

The nature of change

The canary is dying, but has anyone noticed?



GARETH PATTERSON AND A FRIEND

Never before has there been so much international focus on environment. The challenges of climate change and the effects of global warming has galvanised huge public environmental awareness worldwide. We are witnessing extreme weather conditions, flooding, severe storms, warmth when there should be coolness, droughts, and the glaciers are melting. Finally, it seems humankind is recognising that when we speak about environment, we are not speaking about an external environment, about a Nature separate from ourselves, but about ourselves as well. We are recognising that we, humankind are not separate from Nature, but are a part of the environment, and with climate change we are all in it together, like it or not. There is no escaping this fact. The words of Chief Seathl (popularly known as Chief Seattle) have never rang louder than today - all things are connected. Whatever befalls the Earth, befalls the sons of the Earth. And sadly it has taken so long for us to come to the conclusion of this connectedness, or rather realised the responsibility that

comes with this connectedness.

Is this the millennium melt down, or maybe, the time of change and atonement by humankind? Not only are we realising that humankind is not separate from Nature, but we are also understanding we are just a single species amongst the myriad of life on this planet. A humbling fact is that while Nature can survive without us, we definitely cannot survive without the intricate processes of Nature. Are we to become as a species, an evolutionary firework, burning brightly and loudly at the beginning, then spluttering, and choking before petering out? Why has it taken so long to heed the warning signs of impending danger? Did the ever rising number of endangered species tell us nothing? We kill the forests and all their layered intricate workings, workings that contain more than half of the Earth's species. The forests have been described as the most creative laboratories on earth, providing over half the pharmaceutical products used by humankind. Yet we destroy them. The great apes of the world could become extinct in the wilds within a single chim-

panzee's lifetime, which is about fifty years. The world's oceans are being depleted. Industrial fishing has wiped out perhaps as much as 90% of large predatory fish species such as the biggest types of tuna. Right now the fate of the whales, big cats, elephants and many other species are increasingly becoming bargaining chips on the gaming board of global economics and international pawn-playing politics.

And because of social factors such as stress, feelings of worthlessness and loneliness of spirit, we are now, quite literally, killing ourselves. Suicides amongst our teenagers, the loudest cry for help of them all, have reached almost epidemic proportions in today's world.

All these tragic things are happening. I feel strongly though and embrace, the stirrings of discontentment within civil society today, and the collective demand for social and ecological sense to prevail. We the world over, have simply had enough. This is the dawning of an age of change from within our human hearts. Never before have we as individuals, or as a collective group, had such an opportunity to demand that our voices be heard strongly, forcefully. Politicians and big business of an outdated order are now skating on the flimsy ice of their own making.

Our platform, in contrast is solid though. Simply because our very survival depends on it... B&E

Gareth Patterson inherited the moniker of "Father of the Lions" from his mentor, the original 'Lion Man of Africa', George Adamson. Patterson's love affair with lions began in the Tuli bushlands in Botswana, where he rehabilitated lions into the wild. While perusing his passion to save the 'king of beasts', he has written several books and spread the word through his lectures as well. Of late, Gareth has also been working to save the elusive Knysna elephants.