that residents of Saskatoon attach special importance to Saskatoon becoming a more ‘nature-friendly city’ – a community where residents are fully aware that they rely on the natural world for their wellbeing. Those residents in turn will care about the consequences of climate change for our planet, and work to prevent it.

“We already know that
what happens to life on Earth
will depend on how people live
in cities.”

--Oliver Hillel, Montreal
UN Secretariat of the Convention of Biodiversity,
Feb. 17, 2013

SLIDE PRESENTED TO THE HEARINGS BY CANDACE SAVAGE

A nature-friendly city will encourage human powered transport – “you need to be on your bike or walking to experience nature”, Candace said. **A nature friendly city will support more home gardens, more community gardens, more green roofs, more planting of street trees, more use of natural drainage, and more natural habitat for birds and wild bees. These actions help to preserve biodiversity and simultaneously help to sequester carbon,** thus reducing atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions.



SLIDE PRESENTED TO THE HEARINGS BY CANDACE SAVAGE