

2014 Volkswagen Golf TDI - Boston \$11,500 SHOP NOW	2012 Audi A3 2.0 TDI Premium Plus Wagon FWD - Boston \$15,890 SHOP NOW	2015 Volkswagen Golf TDI SEL - Boston \$15,900 SHOP NOW
--	---	--

Opinion

TRAFFIC ALERT

Highway 99 is closed. Prepare for delays during your morning commute.

Pope Francis' environmental encyclical cannot be ignored



Originally published September 19, 2015 at 4:01 pm Updated September 21, 2015 at 2:50 pm



Seattle Times illustration

2012 Audi A... \$15,890	2014 Volksw... \$11,500	2017 Volks... \$22,455
2013 Volks... \$11,495	2012 Volksw... \$9,995	2011 Volks... \$7,795
2010 Volks... \$8,700	2010 Volksw... \$4,499	2012 Volks... \$8,000
2015 Volks... \$14,475	2013 Volksw... \$11,337	2017 Volks... \$20,488
2008 Volvo... \$7,150	2015 Volksw... \$15,900	

Our lives are connected with every other species on Earth and we cannot live without them.

By [Charles C. Davis](#) and [Aaron M. Ellison](#)

Special to The Times

IT is easily forgotten as we spend our days in cities and offices, in front of our computers or our clients, and are caught up in social networks: We are but one leaf on the much larger Tree of Life.

In Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, "Laudato si'" ("Praise be to you"), the pope reminds us of the intrinsic rights of nonhuman species and our moral and ethical obligation to protect them. But as long as we refer to other organisms as "resources" and not beings, they will continue to be neglected, exploited or abused. As long as we disregard the intrinsic value of other species, the leaves of the Tree of Life will continue to fall, its branches will be cut down and eventually the trunk that supports us all may rot and disappear.

Our lives are intimately connected with those of every other species and we cannot live without them. The Earth's wealth of biodiversity delivers priceless ecosystem services. Coral reefs and mangrove forests protect our coasts from the storms that are increasing in frequency and intensity. Birds, bees, and even beetles, flies and ants pollinate our crops.

As these species disappear, people in many countries now perform their work to ensure plentiful crops of fruit. The plants of our forests and fields create the air we breathe. And thousands of organisms, including the smallest microbes, are the source of more than 70 percent of the proven and newly discovered drugs that treat debilitating diseases such as cancer.

Most Read Opinion Stories

- 1 Engage to save Seattle neighborhoods | Editorial
- 2 Trump and Pelosi: The legacies of their fathers | Op-Ed
- 3 William Barr's welcome pledge to protect Mueller | Editorial
- 4 Why I fly the flag upside down | My Take
- 5 Abandon citizenship question on census | Editorial

Related guest opinion: Pope Francis remains weak on child sex abuse

We live in the Anthropocene, defined as the period of time that started when humans began to significantly alter the ecosystems of the Earth. We have inherited our current predicament from generations past. Now it is up to us, and generations to come, to rediscover the intrinsic value of nature's biodiversity and stop what is known as the sixth mass extinction.

In recent weeks, we have seen well-deserved attention by world leaders, the media and the general public to the pope's encyclical, particularly with respect to climate change. However, to bring such a singular focus to this revolutionary document is to overlook the broader issues it encompasses. As biologists, we feel that in the ensuing discussion, one of the cornerstones of the encyclical has been missed — the tremendous loss of our planet's biodiversity at the hands of humans.

Rapid change in the Earth's climate is undeniably a major and pressing concern of our time. The pope reiterates the broad scientific consensus that human actions are its primary cause. But regardless of what or who is responsible for climate change, it is of great consequence to our cities, coasts, our health and way of life, and is also a threat to the incredible diversity of species, from the largest whales and redwoods to the smallest microbes with which we share this planet — our only home.

A defining feature of the Anthropocene is the rapid extinction of nonhuman species. As people left Africa and migrated to new regions — including Australia, Eurasia, the Americas and even the most remote islands in the Pacific Ocean — species that had inhabited these places for millions of years disappeared. Over the last century alone, vertebrates, which include our closest relatives and nearly all of the animals that we rely on for food, fibers and farm labor have gone extinct at a rate more than 100 times faster

than the natural (or “background”) extinction rate that has prevailed since life first emerged on Earth more than 3.5 billion years ago.

Pope Francis recalls for us that St. Francis of Assisi said that “each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection.” Similarly, St. Bonaventure would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of “brother” or “sister.” These brothers and sisters are the species with which we share our planet.



2012 Audi A3...	2014 Volkswa...	2011 Volksw...
\$15,890	\$11,500	\$7,795
2010 Volksw...	2012 Volkswa...	
\$8,700	\$8,000	

As good shepherds of this world, we would do well and what is morally right to heed the pope’s words to “protect the Earth and ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations.” Time is running out.

Charles C. Davis is professor of organismic and evolutionary biology at Harvard University and director of the Harvard University Herbaria. Aaron M. Ellison is the senior research fellow in ecology at Harvard University and author of “A Field Guide to the Ants of New England.” On Twitter: [@AMaxEll17](#)

 [View 36 Comments](#)

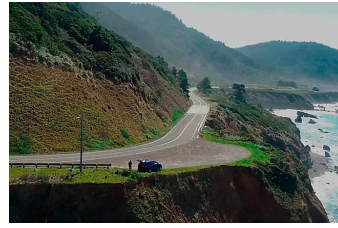
Recommended in



Tim Tebow
announces
engagement to
former...



Trump invokes one
of the worst Native
American...



Before Harts
plunged off cliff,
strain dogged...



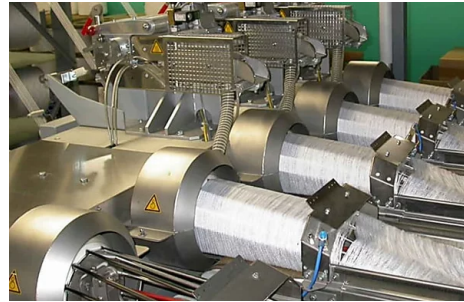
Dear MacKenzie
Bezos: You're rich.
You're free...

Around the Web



These New Sedans Are
Incredible. See What

Sponsored | Yahoo! Search



You'll Want Better Bed
Sheets After Reading

Sponsored | homelife tips.net



Best Places To Retire In
Each State 2018

Sponsored | Forbes



If Your Dog Eats
Grass (Do This

Sponsored | Health
Headlines



2018 Emmy
Awards: The Most

Sponsored | Livingly



Want The Secret
To 'Celebrity

Sponsored |
special.trysnow.com



[Photos] Millions
Are Grieving Over

Sponsored | Direct Expose



2nd man dies at California home of

The Seattle Times



53-year-old man fatally shot in White Center is

The Seattle Times



Lewinsky storms offstage after ‘off limits’ Clinton

The Seattle Times

2014 Volk...	2012 Audi...	2011 Volk...	2013 Volk...	2012 Volk...	2008 Volv
\$11,500	\$15,890	\$7,795	\$11,495	\$8,000	\$7,150

- Contact ▼
- About the company ▼
- Advertise ▼
- Subscriber Services ▼
- Today’s Front Page
- f Facebook
- 🐦 Twitter