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Overpopulation Is the Problem

I greatly enjoyed reading "The Millennium Assessment," by Fred Powledge (*BioScience* 56: 880–886). It presented a reasonable program to discover how bad things are, which is, I suppose, frequently necessary to have fresh ammunition to use in trying to wake up our national leadership.

What I find lacking in the whole approach, not only in this article but in the profession as a whole, is the failure to openly recognize that none of it matters as long as we fail to correct the underlying cause of nearly all of our problems: overpopulation. We already know enough to recognize that without a reduction of the population of humans, no proposed programs will have any real effect. The human population grows more rapidly than any ecological protection or amelioration program can be produced or take effect.

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Response from Powledge

As Dr. Bennett points out, population growth is at the base of virtually all environmental problems. Without it, there would probably have been no need for a Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

*I can't speak for the MA's authors, but surely the significance of population growth figured in all their research. Just a few pages into their flagship report (*Ecosystems and Human Well-Being: Current State and Trends*), they write that "increasing consumption per person, multiplied by a growing human population, are the root causes of the increasing demand for ecosystem services" (p. 4). What's missing from most such discussions (including my piece) is a plan for dealing with overpopulation that the world will accept. That's a terribly difficult cat to bell.*

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