

We The People
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We the People 331 The Bogong Moth



Good Day to you. Located in the Alpine National Park in Victoria is Mount Bogong rising to nearly 2000 meters. The mountain acquired its name from the Bogong moth which is a night flying moth similar to the Monarch butterfly. Bogong moths reside in sheltered places like caves in their millions and return to breeding grounds in Autumn, migrating up to 900 kilometres which is no mean feat for such a small fragile creature. Now you may wonder why I'm highlighting the Bogong moth and its simply because **its existence is a metaphor for the intricacy of life and the impact mankind has on this miraculous fragile system.** The Bogong represents a turning point for us because if this humble creature is allowed to be driven to extinction then it's a signal that we do not value our own existence. Allow me to amplify the matter to give you a feel for the interrelated roles in play. Because of the abundance of moths in the past, creatures like bats and birds and even the antechinus eat them as a source of protein.

Now enter the endangered Mountain Pygmy Possum. This dear little creature, like so many others, is threatened by land clearing and loss of habitat. However they are also dying from arsenic poisoning. The Bogong larvae feed on crops treated with pesticides and then ultimately migrate to their cool mountain hibernation site. The bioaccumulation of arsenic poison in their bodies is very small but when they gather in their millions over many years and as the moths perish and their bodies decay the arsenic builds up in this cycle. So the Mountain Pygmy Possum slowly accumulates more arsenic as they consume the moth and now they are in grave peril from this and other issues. Professor Eric Warrant of Lund University in Sweden studies the Bogong moth and travels to Australia each year. He has observed significant population declines for an array of reasons including drought and believes this little creature will become locally extinct in some areas. **The vulnerability of the Australian Alps to climate change is the worst in the world** because we've got these short little mountains so when it gets warmer, there is nowhere for these cold-adapted species to go. Caves that used to hold 17,000 Bogong moths **per square metre**, totalling tens of millions in all, have been empty for two years or more. Apart from the pesticide issue the moths form an important part of the food chain for so many other creatures so their demise is silent but simply catastrophic for the eco system and ultimately mankind.

The lights of a city cause the Bogong '**navigation confusion**' as happened when the Olympics came to Sydney along with many other major events. Storms and high winds blow them off course and so on it goes. To lose the Bogong moth would be an invisible calamity, yet most Australians don't know and quite frankly don't care, yet we will pay dearly in the end as we insult nature. The Bogong moth's demise is a metaphor for what mankind is doing to this beautiful planet because the only thing we understand is **money and power** which in the end is an illusion. The intrinsic and vital right of all creatures great and small to live seems to elude us, yet this is but one environmental tragedy currently underway. They are literally the '**canary in the coal mine**' and we refuse to take heed. In my view we must learn about real sustainability and fast and a good start would be to cap this nation's population by dramatically reducing immigration numbers for ever. The current level is so great that our unique and dry continent and culture is being threatened. Think about it and make your voice heard for the sake of those to follow and the little Bogong moth.

Until next time this is Kent Bayley

