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"Ecologists, Environmentalists, Experts, and the Invasion of the 'Second Greatest Threat'"

Chew, Matthew K.

Chew, Matthew K. “Ecologists, Environmentalists, Experts, and the Invasion of the ‘Second Greatest Threat’.” *International Review of Environmental History*, 1 (2015): 17-40. doi: 10.22459/IREH.01.2015 .

The commonplace, quantitative assertion that “invasions” of exotic (introduced) organisms constitute the “second greatest threat” of species extinction debuted in Edward O. Wilson’s 1992 book, *The Diversity of Life.* Based only on three interrelated publications summarising concerns about the conservation status of North American freshwater fishes, Wilson laconically extended the claim to planetary significance. This inspired the most-cited article ever published in the American journal *BioScience,* subsequently underpinning thousands of peer-reviewed publications, government reports, academic and popular books, commentaries, and news stories. While carefully recounting the origin, promotion, and deployment of the “second greatest threat,” I argue that its uncritical acceptance exemplifies confirmation bias in scientific advocacy: an overextended claim reflexively embraced by conservation practitioners and lay environmentalists because it apparently corroborated one particular, widely shared dismay about modern society’s regrettable effects on nature. (Text from author’s abstract)

International Review of Environmental History takes an interdisciplinary and global approach to environmental history, across different methodologies, nations, and time-scales. It recognizes the importance of locality in understanding global processes and publishes on all thematic and geographic topics of environmental history, especially encouraging articles on and from the ‘global south’. It is edited by James Beattie and published by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

Download:
PDF: https://www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/02_chew.pdf

Further readings:

- Beinart, William. "Bio-invasions, Biodiversity, and Biocultural Diversity: Some Problems with These Concepts for

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Historians." In: "The Edges of Environmental History: Honouring Jane Carruthers," edited by Christof Mauch and Libby Robin. Special issue, *RCC Perspectives*1 (2014): 75–80.
- Peretti, Jonah H. "Nativism and Nature: Rethinking Biological Invasion." *Environmental Values* 7, no. 2 (1998): 183–92. doi:10.3197/096327198129341537.

Related links:

- Journal Website at the Australian National University Press https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/international-review-environmental-history-volume-1-2015

Websites linked in this text:

- http://dx.doi.org/10.22459/IREH.01.2015

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