

Pest Control and the Human Predicament

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Today the biosphere is undergoing unprecedented changes—changes that threaten the persistence of civilization. Global warming, ozone depletion, acid precipitation, toxification of the entire planet, and dozens of less pressing environmental problems now confront us. Consider only that most basic aspect of the human predicament—one that is a major contributor to almost all environmental problems—the explosive growth of the human population.

In 1990 the population of Earth is more than 5.3 billion people, more than 2.5 times the number when I was born in 1932. Since *The Population Bomb* (Ehrlich 1968) was written in 1968, almost two billion people have been added to the planet—more than lived on Earth in 1900. Some 95 million people are now being added yearly, the population equivalent of the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Ireland, Iceland, Finland, Denmark, and Belgium combined.¹

The explosive growth of the human population is the most spectacular earthly event of the last 65 million years. The entire planet has become vastly overpopulated by the simple standard that even today's 5.3 billion people cannot be supported on humanity's income, which consists primarily of products of photosynthesis. Only by depleting

¹ Documentation for unreferenced statements in this paper can be found in Ehrlich & Ehrlich 1990.