

John Livingston: An Appreciation

By David Orton, with contributions from Billy MacDonald and Ian Whyte

“The ‘development’ ideologues do not hear the screaming of the buttressed trees or the wailing of the rivers or the weeping of the soils. They do not hear the sentiment agony and the anguish of the non-human multitudes – torn, shredded, crushed, incinerated, choked, dispossessed.”
John Livingston, **Rogue Primate**, p. 60

“The overwhelming thrust of the ‘environmental’ movement is dedicated not to the interest of Nature, but to the security and sustainability of the advancement of the human enterprise.” **Ibid**, p. 214

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to make John Livingston (1923-2006) better known in the activist community, because we feel that what he had to teach us is extremely important for today’s rapidly disintegrating ecological and social world, and deserves to be better known. The three people mentioned above as being involved with this discussion paper, have been personally influenced in their lives as environmental and Green activists by this important deep Green Canadian thinker.

This is of course true for so many others who have come across the writings of Livingston in his various books like **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation**, **Rogue Primate**, or the other natural history and theoretical publications; or who have been taught by him; or have listened to media programs where this theorist has left his imprint. Livingston is a very moving writer, who forces the reader to face up to what is required for the Earth’s survival.

Livingston was an ecological seer whose insights ought to have far more attention. For example, the 1981 **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation** showed the empty ritualism of the environmental assessment panels across Canada and their destructive legacy for wildlife and the Earth: “EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) is a grandiloquent fraud, a hoax, and a con.” (p. 33) Yet to this day, legions of those who profess a concern for the environment eagerly embrace participation in such assessment panels. We believe, not to minimize him but to emphasize his theoretical contribution and influence, that Livingston could perhaps be considered of the stature of the late Arne Naess (1912-2009) in a Canadian context. This is a question which this paper explores, as we look at the relationship between the ideas of Livingston and those of Naess. The aim is to see whether Livingston was influenced by this Norwegian philosopher, who originally outlined and developed the deep ecology philosophy. Also we wanted to explore if there were disagreements and, if so, what they were.

From a Canadian perspective, Stan Rowe (1918-2004), also a naturalist and co-author of the 2004 “A Manifesto for Earth”, for which Livingston wrote a Comment, is someone of a comparable stature. Both their writings have influenced those seeking a deep ecology path.

While we are clearly admirers of the ideas of John Livingston, this is not a eulogy. Where appropriate, from our perspective, various critical comments will be made.

All the books and major articles by John Livingston are listed by date of publication in the Appendix. (There is also a list of other books and articles mentioned or related to the discussion.)

LIVINGSTON'S BACKGROUND

Livingston was an active naturalist and his depth of knowledge about the natural world inspires awe. He wrote that there were two Canadas, one of wild creatures and one of the people. He believed that inter-species relationships were special. This is how he expressed it in a 1990 interview conducted by Farley Mowat:

"I am absolutely convinced that inter-species relationships are the ultimate relationships. We start with individual selfishness, then our relationship sphere begins to expand. There's mother; there's family; there's the tribal self, and that eventually transcends to an inter-species self. At that stage, the essence of the feeling one has for nature is selflessness. The individual self dissolves in the overall relationship. A participatory relationship with nature." (**Rescue The Earth**, p. 273)

Livingston expressed his views on natural history throughout all his books and essays. In the Author's Foreword of **One Cosmic Instant**, he described his writings as "a reasonably civilized form of sabotage." He was very active in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, with nature radio programs like "Audubon Outdoors" and on television with "Explorations" and "The Nature of Things." He led a CBC expedition to the Galapagos. He gave public lectures and taught for many years in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. He was president of the Audubon Society of Canada and edited that Society's magazine. He was also president of the Federation of Ontario Naturalists

DOMINANT THEMES

Reading Livingston's nature writings one is struck by several dominant impressions.

Natural History Knowledge: Livingston had an enormous and detailed practical knowledge about the flora and fauna of Canada and about the land and marine geography. He had a talent in conveying this to others which combined his "hands on" knowledge of the natural world with a riveting writing style, free of platitudes. This natural history awareness gives the depth to Livingston's wisdom.

Non Human-Centered: This is the major theme running through all of Livingston's writings, as it is for fellow Canadian eco-philosopher and naturalist Stan Rowe, cited approvingly in **Rogue Primate**. This ancient yet contemporary theme, of humans seeing themselves as separate from the natural world – what Peter Singer called speciesism – is seen as the dominant 'received truth' of contemporary culture. Livingston made a conscious effort to write from a non human-centered perspective and continually tried to explain historically how the human-centered attitude (anthropocentrism), came into being: "Ours is the species that treats the land as though it owned it." (**Canada: A Natural History**, p. 193) Or, as expressed in **One Cosmic Instant**, "A man should no more be allowed to own the living soil than he now owns the air he breathes." (p. 223) Such statements are similar in sentiment to views held by Arne Naess: "The earth does not belong to humans." (**Deep Ecology for the 21st Century**, p. 74) One overall theme of Livingston's writings about the natural world was to explore when the sense of dominance of

humans over nature historically came about and to try to comprehend why this happened. (He uses “man” in his writings to refer to both genders.) Separation from nature leads to a doctrine of thinking that the non human is subject to absolute human domination and power. The ecocentric ethic advocated by Livingston goes against existing cultural traditions and assumptions. He thus opposed that marketplace concepts like competition, dominance, aggression, proprietorship, etc. be applied to nature and stressed “interspecies compliance” as sustaining the natural world. For Livingston, supposed cultural objectivity was actually riddled with cultural subjectivity.

Wildlife Cannot Be Defended Or Preserved Within Industrial Culture: As Livingston stated in **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation**, “There can be no ‘rational’ argument for wildlife preservation...” (p. 116) He believed that the defence of wildlife arises from an individual’s emotional attachment and experience with wild nature and saw this as a personal feeling – a “selfish individual experience” (*Ibid*, p. 98) – which could not be communicated in a rational sense to others. This experience appears to be a kind of “Self-realization”, as expressed by Arne Naess, where the individual connects in consciousness to the natural world, becomes part of this world, and acts from this perspective. Livingston conveyed it as: “Nature as one’s ‘extended self’ might serve to bridge the gap between the self-and-other, between the human-and-non-human. If, for example, I am able to see and identify the coyote or the red-tailed hawk as an extension of myself, perhaps I will act somewhat differently in view of that perception.” (**Endangered Spaces**, pp. 244-245) Livingston argued that “human management” would not save wildlife, what was required was a fundamental shift in the way humans perceive and receive the natural world that surrounds them: “All that is in my universe is not merely mine, it is me.” (**The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation**, p. 113) The thinking in this wildlife paragraph has been embodied in the Nature-bonding work carried out by Billy MacDonald at Red Tail Nature Awareness in Scotsburn, Nova Scotia.

Eco-political: Livingston’s natural history was also eco-political because many of the ideas which were more fully present in his later theoretical or philosophical books first appeared or were suggested in his nature writings. Livingston not only uniquely conceptualized and described natural history but, most importantly, agitated through his readers to bring about intellectual and social change, to rectify ecological injustice and abuse. Like Stan Rowe, Livingston’s eco-politics was grounded in biological knowledge. Both were scientists in the best sense of the term. (Livingston’s only earned academic degree was a B.A. in English.) Both can be described in Rowe’s characterization as “Earthlings first, humans second.” (**Earth Alive**, p. 21)

No Alternative Political Model: Livingston had a revolutionary attitude towards Nature, in the sense of the changes he wanted to happen within industrial culture, but he seemed to oppose political radicalism within this society. In **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation** he wrote against forming a new political party dedicated to environmental awareness, i.e., a green party as, “this, however, would only serve to alienate the rank and file of other political parties, and would be self-defeating.” (p. 55) Yet in his last major theoretical work, the 1994 **Rogue Primate**, Livingston was more positive towards the Greens, exempting them from the pursuit of resourceism and industrialization associated with other political parties. (pp. 186-187) I think he was quite mistaken in this, if we look at some of the practices of the federal and provincial Green parties in Canada.

In **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation**, Livingston bemoaned the negative image, in his eyes, of environmentalism: “To this day in the seats of power, which means in the corporate boardrooms and the highest echelons of government, ‘conservation’ has too often meant ‘environmentalism’ which has too often been interpreted as hippies and radicals intent on the indiscriminate overthrow of all things.” (pp. 59-60) Livingston made it very clear throughout his

writings that he opposed the industrial growth and consumer society and human-centeredness. Yet he seemed to be appealing here to this very society for the survival of plants, animals and their habitats. This seems a puzzling contradiction for someone so radical in his thinking, of seeking conservation within the system, when his writings show this system is otherwise hostile to wildlife. In a telling observation, Graeme Gibson, a friend for many years, says in his "Appreciation" in **The John A. Livingston Reader**, published in 2007, that Livingston as a thinker was "closest to George Grant" the Conservative philosopher. (p. xii)

NATURAL HISTORY AND GENERAL COMMENTS

"Anyone who has spent the greater part of a lifetime enjoying and attempting to understand and preserve wild nature will have had the experience of witnessing his own species drift lower and lower on his personal scale of perfection." (**One Cosmic Instant**, p. 188)

"The entire career of *Homo sapiens* has taken place in a period so brief as to be invisible on the geological time scale. Long before our ancestors emerged, today's land forms were well in place. Even though as a species, we have experienced only a fleeting moment of the planet's history, we tend to see today's world as complete - as though the ages of mountain-building and flooding and up heaving were now concluded. We also tend to believe that geological phenomena occurred for the purpose of producing the landscape we see today. We often hear of the *final* retreat of the ice, or the *ultimate* form of the Rocky Mountains, or the *eventual* shape of the continents. This is a human conceit only. Volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, contemporary blips on the geological record, remind us that all is not over, and that earth processes continue." (**Canada: A Natural History**, p. 17)

HUNTING: Livingston was not anti-hunting. He mentioned in the Acknowledgments to **One Cosmic Instant** that he received a "special grant" from the Canadian National Sportsmen's Show. In the same book he made the comment:

"Hunters are the first naturalists and ecologists. Their lives depend on their knowing and anticipating the cycles of the seasons and the corresponding requirements of the animals they themselves depend upon." (p. 139)

In a 1990 interview with Farley Mowat, Livingston made it clear that he was against sport hunting and fashion fur. A strange observation in the 1966 **Birds of the Northern Forest**, referring to the killing of prairie waterfowl, was the comment about hunters only taking a portion of the annual natural "surplus". (Plate 17) Perhaps this explains why he could receive funding from hunter organizations. In 1981, Livingston repudiated this surplus position in **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation** and put forward a view more in keeping with his overall eco-philosophy: "In the biosphere there is no harvestable surplus of anything." (p. 30)

FORESTRY IS NOT FARMING: Livingston wrote against forest spraying and clear cutting. He warned about climate change, the doctrine of sustainable development, and against the idea that Canada had "surplus" water. He strongly argued in his writings that excess human population was a key problem. Livingston spoke out against comparing nature to farming and hence the misleading use of the term "harvest" by exploiters as in industrial forestry. The following quotation very movingly makes this point:

"How can you harvest a stand of trees you did not plant, or a shoal of fish you did not propagate, or a trophy moose you did not raise?...The unfortunate legacy of the harvest idea is that it perpetuates and reinforces the perceived status of nature as a resource, a commodity in the human service." (**Canada: A Natural History**, p. 182)

ABORIGINALS, THE ARCTIC, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND FUR TRAPPING: In his nature writings Livingston wrote about the aboriginal kill-off of wildlife, as aboriginals entered new lands. Indigenous people in various countries, which became New Zealand, Australia, and the Americas, did wipe out wildlife. He wrote in **One Cosmic Instant**, that, about 12,000 or so years ago:

“A long list of the very largest mammals became extinct, according to the evidence, at about the same time as man was establishing himself in the 'New World.'” (p. 122)

He was a supporter of indigenous animism and understood its role in spiritually enveloping humans in the natural world and thus restraining their exploitation of this world. This seems to have occurred after the initial kill-off by aboriginals. Livingston noted in **One Cosmic Instant**, that “The loss of animism and the substitution of theism was one of the most critical turning points in history” (p. 142), resulting in a further alienation from nature.

He was not unconcerned about social injustice towards aboriginals: “We could not have had Renaissance cathedrals without the slaughter of Aztec and Inca innocents; both were in celebration of the European church.” (Ibid, p. 182) He was very positive about indigenous cultures, for example the Inuit, as shown in **Arctic Oil**.

Arctic Oil also showed the extreme precariousness of the Arctic ecosystem and its birds, mammals and plants. By showing this in concrete terms, Livingston tried to outline how an oil spill could have disastrous consequences, revealing also a detailed knowledge of the practicalities of Arctic oil and gas politics. As he noted: “No major conservation group or organization has yet identified itself as being flatly opposed to any and all industrial penetration of the far north.” (p. 101) “Peak oil” although not used as a term in this 1981 book, was close to this author’s consciousness: “Today, the slowly but inexorably diminishing, finite world supply of oil is a threat that is closing in on the industrial monoculture.” (Ibid, p. 112)

For John Livingston, Inuit culture was environmentally appropriate, and not, as in industrial cultures, based on production and consumption. His general position towards aboriginals, in Canada and elsewhere, reflects that adopted by Left Biocentrism. Thus he showed both support for traditional aboriginal cultures in opposition to industrial monoculture, but also a willingness to point out historically the negative role of such traditional cultures, as they entered virgin wildlife habitats for the first time. In **Arctic Oil** he pointed out that indigenous groups, in opposing industrial culture, are forced to adopt European notions of “property rights.” This has nothing in common with Inuit traditions. This point was also made in his essay “The Dilemma of the Deep Ecologist”.

Livingston was very much against the fur trade and any attempts to link this to aboriginal culture. His ideas were brought out in the interview conducted by Farley Mowat:

“There’s no ecological, anthropological or economic basis for saying that the fur trade is part of the traditional aboriginal culture. None. It was the fur trade and the trade in animals of all kinds that destroyed the aboriginal cultures of North America. And to hear people today, including natives, claim the anti-trappers are going to bring down the native culture is bizarre.

I think the great change to the aboriginal cultures came when the native no longer saw the animal as part of himself, part of his environment, but as a source of cash. The animal was transformed into a cash symbol. The moment that happened, the aboriginal culture was gone.” (**Rescue The Earth**, p. 272)

[The left biocentric position, as outlined by myself, on Aboriginal-Animal relations past and

present and the fur trade, shares the above perspective and can be found in Green Web Bulletin #46, "Some Limitations of a Left Critique and Deep Dilemmas in Environmental-First Nations Relationships". This article was part of a Discussion Paper for a panel debate/public discussion at the June 1995 Learned Societies Conference in Montreal. An article, "Aboriginal Tradition or Commercial Trapping? Fur Industry Masquerades as Politically Progressive", based on this Bulletin, was published in the **Earth First! Journal**.]

Livingston opposed multiculturalism, which he termed "international industrial monoculturalism", as not being able to accommodate indigenous cultures which are outside of industrial society. (**Arctic Oil**, pp. 93-94) This is an interesting position and a direct challenge to the official view in Canada, that it is and should strive to be a multicultural society.

RESDURCISM: Livingston introduced the striking concept of "resource" in *_Arctic Oil_*. This term (and its corollary "resourcism") is forever associated in my mind with his thinking. It was further discussed in **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation** and **Rogue Primate**: "A 'resource' is anything that can be put to human use ...It is the concept of 'resource' that allows us to perceive nature as our subsidiary." (**Arctic Oil**, p. 119) He went on, "Once a thing is perceived as having some utility – any utility – and is thus perceived as a 'resource,' its depletion is only a matter of time." (**The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation**, p. 43) So "resource" becomes associated with human-centeredness. After reading Livingston, I could never consciously use this term in my own writing to refer to trees, fish or other animals. I came to see that the language we use, embodies a taken-for-granted world view of human dominance.

ELEVATION OF THE NATURALIST: Livingston privileged the naturalist as the person who best makes the case for the defence of the natural world, based on individual experience, where "nature is not an object, but a subject." (**Endangered Spaces**, p. 247) His assumption, that those who defend wildlife are basically naturalists, was a position also expressed by York University colleague Neil Evernden in a companion essay in **The Paradox of Environmentalism**. However, this defence of wildlife cannot be conducted within the rules governing accepted human-dominated debates.

Livingston's ecological activism as a life-long naturalist can be contrasted with the general attitude towards active environmentalism among naturalist club members. Too often they seem to remain content with merely observing and recording wildlife and plant life, but don't oppose environmental destruction. For many, naturalizing does not seem to change human consciousness away from anthropocentrism and towards ecocentrism but is a vehicle for "getting away" from society. In the past I have been a casual member of naturalist societies in Montreal, Victoria, and Halifax. While living in British Columbia in the late 1970s, I was active for the B.C. Federation of Naturalists on a couple of environmental issues, namely the Southern Moresby Wilderness Proposal on the Queen Charlotte Islands and the Tsitika Watershed issue on Northern Vancouver Island. I met considerable resistance by Federation members at senior levels against taking strong environmental stands on land use conflicts. The majority of naturalist club members, in my experience, do not seem to want to fight on environmental issues. If a particular naturalist organization does become involved, then the stand taken is usually on the conservative side of the environmental spectrum.

The general hesitancy among naturalists about speaking out on environmental issues (of course not Livingston's position) seems at odds with a basic premise of deep ecology, that embracing and involvement in understanding the natural world through naturalizing work – Nature bonding – is a necessary path to a deeper ecological consciousness for Earth defenders, which can overcome human-centeredness.

INDUSTRIALIZATION, NOT CAPITALISM, IS THE PROBLEM

“Both ‘right’ and ‘left’ subscribe to and are subsumed by the greater ideology of the industrial-growth ethos.” (**Rogue Primate**, p. 59)

This was a theme introduced in the 1973 book **One Cosmic Instant** and pursued in Livingston’s later books. For many years, and prior to studying the material for this paper, I had written in various articles about the origins of the left biocentric tendency, how Andrew McLaughlin’s 1993 book **Regarding Nature: Industrialism and Deep Ecology**, had shown industrialism to be the main problem in destroying nature. (p. 172) McLaughlin argued that capitalism and socialism were both variants of such industrial social practices. This position was basically incorporated into the left biocentric theoretical tendency, with attribution to McLaughlin. Clearly Livingston was advocating such a position some 20 years earlier in **One Cosmic Instant**:

“From the conservationist’s point of view, there is no shred of difference between capitalist and socialist societies so long as both stand for inordinate industrial growth and productivity. Industrialization at an increasing rate is the goal of all the super-powers and their satellites today, and industrialization (including growth in both production and consumption) is the grail of all forms of government in the ‘developed’ world.” (p. 206)

I agree with his position, made in several of his writings. Yet the appropriate social arrangements for the future ecocentric society, where humans are no longer lords and masters over the natural world, will, I believe, draw more from a socialist, collectivist, cooperative base rooted in social justice for humankind, rather than from capitalism. Stan Rowe, who shared Livingston’s views of our relationship to the Earth, but perhaps unlike Livingston considered himself a person of the Left, put it this way, “Socialism has the virtue of extending the circle of care beyond the selfish individual, at least turning our vision outward in the right direction.” (**Home Place**, p.193) Future ecological social formations we can organize for, could be diversely unique, and not built on the human arrogance towards nature common to both existing capitalist and, unfortunately, past socialist/communist societies.

From Livingston’s perspective then, environmental carnage today is seated in the Western industrial person shaped by this very social formation. This carnage can only be overcome if basic cultural beliefs of dominance over nature are changed. Most cultural systems make distinctions between humans and other animals as absolute as possible. We have to cease from interpreting nature only through ourselves, and thereby restricting ‘meaning’ to humans.

ECOLOGICAL NATIONALIZATION: A very interesting comment by Livingston, which deeper environmentalists in Canada need to consider, was made about the necessity to differentiate between ideological and environmental approaches to nationalization. One thinks here of the enormously polluting Alberta tar sands, and the appropriate strategy for ending their ‘development.’ In **One Cosmic Instant**, Livingston said: “When nationalization of primary resources comes, as it inevitably must, it will be on grounds which are ecologically oriented. The grounds will not be ideological.” p. 207

Environmentalists, he argued, need to understand that environmental forces are eating away at what can be considered “traditional rights”, like the right to reproduce. The end of human dominance over nature requires a major value shift, a change in the dominant culture. If people come to believe that change is necessary, then value shifts could occur quite rapidly. This is why theoretical work, that is, changing cultural mind sets, is necessary and vitally important.

SOME DISSENTING CONSIDERATIONS

“The establishment of a green society presupposes the implementation of the necessary changes suggested in the deep ecology formulation.” (**The Selected Works of Arne Naess**, Volume Ten, p. 574)

John Livingston was far less political than Arne Naess. I found out through an obituary when Naess died in January of 2009, that he had been a candidate on the Norwegian Green Party's lists. Although Green parties worldwide fall in the shallow eco-capitalist ecology camp, as noted early on by Rudolf Bahro when he exited the German Green party in 1985 – and as we see today in the Canadian federal Green Party – the concern for a political vehicle to express Earth-centered ideas and the various problems which this entails, does not seem to have been a priority of Livingston's thinking.

Clearly Naess differed from Livingston on this. Naess argued for ecological justice plus social justice; also that the green movement must be involved in peace problems and must combine reformist and revolutionary work. Green politics, said Naess, meant the elimination of class politics globally, nationally, and locally. However it must present itself so that it cannot be placed on the red/blue or left/right continuum, and make this clear in its public face. Naess had a movement built around his ideas. This was not the situation for Livingston's work. [For the involvement of Naess in Green politics, see the section “Green Politics” in my assessment of **The Selected Works of Arne Naess**]

As mentioned earlier, Livingston seemed to have moved from outright rejection of the idea of an independent green political formation in 1981, to a tepid approval of the Greens in his last major work, the 1994 **Rogue Primate**.

The writings of Livingston show that for him culture was key in trying to understand the relationship between man and nature, not industry or government. He was not engaged or interested in Green politics. He seems to have missed out on the educational or propaganda function of Green politics, if conducted from a principled, non-shallow position. In his 1973 book **One Cosmic Instant**, Livingston made a defining statement about his politics, and a recurrent theme in his writings: “Inordinate productivity is what present environmental issues are concerned with – not capitalism or socialism. Environmental issues must not be confused with ideological issues.” (p. 206)

Thus ecological politics must focus on how humankind will relate to the natural world and not whether an economy and society is capitalist or socialist. Livingston saw the industrial social formation with its perpetual growth economy as the enemy of life on Earth. Both capitalism and socialism/communism have historically been faces of this formation. But Livingston did not articulate that, while a permanent growth economy and expanding consumerism are intrinsic to capitalism, it does not follow that this is how a socialist or communist economy has to define itself, notwithstanding what has occurred in the past. Rudolf Bahro, an ecocentric Left Green thinker in Germany, advanced the view in the 1980s in his book **Avoiding Social & Ecological Disaster** that “We must lower the basic load which our civilisation is imposing on the earth, by a factor of ten to one.” (p. 324) Bahro advocated “communitarian societies, planning their everyday working and living around an undogmatic spiritual vision and practice...and allow room for animals, plants, earth, water, air and fire to resume once more their own evolutionary direction.” (**Ibid**, p. 269) The socialist/communist promise of social justice through economic redistribution remains valid and necessary for true social justice. One could envision an

ecologically-oriented socialist or communist economy that respects ecological limits and frugal lifestyles; respects other life forms, which would include human population reductions; is not based on permanent economic growth and consumerism; is decentralized or small scale; upholds democracy and individual human rights – providing such rights are not Earth-unfriendly.

A second related point would be that in order to mobilize humans to conceive of themselves culturally as Earthlings, respecting and upholding the intrinsic interests of non-human life forms and the Earth itself, and to succeed politically, social justice for humankind must be part of this mobilization. The socialist or communist political side has more to contribute on this than the capitalist side. Livingston seems to have had capitalism and socialism equally in his ecological gun sights and offered no path forward out of the capitalist economy. It is necessary to say that the Left has generally been in opposition to the kind of Earth-centered politics for which John Livingston and others so resolutely stood for. The Left has fought calls for human population reductions and making human politics subordinate to preserving the health of the Earth. Livingston pointed out that supporters of social ecology accuse those who defend Nature and raise population issues of being ecofascists. (**Rogue Primate**, pp. 189-190) [Green Web Bulletin #68, in 2000, presented a left biocentric analysis of ecofascism, opposing the linking of ecofascism with the deep ecology movement by some social ecologists.] The political task for environmental and Green activists is to combine biocentrism/ecocentrism with the social justice tradition of the Left, which is what left biocentrism is trying to do.

Livingston's view of the vanguard role of the naturalist in Nature preservation and wildlife defence is a puzzle. While it applied to his own situation as a naturalist and perhaps to a few of his friends, generally naturalists are not prominent in the environmental and Green movements. Those of us who consider ourselves biocentric or ecocentric and supporters of deep ecology do place Nature preservation and wildlife concerns at the center of our political work. But "naturalists" who are members of natural history clubs are not normally the Earth-warriors Livingston's writings imply.

I also found that Livingston did not adequately conceptualize for others the bonding to the natural world and the defence of wildlife so central to his ecological world view. Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic, "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land" (**A Sand County Almanac**, p. 239) has been an important movement-rallying slogan. There is no such equivalent in Livingston's work. Instead there is almost a glorification of the individual "mystery" in relating to wild nature, which is not capable of explication. Graeme Gibson seems to support this position in his posthumous "Appreciation" of Livingston's work, when he says: "That some form of mysticism, or intuitive experience – call it what you will – is close to the centre of the ethos Livingston shares with most naturalists and preservationists is indisputable." (**The John A. Livingston Reader**, p. xix)

Livingston showed very successfully that the human-centered Western industrial cosmology has no place for other species. For him, the fundamental problem was ontological – that is, the nature of existence, the need for a different ground-of-being to industrial society. Yet we do need a shared language and common slogans to mobilize the forces of opposition to industrial capitalism – this was not, unfortunately, provided by Livingston. Like Livingston, Arne Naess also believed that the main problem was ontological. But he, with George Sessions, did develop the eight-point Deep Ecology Platform to rally the ecocentric troops and provide them a capsule of this world view. Ecological thinkers can also be organizers. As Ed Abbey so famously said, "Sentiment without action is the ruin of the soul."

LIVINGSTON AND DEEP ECOLOGY

“Clearly the deep ecologist who does not ‘go public’ is irrelevant. I say this because the destruction of nature is not going to ‘go on hold’ while the body of deep ecological insight permeates the public consciousness and the public conscience. Something has to be done now. If the paradigm is the problem, and most of us believe it to be, then we might as well have at it.” (**The Paradox of Environmentalism**, p. 71)

“The philosophic basis for environmental management and control is the same basis as that for environmental destruction.” (**Ibid**, p. 71)

“We believe that the preservation of birds – all birds – is a legitimate aim that does not need justification on economic or any other grounds. Birds should be preserved because they are there – because they happened. That, to us, is reason enough.” (**Birds of the Northern Forest**, p. 11)

“The utter objectivity of nature, which is to say that no organism is ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ but merely is...” (**Canada: The Wonders of Nature**, p. 137)

Most lists of deep ecology thinkers on the internet cite John Livingston. So it is not original for this essay to claim him as a member of this persuasion. My own claim for Livingston in this regard is based on the thrust of his Earth-centered thinking, as shown in his writings, and that Livingston explicitly claims sympathy with deep ecology. He said that as a result of his earlier book publishing, he came in contact with others thinking along similar lines and then realized he was not alone. The 1988 letter from Livingston to the environmental group North Shore Environmental Web in Nova Scotia (quoted below), is one example of him making his deep ecology interests apparent and reaching out to others:

“I have read your March 1988 paper with the greatest of interest and admiration. I read it also with gratitude for your clarity of expression and argument – qualities not always easy to come by in the “deep ecology” literature... It is my personal view that capitalist and socialist persuasions are equally unecological so long as they share the ethos of industrial growth. Human social organization is irrelevant to the destruction of Nature. The industrial growth society remains just that, its color notwithstanding. Congratulations on your splendid document. Sincerely, John Livingston, Professor.” (Letter dated March 22, 1988, to the North Shore Environmental Web, New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, responding to a Discussion Paper “The Green Movement And Our Place In It.” David Orton and Billy MacDonald were then members of this now defunct organization.)

Of course Livingston brought his own independent thinking and contribution to deep ecology. He investigated, with a natural-history overlay, why humans have become the “rogue” self-domesticated, placeless, primates; why wildlife conservation can only be a “fallacy” in our existing society; why humankind has come to view the natural world not as intrinsically worthy in its own terms, but merely as a collection of “resources” for exploitation; and why human-derived environmental impact assessments are basically fraudulent and provide a fig-leaf cover for continuing environmental destruction. These are all ideas which are associated in my own mind with John Livingston. There is a legacy of original ideas, which Greens and environmentalists who seek to go deeper in their thinking can draw upon.

I believe John Livingston’s ideas have contributed in a significant way to my personal theoretical evolution and viewpoint. They have also contributed to the theoretical foundations of the left

biocentric tendency within deep ecology, as noted in the 1998 “My Path to Left Biocentrism: Part 1 - The Theory.” Livingston has inspired others I have worked with over the years, like Billy MacDonald, founder of Red Tail Nature Awareness in Scotsburn, N.S., who has worked with hundreds of young people in Nature-bonding; and Ian Whyte of Ottawa, who has been involved in forest and wildlife issues in Ontario – particularly around defending the ecological integrity and wildlife of Algonquin Park, as well as having contributed to Green party politics at the provincial and federal levels. MacDonald and Whyte have drawn from their own experiences of working with Livingston’s ideas, in contributing to this paper. I have tried to bring Livingston’s work to the attention of others through essays and book reviews, and by including two key books **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation** and **Rogue Primate** in annotated bibliographies for other greens and environmentalists.

The concept of “resourcism”, as developed by Livingston, has become a central component of my own understanding and helped inform and deepen my critique of industrial forestry – for example the Green Web bulletin “Industrial Forestry and a Critique of Natural Resource Management.” **The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation** is a much battered copy on my bookshelf which I consulted innumerable times on wildlife issues to oppose the typical human-centered “game” orientation of alleged wildlife conservation policies here in Nova Scotia, as well as across Canada. The same book, with its critique of the environmental assessment process, helped the environmental groups I was working with decide not to participate in the formal environmental assessment hearings for the Sable Gas Project, and resulted in the Green Web essay “Environmental Hearings and Existential Dilemmas: The Sable Gas Project”. I also discussed and adopted Livingston’s critique of the use of the term “animal rights” to describe the work of this important movement in “Deep Ecology and Animal Rights.” [All of the publications cited here are available on the internet.] Towards the end of his life, Livingston wrote a very positive Comment on “An Earth-centered (Ecocentric) Manifesto”, drawn up by Ted Mosquin and Stan Rowe. (Ian Whyte and myself, along with others, also contributed comments on the Manifesto in its various draft forms.) I feel that I have had many theoretical influences from John Livingston in my life as a green and environmental person.

Livingston most fully explored his relationship to deep ecology in the essay “The Dilemma of the Deep Ecologist” and in his final major work **Rogue Primate**. One comes to the conclusion, after going through the various texts, that Livingston saw his own thinking as aligned with the philosophy of deep ecology and the thinking of Arne Naess. This alliance is seen by him as cosmological in nature. Some features of this are:

- Livingston accepted the basic idea of all entities in nature as having equal intrinsic value, not dependent upon humans for legitimation.
- Like Naess, he repudiated the concept of private property in Nature by humans.
- He accepted the distinction Naess made between “shallow” and “deep” ecology, and that the environmental movement is overwhelmingly human-centered, dedicated to advancing the interests of industry-centered humans, not the interest of Nature and other species.
- He placed the environmental movement as basically in the shallow camp, while wildlife advocates or naturalists were seen as in the deep camp and as a leading voice.
- Finally, both Livingston and Naess, most importantly, saw the crucial importance of childhood Nature-bonding in the development of the “ecological self” so that it could be liberated from the cultural prison of human chauvinism and the taken-for-granted goal of the humanization of the planet. Naess has described how, as a small child, he spent hours studying small marine intertidal life forms, it seems, partly because his mother lacked empathy with him. Livingston expressed his views on childhood Nature-bonding in **Rogue Primate**:
“For the child who has bonded with and thus become non-human Nature, and who retains the capacity to retrieve that self-identity through adulthood, the wilful, deliberate, and conscious

wounding of Nature is impossible, because that would be self-mutilation.” (p. 134)

For Livingston, the wildlife naturalist activist acquires a “biospheric self”, which leads to “the dissolution of the ego-centered self,” (ibid, p. 196) whereas human chauvinism “requires ‘selfhood’ to be kept in the human family.” (Ibid, p. 98) The concept of Self-realization from Naess, which for him is not philosophically or logically derived and which is key for transforming a person’s consciousness, is quite similar to Livingston’s view of how the wildlife activist relates to the natural world.

CONCLUSION

This Green Web Bulletin has been an examination of John Livingston’s writings. It has looked at some of his key ideas which have contributed to the theoretical growth of the environmental and green movements. He was an original thinker who made a significant contribution. I have presented the arguments and evidence for why he must be included in the deep ecology camp. I started the research for this paper with some predisposition that John Livingston could be regarded as Canada’s Arne Naess. However, as we saw in the section “Some Dissenting Considerations,” this is no longer my position. Naess was very involved in Green eco-politics and in trying to outline a path forward for others out of the ecological and social morass of industrial capitalist society. Clearly this was not Livingston’s interest. It is quite possible, given the depth of his pessimism, that he thought such a path was impossible. He was an ecological prophet but also essentially a mystic. Politically, Livingston was on the deeper conservative side, with someone like his friend Graeme Gibson comparing him to conservative philosopher George Grant, author of **Lament for a Nation**.

I was always conscious of utilizing Livingston’s thinking in my own theoretical and practical work. I acknowledged his contribution to the formulation of the left biocentric tendency within deep ecology and sought to make his ideas known to others. However, I had not before read his natural history books. I came to see, in preparing this Appreciation, that his thinking was quite rooted in his work as a naturalist, as an inter-species voice. He drew upon it to present his savage and profound critique of the anthropocentrism of the worldwide industrial growth culture, his major focus. It is this culture, Livingston showed us, which is destroying the Earth.

In his interview with Livingston in **Rescue The Earth**, Farley Mowat calls him “the prime philosopher of the environmental movement in this country.” I would not disagree with the exuberance of such a classification.

January, 2010

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