“For the past several billion years evolution on Earth has been driven by small-scale incremental forces, such as sexual selection, punctuated by cosmic-scale disruptions — plate tectonics, planetary geochemistry, global climate shifts, and even extraterrestrial asteroids. Sometime in the last century that changed. Today the guiding hand of natural selection is unmistakably human, with potentially earth-shaking consequences.

The fossil record and contemporary field studies suggest that the average rate of extinction over the past hundred million years has hovered at several species per year. Today the extinction rate surpasses 3,000 species per year and is accelerating rapidly; it may soon reach the tens of thousands. In contrast, new species are appearing at a rate of less than one per year.

Over the next 100 years or so as many as half of the Earth’s species, representing a quarter of the planet’s genetic stock, will functionally if not completely disappear. The land and the oceans will continue to teem with life, but it will be a peculiarly homogenized assemblage of organisms unnaturally selected for their compatibility with one fundamental force: us.

Nothing — not national or international laws, global bioreserves, local sustainability schemes, nor even ‘wildlands’ fantasies — can change the current course. The broad path for biological evolution is now set for the next several million years. And in this sense the extinction crisis — the race to save the composition, structure, and organization of biodiversity as it exists today — is over, and we have lost.”

—Stephen M. Meyer, Massachusetts Institute of Technology