



Save The Plants

The threat to the existence of many wild animals is now widely recognized, but not many people are aware that plants are also in danger. In fact, the number of plants threatened with extinction is estimated at 25,000 compared to some 5,000 animals.

Large areas of desert around the world bear testimony to Man's destruction of vegetation. Most of the biblical 'land of milk and honey' in the Middle East is now desert or is being rehabilitated at great expense. Many bare and eroded lands around the Mediterranean once supported forests. In many parts of Africa and India cattle and goats wander the stony plains eating up any scrap of green that manages to appear on what were once good pastures. Overgrazing by domestic and feral stock is, in fact, the greatest menace to plants, although 'raids' by botanists and other enthusiasts on some beautiful plants have sometimes exacted a serious toll on rare species.

Perhaps people forget that all our domestic crops and garden flowers spring from wild stock. Just as important is the fact that plants provide a high proportion of medicines in modern use. Who knows what secrets of value to mankind are still locked away among plants awaiting discovery.

When it comes to food, Man has worked through the centuries developing the strains of wheat, rice, barley and other crops from wild varieties. Having used the primitive stocks, Man neglects them and the result today is that many are being lost as natural vegetation is cleared for cultivation. Does it matter? Yes! The experts are already sounding warnings that new varieties which are helping to feed our growing numbers are often less resistant to disease, and that it may be only reaching back to genes in the wild stocks that diseases can be fought.

A large proportion of our diet is supplied by four cereals - wheat, rice, maize and sorghum. Imagine, if you can, the scope of the disaster if one of these should fail or if some new virulent disease should appear with which we are unable to cope in time. In a very real sense the fate of the human species depends on our ability to understand and exploit the gene bank of cultivated plants.

In Britain alone there are over sixty-one plants that have become so rare that they are protected by law.

Some of these are:

Alpine gentian



Killarney fern

Spiked speedwell

Oblong woodsia

Ghost orchid

Snowdon Lily

Blue heath

Diapensia

Wild gladiolus

Red helleborine

Alpine woodsia

Mezereon

Monkey orchid

Tufted saxifrage

Alpine sow-thistle

Drooping saxifrage

Spring gentian



Cheddar Pink

Ladies Slipper Orchid

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