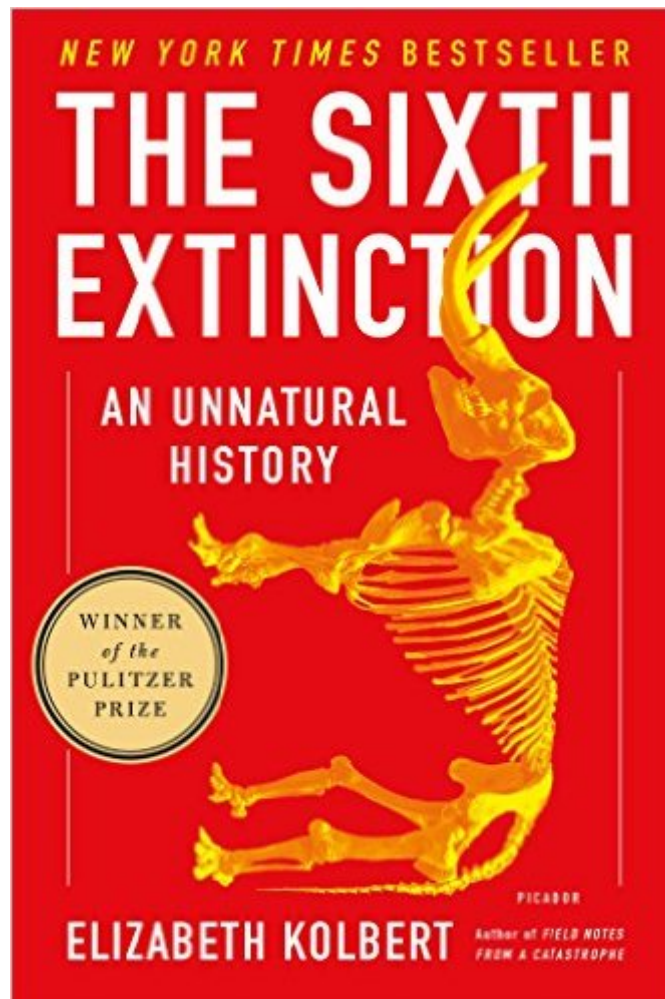


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The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History



Synopsis

WINNER OF THE PULITZER PRIZE ONE OF THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW'S 10 BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER A NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD FINALIST A major book about the future of the world, blending intellectual and natural history and field reporting into a powerful account of the mass extinction unfolding before our eyes. Over the last half-billion years, there have been five mass extinctions, when the diversity of life on earth suddenly and dramatically contracted. Scientists around the world are currently monitoring the sixth extinction, predicted to be the most devastating extinction event since the asteroid impact that wiped out the dinosaurs. This time around, the cataclysm is us. In prose that is at once frank, entertaining, and deeply informed, New Yorker writer Elizabeth Kolbert tells us why and how human beings have altered life on the planet in a way no species has before. Interweaving research in half a dozen disciplines, descriptions of the fascinating species that have already been lost, and the history of extinction as a concept, Kolbert provides a moving and comprehensive account of the disappearances occurring before our very eyes. She shows that the sixth extinction is likely to be mankind's most lasting legacy, compelling us to rethink the fundamental question of what it means to be human.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a former invertebrate paleobiologist, "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History" is the book I have been waiting for years to be written. It is a clarion call for ending the current mass extinction that we humans are causing, and a book that should be, according to Scientific American, "this era's

galvanizing text", worthy of comparison with Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring". It is also a vastly superior popular science book than last year's "Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction" written by IO9 science editor Annalee Newitz, simply because Elizabeth Kolbert, a staff writer at The New Yorker, has done a superlative job in science reporting, accurately reporting and interpreting work done by some of the most notable researchers of our time studying mass extinctions, whether it is research from Berkeley vertebrate paleobiologist Anthony Barnosky (The lead author of a 2011 Nature paper estimating that current extinction rates are equivalent to those of the five great mass extinctions recognized from the fossil record; the terminal Ordovician, terminal Permian, terminal Triassic and the terminal Cretaceous; the latter in which non-avian dinosaurs became extinct.) or American Museum of Natural History curator of invertebrate paleontology Neil Landman, a noted researcher of Cretaceous ammonites, or evolutionary geneticist and anthropologist Svante Paabo, whose team is sequencing the entire Neanderthal genome and recognized the existence of another late Pleistocene hominid species, the Denisovans, from genomic material in a fragment of a finger bone found in a Siberian cave.

"The Sixth Extinction" is one of many fundamentally flawed books on climate change; yet I still recommend people read this book. That's because of the dearth of well-done climate change books coupled to the importance of developing public literacy on climate change. You would think that perhaps humanity's greatest contemporaneous threat would result in too many great books to feasibly read. E.g., consider all the great books published around 2009 honoring 150 years since Charles Darwin published "On the Origin of Species". I read seven in that period. Yet with climate change we too often suffer through the amateurish (Overheated: The Human Cost of Climate Change by Guzman, Andrew T. [2013]), the overwrought (Storms of My Grandchildren; The Truth About the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity (Chinese Edition)), and here a book that insufficiently covers the very topic referenced in the title - "The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History". Here's what Elizabeth Kolbert does well: ' Defines mass extinctions relative to the background extinction rate.' Succinctly explains past mass extinction rates to help us better appreciate individual studies that are now being published regarding current findings.' Provides some good examples of current extinctions that also illustrate why these are harbingers to far worse in the near future.

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