
Viewpoints

As if the rest of life mattered

Joe Gray

Recently I was skimming through the *Principles of Political Economy with some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*, written by John Stuart Mill in 1848. In it, I came across a passage that I thought remains an apt observation on the state of the landscape:

Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture ploughed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture.

In the 168 years that have passed since this passage

was written, society has, in some areas, made progress towards a state of harmony with nature (we have, for instance, become somewhat more tolerant of raptors). However, the expanding human population and our growing appetite for resources bring with them increasing demands for new housing, food production, and other land uses that are generally detrimental to non-human species.

As a naturalist – having developed a deep love of the natural world, born of time spent marvelling at its beauty and intricacy – I am more aware of this than most. And as a naturalist I feel compelled to fight for the rest of nature. But how can I go about this?

I can make donations. I can volunteer. I can sign petitions. I can write to my MP. Better still, if I am feeling bold enough, I can speak out in my everyday conversations against the problems being faced by the rest of the natural world. Society needs to shake its blind spot.

I can also try to lead by example and behave and make choices – to paraphrase conservationist Eileen Crist – *as if the rest of life mattered*.