



The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History

By Elizabeth Kolbert

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ONE OF THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BOOK REVIEW'S 10 BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR

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 a 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 *The Sixth Extinction*, two-time winner of the National Magazine Award and *New Yorker* writer Elizabeth Kolbert draws on the work of scores of researchers in half a dozen disciplines, accompanying many of them into the field: geologists who study deep ocean cores, botanists who follow the tree line as it climbs up the Andes, marine biologists who dive off the Great Barrier Reef. She introduces us to a dozen species, some already gone, others facing extinction, including the Panamanian golden frog, staghorn coral, the great auk, and the Sumatran rhino. Through these stories, Kolbert provides a moving account of the disappearances occurring all around us and traces the evolution of extinction as concept, from its first articulation by Georges Cuvier in revolutionary Paris up through the present day. The sixth extinction is likely to be mankind's most lasting legacy; as Kolbert observes, it compels us to rethink the fundamental question of what it means to be human.

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The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History By Elizabeth Kolbert Bibliography

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Editorial Review

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Starred Review It didn't take long for Homo sapiens to begin "reassembling the biosphere," observes Kolbert, a Heinz Award-winning New Yorker staff writer and author of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (2006). By burning fossil fuels, we are rapidly changing the atmosphere, the oceans, and the climate, forcing potentially millions of species into extinction. Five watershed events in the deep past decimated life on earth, hence the designation "Sixth Extinction" for today's human-propelled crisis. To lay the groundwork for understanding this massive die-off, Kolbert crisply tells the stories of such earlier losses as the American mastodon and the great auk and provides an orienting overview of evolutionary and ecological science. She then chronicles her adventures in the field with biologists, botanists, and geologists investigating the threats against amphibians, bats, coral, and rhinos. Intrepid and astute, Kolbert combines vivid, informed, and awe-struck descriptions of natural wonders, from rain forests to the Great Barrier Reef, and wryly amusing tales about such dicey situations as nearly grabbing onto a tree branch harboring a fist-sized tarantula, swimming among poisonous jellyfish, and venturing into a bat cave; each dispatch is laced with running explanations of urgent scientific inquiries and disquieting findings. Rendered with rare, resolute, and resounding clarity, Kolbert's compelling and enlightening report forthrightly addresses the most significant topic of our lives. --Donna Seaman

Review

"[*The Sixth Extinction*] is a wonderful book, and it makes very clear that big, abrupt changes can happen; they're not outside the realm of possibility. They have happened before, they can happen again." ?*President Barack Obama*

"Riveting . . . It is not possible to overstate the importance of Kolbert's book." ?*San Francisco Chronicle*

"Arresting . . . Ms. Kolbert shows in these pages that she can write with elegiac poetry about the vanishing creatures of this planet, but the real power of her book resides in the hard science and historical context she delivers here, documenting the mounting losses that human beings are leaving in their wake." ?*The New York Times*

"Surprisingly breezy, entirely engrossing, and frequently entertaining . . . Kolbert is a masterful, thought-provoking reporter." ?*The Boston Globe*

"Your view of the world will be fundamentally changed. . . . Kolbert is an astute observer, excellent explainer, and superb synthesizer, and even manages to find humor in her subject matter." ?*The Seattle Times*

"Powerful . . . An invaluable contribution to our understanding." ?*Al Gore, The New York Times Book Review*

"Natural scientists posit that there have been five extinction events in the Earth's history (think of the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs), and Kolbert makes a compelling case that human activity is leading to the sixth." ?*Bill Gates*

"[Kolbert] makes a page-turner out of even the most sober and scientifically demanding aspects of extinction." ?*New York Magazine*

“Ms. Kolbert's lively account is thought-provoking.” *?The Wall Street Journal*

“[Kolbert] grounds her stories in rigorous science and memorable characters past and present, building a case that a mass extinction is underway, whether we want to admit it or not.” *?Discover Magazine*

“Throughout her extensive and passionately collected research, Kolbert offers a highly readable, enlightening report on the global and historical impact of humans . . . a highly significant eye-opener rich in facts and enjoyment.” *?Kirkus (starred review)*

“The factoids Kolbert tosses off about nature's incredible variety--a frog that carries eggs in its stomach and gives birth through its mouth, a wood stork that cools off by defecating on its own legs--makes it heartbreakingly clear, without any heavy-handed sermonizing from the author, just how much we lose when an animal goes extinct. In the same way, her intrepid reporting from far-off places--Panama, Iceland, Italy, Scotland, Peru, the Amazonian rain forest of Brazil, and the remote one tree Island, off the coast of Australia--gives us a sense of the earth's vastness and beauty.” *?Bookforum*

“Kolbert accomplishes an amazing feat in her latest book, which superbly blends the depressing facts associated with rampant species extinctions and impending ecosystem collapse with stellar writing to produce a text that is accessible, witty, scientifically accurate, and impossible to put down.” *?Publishers Weekly (starred review)*

“Rendered with rare, resolute, and resounding clarity, Kolbert's compelling and enlightening report forthrightly addresses the most significant topic of our lives.” *?Booklist (starred review)*

“An epic, riveting story of our species that reads like a scientific thriller--only more terrifying because it is real. Like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction* is destined to become one of the most important and defining books of our time.” *?David Grann, author of The Lost City of Z*

“I tore through Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction* with a mix of awe and terror. Her long view of extinction excited my joy in life's diversity -- even as she made me aware how many species are currently at risk.” *?Dava Sobel, author of Longitude and Galileo's Daughter*

“With her usual lucid and lovely prose, Elizabeth Kolbert lays out the sad and gripping facts of our moment on earth: that we've become a geological force, driving vast swaths of creation over the brink. A remarkable addition to the literature of our haunted epoch.” *?Bill McKibben, author Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist*

“Elizabeth Kolbert's cautionary tale, *The Sixth Extinction*, offers us a cogent overview of a harrowing biological challenge. The reporting is exceptional, the contextualizing exemplary. Kolbert stands at the forefront of what it means to be a socially responsible American writer today.” *?Barry Lopez, author of Arctic Dreams*

“The sixth mass extinction is the biggest story on Earth, period, and Elizabeth Kolbert tells it with imagination, rigor, deep reporting, and a capacious curiosity about all the wondrous creatures and ecosystems that exist, or have existed, on our planet. The result is an important book full of love and loss.” *?David Quammen, author of The Song of the Dodo and Spillover*

“Elizabeth Kolbert writes with an aching beauty of the impact of our species on all the other forms of life known in this cold universe. The perspective is at once awe-inspiring, humbling and deeply necessary.” *?T.C. Boyle, author of San Miguel*

About the Author

Elizabeth Kolbert is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. She is the author of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*. She lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts, with her husband and children.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Rebecca Burks:

What do you with regards to book? It is not important together with you? Or just adding material when you require something to explain what yours problem? How about your extra time? Or are you busy man? If you don't have spare time to complete others business, it is make you feel bored faster. And you have time? What did you do? Everyone has many questions above. The doctor has to answer that question due to the fact just their can do this. It said that about book. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is correct. Because start from on guardería until university need that *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* to read.

Patricia Howard:

Reading can called mind hangout, why? Because if you are reading a book especially book entitled *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* your brain will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every aspect that maybe unknown for but surely might be your mind friends. Imaging each and every word written in a e-book then become one form conclusion and explanation that will maybe you never get before. The *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* giving you another experience more than blown away your mind but also giving you useful information for your better life within this era. So now let us teach you the relaxing pattern the following is your body and mind will probably be pleased when you are finished reading it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary spending spare time activity?

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examining especially. It is to be very first opinion for you to like to open a book and read it. Beside that the book *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* can to be your brand new friend when you're truly feel alone and confuse using what must you're doing of that time.

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