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The impact that natural disasters have brought upon human beings' lives has been extensively discussed the last couple of decades, but the influence it has had on Houston wildlife has not been discussed with the same focus. This issue came to mind when considering other things that are affected through natural disasters and environmental problems, and of course wildlife suffers some of the biggest consequences. This inspired me to figure out if environmental conservation in Houston has made an impact wildlife preservation. I will focus on environmental issues that have caused wildlife to disappear or become endangered and answering why it ended up happening. While contemplating this issue, there is a bigger question coming into play; should animals be treated morally equal to humans? Humans take animal lives for granted, and while most of society values them to some degree, the majority value them less than what they value a human life. I knew I would be combining this philosophical debate with environmental issues pertaining to wildlife, and that's why I decided that focusing on Australia's environmental issues, bringing in research from the Great Barrier Reef bleaching, to help me compare the drastic effects that come when environmental conservation isn't a top priority. I used Australia's Great Barrier Reef in order to mirror the environmental issues going on in the United States, where they mirror the worst environmental case-scenarios possible.

Houston Bayous have not been here as long as the Great Barrier Reef, which was formed around 500,000 years ago, but the fact is that the Great Barrier Reef is rapidly being destroyed

from human interaction in the area. According to “What Happens If All the Coral Reefs Die?”, Kevin Loria states that “overfishing has wiped out healthy food chains”, “boats dragging anchors and nets – or just scraping along the sea floor – have damaged or destroyed reefs.”, “pollution from agriculture and runoff from cities”, but most importantly “human-caused greenhouse gas emissions”. The gas emissions come from “the burning of fossil fuels” which have “warmed the planet.” The “Earth’s oceans have absorbed majority of that heat”, and this is causing corals to “lose the components that give them color and help them produce food.” Just from this article, I know Australia’s environmental issues are perfect for my topic because it seems like there is real-world problems occurring from how late they realized their environmental issues. This ties in with Houston Bayous because this could become a potential threat to the Gulf Coast if we continue to release waste into bayous, or just by the amount of human interaction we have with the wildlife. The Great Barrier Reef was home to a diverse number of animals, from sharks and whales, to turtles and starfish, but as of 2016, 50% of the reef has been affected by the bleaching, killing off many animals and plants living in the area. This is just a consequence of neglect in the Great Barrier Reef, yet it parallels Houston based on the amount of pollution our city releases into a grand scale. Did humans not value the animals in the area enough to establish rules protecting animals and limiting how much environmental waste humans made? It seems like ignorance plays a big issue with these questions, because there is always self-awareness when it comes to the destruction of nature. We decide to kill animals for food because it’s for human survival, but humans subconsciously know the harmful toxins we release into nature will eventually hurt us, yet we choose to ignore it because it’s not a problem in present time. Once they start to see bigger consequences, humans seem to place more importance on the issue of environmental conservation, and this can be proven through Australia’s problem. Once they saw

the Great Barrier Reef bleaching, they started to make it a higher priority in their political agendas. Loria states “ if we don’t deal with the problem soon, we should think about what widespread ocean ecosystem collapse will look like and mean for humanity”, and this bring me back to the same question: Do humans value themselves superior to every other species, and is it morally correct?

For example, in “Texas Rivers”, “the fish hatchery became a concern after fish production increased and caused “undesirable discharges.” (Archival Research Paper, pg. 2) After it became a pressing matter, they decided to get rid of the fish hatchery, and this was important in my research process because it showed that conservation efforts were more towards the appearance of the bayou, than for the preservation of wildlife surrounding the area. This was such an important observation because it allows me to place the importance of wildlife into a spectrum, where we value humans over every other category, then Bayou conservation seems to be above Wildlife preservation. It makes me question to what extent we should value bayou conservation in order to save wildlife that get endangered from the chemical changes that undergo when cleaning up bayous.

In her article “Vulnerability, Equality, and Animals”, Maneesha Deckha explains that “two types of theories” which “dominate traditional animal equality arguments.” (pg.52) One theory, which is “Peter Singer’s utilitarian theory”, makes a claim in his argument that “prejudice based on species is morally equivalent to prejudice based on race or sex.” (pg.52) There is usually “human preference for humans” based on “biological distinction”. If animals are “sentient and have the capacity for pleasure and suffering” then they should be “equally considered.” This whole theory determined that the “capacity that entitles a being to moral consideration is sentience.” The other theory, “Subjects-of-a-life” theory by Tom Reagan, states

that “beings that have certain mental abilities including “beliefs and desires; perception, memory, and a sense of the future... and emotional life... preference...” Reagan believed “most mammals past their first year of life would meet this “subject-of-a-life” criteria. Both theories suggested that animals are “entitled to moral regard” based on “reasoning and self-aware “subject of life” or as a sentient being.” But many scholars have critiqued the “sameness logic” both theories attempt to use; creating a “hierarchy among non-humans” and “reduces the diversity of non-human life.” I completely agree with the scholars presented in this article; it seems like the sameness logic excludes certain non-humans, giving them less importance overall. Certain traits and mannerisms should not be the only reasoning behind one animal having rights, and the other one left without any protection. There is always a way to separate preferences, and just like slavery was once based on “biological traits”, humans can easily separate any group from other groups by just creating an argument around certain factors. Therefore, I could argue against both theories, but I realize we can not give the same type of rights to animals as humans if they don’t have the same capacity of intelligence and emotion as us. I wouldn’t exactly say they need the same type of rights humans have, but protection and preservation could be enough for their species to thrive in peace. After researching all of this, it seems like wild animals are not able to have the same emotions as us, and therefore should not have the same rights as humans. I do think that animal rights should be valued more than the appearance of a bayou, just because those animal’s lives matter too.

Work Citations

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