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Our Place in Nature

I enjoyed the company of two saddlebacks recently, as I sat on a stone bench in the heart of the forest on Kapiti Island. Oblivious to me, the saddlebacks went about their business, noisily feeding, hopping and flying all over the place, almost like a dance.

In such a splendid setting, one does indeed rediscover 'our place in nature', the sub-title of David Suzuki's book, *The Sacred Balance*. Suzuki is one of Canada's leading environmentalists and a prophet of our time — one of a long line of scholars lending academic weight to the proposition that a change in our stewardship of the Earth and the life on it is required.

Change doesn't mean going backward. A sustainable world needn't be drab, monotonous,

Secondly, think about the information that floods us. Consider its sources. Organizations such as the tobacco industry or the genetically modified food business have vested interests. Whereas, as Suzuki says, grass-roots groups have credibility because their motives are obvious. Forest and Bird doesn't seek maximum profits, market share or power. We work for a future for our children, a clean environment and the protection of wilderness and biodiversity.

Thirdly, trust your common sense. There's a huge difference in the quality of information published in the tabloid media and that in magazines such as the *New Scientist*, or *Forest & Bird*. Reports in 'business' newspapers must be read with

'human needs can be met in balance with the self-renewing processes of the earth'

ous, devoid of colour, frivolity, inventiveness or art. It's a world where products and public policies are designed to service real human needs, incorporating principles of durability, recycling, low energy and ecological costs.

Suzuki's sobering book contains information that is frightening. Even scarier is the impression that you think he's writing about us, here in New Zealand. He's adamant we can regain an ancient and sustaining harmony in which human needs can be met in balance with the self-renewing processes of the earth. Easier said than done in an age of narcissism.

There are exceptions, of course, but it does seem that a lot of political and industrial leaders are like Narcissus; captivated by themselves. Seemingly oblivious to huge ecological problems, they turn away from environmental issues as if avoiding an unpleasant smell. (Prime Minister Jenny Shipley couldn't even find time to talk to Forest and Bird about the plight of our national bird, the kiwi, which is staring down the barrel of extinction).

How can we effect a change in the stewardship of New Zealand's environment?

Firstly, we could in 1970's jargon 'get moral'. Moral issues are easily identified; they're the ones where there's no self interest.

an understanding of their known pro-business bias. Political press statements usually have political motives.

Fourthly, consider the future. Think about the problems we are leaving as a legacy for our children. What will the quality of their air, water and soil be like? If we cannot alleviate problems of pollution, deforestation, soil erosion or climate change, will future generations be able to cope with the consequences we leave for them?

Fifthly, think about our most widely held assumptions, many of which underpin the destructive path we are on.

It is widely believed that humans are special, that our intellect has lifted us above the natural world. But our absolute need for air, water soil, energy and biodiversity gives the lie to that assumption.

— Keith Chapple



KEITH CHAPPLE is national president of *Forest and Bird*.