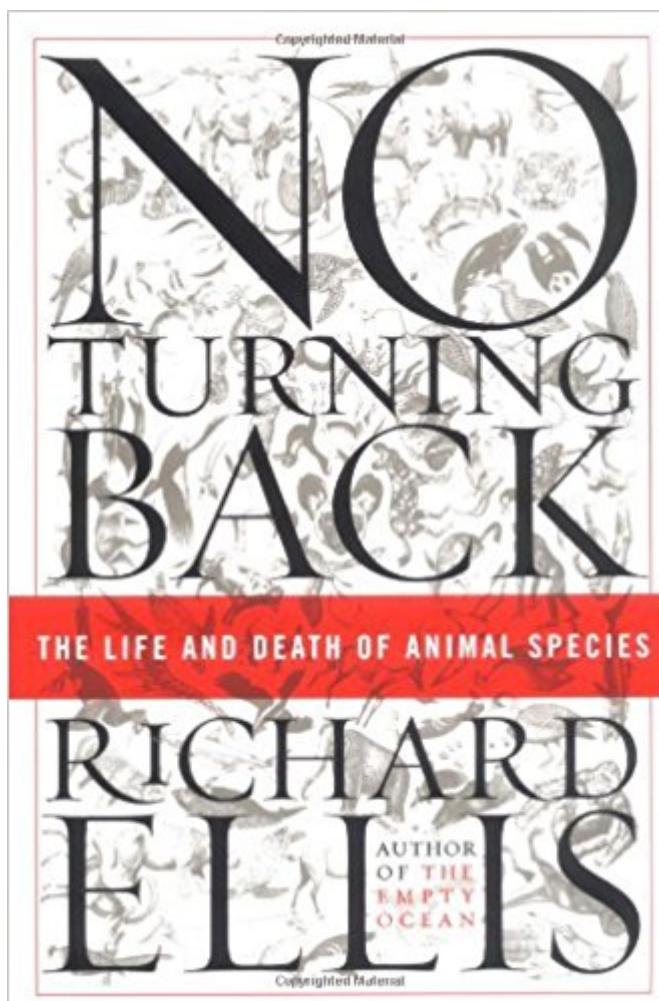


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No Turning Back: The Life And Death Of Animal Species



Synopsis

A noted naturalist's fascinating inquiry into the life and death of animal species. Just about every species that has ever lived on earth is extinct. The trilobites, which dominated the ocean floors for 300 million years, are gone. The last of the dinosaurs was wiped out by a Mount Everest-sized meteorite that slammed into the earth 65 million years ago. The great flying reptiles are gone, and so are the marine reptiles, some of them larger than a humpback whale. Before humans crossed the Bering land bridge some 15,000 years ago, North America was populated by mastodons, mammoths, saber-toothed tigers, and cave bears. They too are MIA. Passenger pigeons once flew over North America in flocks that numbered in the billions; the last one died in 1914. In this book you will meet creatures that were driven to extinction even more recently, as well as some that were brought back from the brink. You will even encounter animals not known to exist until recently -- an antidote to extinction.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In *No Turning Back*, Richard Ellis makes a survey of animals that have disappeared through anthropogenic or other means. "Everybody knows what extinction is," he writes, but theories of why it happens are hampered by "the inability of biologists and paleontologists to agree on exactly what a species is." Still, Ellis manages to pick perfect examples to show how extinctions happen in the natural world, and how humans unnecessarily contribute to some of them. It's hard to look at the careful illustrations of long-gone animals such as the Irish elk, Steller's sea cow, quagga, or even

the dodo, without feeling that the world would be better with some of them around. Ellis also introduces little-known species currently close to extinction, such as the spot-tailed quoll, the bilby, and the saiga, to add to the list of well-known threatened animals such as the white rhinoceros or the orangutan. Ending on an optimistic note, Ellis tells how some animals have been brought back from the brink of extinction through hard work, careful conservation, and lots of money. A master of the shocking ecological fact, and a thoroughly accessible and engaging narrator of the natural world, Ellis has succeeded in explaining extinction and its causes by showing readers what there was to love about creatures long gone. --Therese Littleton

In his latest book, multitalented marine naturalist Ellis (*Imagining Atlantis; The Empty Ocean*) broadens his attention from life in the oceans to an examination of the process of animal extinction. Readers will be tantalized by brief descriptions of many odd species—some extinct, many endangered. They will learn about the 50-foot-long megatooth shark; the 10-foot-tall duck known as *Bullockornis*, or "the demon duck of doom

A book explaining the scientific evidence for evolution. It is an easy to understand book for the majority of folks.

No Turning Back: The Life and Death of Animal Species (2004) suffers the same problems that has plagued other books written by Ellis: an excessive use of quoting and - at least for cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) - dumb mistakes. The first several chapters deal with extinctions and why they may have occurred. Here Ellis goes in circles, telling you the same theories again and again, often quoting article abstracts (which make me suspect he didn't even bother read much of the articles themselves). In later chapters he tries to cover the plight of as many species as possible, but in the process says almost nothing about certain species or how they really went extinct. When dealing with cetaceans, he apparently forgot what he had even said in earlier works (e.g., he once again forgot that the Dutch whaling settlement of Smeerenburg was settled well before the first overwintering in 1633-34) and doesn't appear to read his sources closely enough (e.g. Ellis believes Omura's whale, only described in 2003, must be very rare because the majority of the paratypes were caught in the East China Sea - where a lot of modern whaling occurred - when in fact they had been taken near the Solomon Islands, where very little modern whaling actually took place). Ellis also has a problem with dates, stating that British bowhead whaling in the Davis Strait region ended around 1860, when it didn't end until several decades later - you would

think someone who wrote an entire chapter on this subject in an earlier book (Men & Whales, 1991) would recall this? If he made such silly mistakes on a subject he's published extensively on, imagine all the mistakes he's made throughout the book? That's a little scary to think about. What could've been a very interesting read turned into a struggle to finish. Had I not been reading other books at the time I probably wouldn't have finished it at all. I wouldn't really recommend this book to anyone - unless you want to write an essay on all the mistakes that Ellis probably made, that is.

Une étude très documentée et passionnante sur les trop nombreux impacts négatifs de l'Homme sur notre planète. Par delà les extinctions, la place de l'Homme est ainsi remise dans une bien triste perspective.

After reading the review from the raving egotist who gave the book one star simply because Mr. Ellis doesn't think he's as smart as his mom told him he is I thought that I should write one too, but I'll keep it short. If you are interested in nature, science, etc. and are looking for an engaging, casual book to spend some time with you'll learn a lot from this one. The book is written for the Average Joe and is in Average Joe language, so if you believe that you're the guy Einstein stole all his ideas from you might find the book too simplistic, but if you're a normal person who likes reading about science the book will keep you entertained. Oh and watch out for Steve Alten. He's apparently been getting into dad's special Kool-Aid again.

"No Turning Back" is a hybrid of several other books on the subject that I have read: "Extinction-Evolution and the end of man" by Michael Boulter, "The Sixth Extinction" by Richard Leakey, and "Song of the Dodo" by David Quammen. Interestingly enough, the blurbs on the back cover are for other books written by Ellis, not this one. His thirteen or so previous books all dealt with sea life. Ellis is an excellent writer. This book is well-researched and full of interesting facts. You would think that I would know a thing or two about extinction judging from the books I have read on the subject but I learned a lot from this one. For example, hyperdisease is a disease capable of wiping out an entire species. Irrevocable evidence of just such a disease has been found in the most recent bones of Mastodons. It is assumed by the timing of the epidemic to have been spread by people and their dogs. We may be witnessing the same thing with the frogs of the world. I do not want to give too much of the book away, but you can count on seeing lots of good tidbits like this. Anything a lay person would want to know about the topic of extinction in general is covered. He also talks about species that have been brought back from the brink, the probability of resurrecting

extinct species, and new species that have been discovered. If you do not already know much about extinction, this book will be fascinating. Personally, I am less interested in ancient extinction events than in finding solutions to halt the one currently in progress. Ellis finishes his book with the standard ominous suggestion that humanity may be positioning itself for extinction. This warning bell has been ringing out since 1962 when Rachel Carson wrote "Silent Spring." You would think (as we head for the half-century mark for her book) that the concept would have taken hold, but it hasn't, strongly suggesting that it never will. The wolf may be coming, but the warning has lost its effect over time. The debate over using DDT is raging all over again. Missing from the book, as with most other books like it, are innovative suggestions for how to end this event. It has been estimated that for about 28 billion dollars enough critical habitat could be bought or leased to protect 70 percent of the known plant and animal species in the world. Our current attempt to establish a democracy in Iraq has already cost us five times that much. Such is human nature. It is also human nature to form into groups complete with a geographic boundary and a label. These boundaries are called countries. All through history, in times of war, the areas adjacent to the warring parties widen into what is called a no man's land. Given time, these off limits areas are taken back by nature. This has happened in the no man's land between the two Koreas and it is an excellent example of what happens when human beings are kept out, in this case, by warring factions. No one goes hungry in South Korea just because that piece of land is not farmed. Whereas the hunger found in North Korea is caused by its poor economy. Will our technology explosion outstrip our population explosion? Can we find ways to stay housed and fed without destroying the rest of nature? I highly recommend Ellis' book. It is by far the best I have read on the subject of extinction. Russ Finley, Author of "Poison Darts-Protecting the biodiversity of our world."

Note: I received this copy via Netgalley. Ellis looks at the various factors that have contributed and still are to the extinction of the species being threatened. The majority of this book deals with extinction that has occurred in the past and what might transpire (or inevitably will at the rate we are going) in the future. Ellis is able to masterfully bring science to the everyday individual. While some parts are still dry, Ellis mixes in a variety of interesting anecdotes and facts from modern things. One of the key points people should take from this book is just how much of an impact humans have had on bringing forth the extinction of species and moving the process along. Also: [...]

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