**Extinctions: How Life Survives, Adapts, Evolves**

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Palaeontology shows us that many billions of species that once existed are now extinct, and their natural extinctions enabled new species to inherit the Earth. We identify mass extinctions during which 50–95% of species were killed off, and yet life always recovered. In fact, some of the great diversifications in the history of life were triggered by the opportunities afforded by mass extinctions. So, extinction in the context of modern life, especially the needless slaughter of species by human action or carelessness, is inexcusable. Who does not mourn the loss of the Polynesian tree snail or the dodo? Palaeontologists of course work on longer time scales and can see how extinction events have released the potential of new groups to show their evolutionary mettle. This is one of the wonders of exploring the geological record but should not allow us to think we can hasten the extinction of any modern species.

For details on biography, research interests and publications of Mike Benton

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