

PROPHECIES OF DOOM vs THE REAL WORLD

A FEW EXAMPLES OF EXTREME PREDICTIONS THAT NEVER EVENTUATED

No Turning Back (Basic Books, 1994)

1865 Coal Supplies to Run Out

"The Coal Question: An Inquiry Concerning the Progress of the Nation and the Probable Exhaustion of Our Coal Mines," by William Stanley Jevons, 1865. (England) "The conclusion is inevitable that our present happy progressive condition is a thing of limited duration." He predicted England's coal supplies would be used up quickly by the expanding population of the prosperous Victorian era.

1886 No More Birds

"We may read [the story] plainly enough in the silent hedges, once vocal with the morning songs of birds and in the deserted fields where once bright plumage flashed in the sunlight." Founding statement, Audubon Society.

1887 Humans Will Consume All of Nature

There will soon not be a bird of paradise on earth, and the ostrich has only been saved by private breeders. Man will not wait for the cooling of the world to consume everything in it, from teak trees to humming-birds, and a century or two hence will find himself perplexed by a planet in which there is nothing except what he makes. He is a poor sort of creator." from "Man the Destroyer," excerpted from The Spectator (London) and printed The Audubon Magazine, Issue 1 Vol. 1, February 1887.

1926 Oil To Run Out in 1933

* In 1926 the Federal Oil Conservation Board announced that the United States would run out of oil in seven years.

1948 War Over Natural Resources, Soils Exhausted

In 1948 two books appeared that seemed to confirm the New York Times' gloomy prediction. Fairfield Osborn, the president of the New York Zoological Society published "Our Plundered Planet." William Vogt's "Road to Survival" became a best seller and a book club favorite when he predicted that the depletion of soils and minerals would soon lead to smaller supplies and high prices and possibly another world war, this one over natural resources.

Population Outgrows Food, Scientists Warn the World,"

front page headline in The New York Times, Sept. 15, 1948. Article said human race was growing fast while the supply of resources was dwindling.

1962 Spring And No Birds Will Sing

Rachel Carson, a biologist dying of cancer, warns the world that toxic chemicals are quickly bringing the day when spring will come and no birds will sing.

1967 Only Brutal Decisions Can Save Us

Paul Ehrlich, THE POPULATION BOMB [NY: Ballantine]

In 1967. Ehrlich predicted imminent doom and that the world would be saved only by a heartless government stepping on people to make "many brutal and heartless decisions." could solve the world's problems. "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines--hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked on now. At this late date nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate."

1968 Nobel Laureate: End of World Might be 1985

George Wald: In 1968 this Harvard biologist won a Nobel prize for his work in physiology and medicine Nobel Prize. He predicted in 1975 that the world would end in 25 years (The Progressive, December, p. 22), and later decided the end might come as early as 1985.

1969 50 Years Left for Life on Earth

Barry Commoner [1917-], biologist who ran for president saying only a socialist system could control technology and the greed that exploited it. In 1969 he predicted earth's life support systems would be exhausted in 50 years.

1972 Major Resources Gone by 1990s

The Limits to Growth declared four forces, like the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, would limit the world's joy ride--famine, the exhaustion of mineral resources, overcrowding, pollution. The world's growing population would soon be fighting for food, making itself sicker on industrial pollution, and paying higher and higher prices for natural resources. So far the world described by the "Club's" prophecy seems to exist in some universe of opposites.

The authors told readers that by 1981 the world's gold would have been mined. By 1985 its mercury would be gone. By 1990 no zinc. By 1992 no petroleum. By 1993 there would be no more copper for electric wiring or pennies and no natural gas for home heating.

1978 "No Room in the Lifeboats"

New York Times Magazine, April 16, 1978. Article warned that "the cost of natural resources is going up" and we are entering an "Age of Scarcity."

The editor of Britain's prestigious journal Nature summed up the main assumption of the doom promoters: "Their most common error is to suppose that the worst will always happen." (Maddox, 1972). Of course, if the worst always happened, civilization would not have spread or survived. This kind of gloom is at the opposite pole from the conservation movement's faith in humanity.