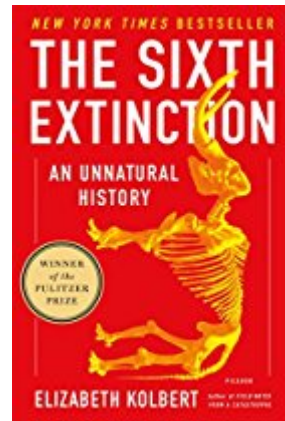


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From Booklist **Starred Review** It didn't take long for Homo sapiens to begin "reassembling the biosphere," observes Kolbert, a Heinz Award-winning New Yorker staff writer and author of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (2006). By burning fossil fuels, we are rapidly changing the atmosphere, the oceans, and the climate, forcing potentially millions of species into extinction. Five watershed events in the deep past decimated life on earth, hence the designation "Sixth Extinction" for today's human-propelled crisis. To lay the groundwork for understanding this massive die-off, Kolbert crisply tells the stories of such earlier losses as the American mastodon and the great auk and provides an orienting overview of evolutionary and ecological science. She then chronicles her adventures in the field with biologists, botanists, and geologists investigating the threats against amphibians, bats, coral, and rhinos. Intrepid and astute, Kolbert combines vivid, informed, and awe-struck descriptions of natural wonders, from rain forests to the Great Barrier Reef, and wryly amusing tales about such dicey situations as nearly grabbing onto a tree branch harboring a fist-sized tarantula, swimming among poisonous jellyfish, and venturing into a bat cave; each dispatch is laced with running explanations of urgent scientific inquiries and disquieting findings. Rendered with rare, resolute, and resounding clarity, Kolbert's compelling and enlightening report forthrightly addresses the most significant topic of our lives. --

Donna Seaman Review "[The Sixth Extinction] is a wonderful book, and it makes very clear that big, abrupt changes can happen; they're not outside the realm of possibility. They have happened before, they can happen again." [President Barack Obama](#) "Riveting . . . It is not possible to overstate the importance of Kolbert's book." [San Francisco Chronicle](#) "Arresting . . . Ms. Kolbert shows in these pages that she can write with elegiac poetry about the vanishing creatures of this planet, but the real power of her book resides in the hard science and historical context she delivers here, documenting the mounting losses that human beings are leaving in their wake." [The New York Times](#) "Surprisingly breezy, entirely engrossing, and frequently entertaining . . . Kolbert is a masterful, thought-provoking reporter." [The Boston Globe](#) "Your view of the world will be fundamentally changed. . . . Kolbert is an astute observer, excellent explainer, and superb synthesizer, and even manages to find humor in her subject matter." [The Seattle Times](#) "Powerful . . . An invaluable contribution to our understanding." [Al Gore, The New York Times Book Review](#) "Natural scientists posit that there have been five extinction events in the Earth's history (think of the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs), and Kolbert makes a compelling case that human activity is leading to the sixth." [Bill Gates](#) "[Kolbert] makes a page-turner out of even the most sober and scientifically demanding aspects of extinction." [New York Magazine](#) "Ms. Kolbert's lively account is thought-provoking." [The Wall Street Journal](#) "[Kolbert] grounds her stories in rigorous science and memorable characters past and present, building a case that a mass extinction is underway, whether we want to admit it or not." [Discover Magazine](#) "Throughout her extensive and passionately collected research, Kolbert offers a highly readable, enlightening report on the global and historical impact of humans . . . a highly significant eye-opener rich in facts and enjoyment." [Kirkus \(starred review\)](#) "The factoids Kolbert tosses off about nature's incredible variety--a frog that carries eggs in its stomach and gives birth through its mouth, a wood stork that cools off by defecating on its own legs--makes it heartbreakingly clear, without any heavy-handed sermonizing from the author, just how much we lose when an animal goes extinct. In the same way, her intrepid reporting from far-off places--Panama, Iceland, Italy, Scotland, Peru, the Amazonian rain forest of Brazil, and the remote one tree Island, off the coast of Australia--gives us a sense of the earth's vastness and beauty." [Bookforum](#) "Kolbert accomplishes an amazing feat in her latest book, which superbly blends the depressing facts associated with rampant species extinctions and impending ecosystem collapse with stellar writing to produce a text that is accessible, witty, scientifically accurate, and impossible to put down." [Publishers Weekly \(starred review\)](#) "Rendered with rare, resolute, and resounding clarity, Kolbert's compelling and enlightening report forthrightly addresses the most significant topic of our lives." [Booklist \(starred review\)](#) "An epic, riveting story of our species that reads like a scientific thriller--only more terrifying because it is real. Like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction* is destined to become one of the most important and defining books of our time." [David Grann, author of The Lost City of Z](#) "I tore through Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction* with a mix of awe and terror. Her long view of extinction excited my joy in life's diversity -- even as she made me aware how many species are currently at risk." [Dava Sobel, author of Longitude and Galileo's Daughter](#) "With her usual lucid and lovely prose, Elizabeth Kolbert lays out the sad and gripping facts of our moment on earth: that we've become a geological force, driving vast swaths of creation over the brink. A remarkable addition to the literature of our haunted epoch." [Bill McKibben, author Oil and Honey: The Education of an Unlikely Activist](#) "Elizabeth Kolbert's cautionary tale, *The Sixth Extinction*, offers us a cogent overview of a harrowing biological challenge. The reporting is exceptional, the contextualizing exemplary. Kolbert stands at the forefront of what it means to be a socially responsible American writer today." [Barry Lopez, author of Arctic Dreams](#) "The sixth mass extinction is the biggest story on Earth, period, and Elizabeth Kolbert tells it with imagination, rigor, deep reporting, and a capacious curiosity about all the wondrous creatures and ecosystems that exist, or have existed, on our planet. The result is an important book full of love and loss." [David Quammen, author of The Song of the Dodo and Spillover](#) "Elizabeth Kolbert writes with

an aching beauty of the impact of our species on all the other forms of life known in this cold universe. The perspective is at once awe-inspiring, humbling and deeply necessary." T.C. Boyle, author of *San Miguel*

About the Author Elizabeth Kolbert is a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. She is the author of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*. She lives in Williamstown, Massachusetts, with her husband and children.

Customer Reviews Most helpful customer reviews 62 of 63 people found the following review helpful. A Remembrance of Things Present By Matt Mansfield Ah, the good old days: remember cars that got maybe 13 miles per gallon, sci-fi movies about alien things crashing into Earth to be defeated by military know-how, big game hunting safaris with triumphant pictures, whale steaks on the new food menu, cute bleached coral and lacquered fish for home decoration, traveling abroad was exotic - almost a once-in-a-lifetime experience! Sure you do. And if you're still a little wistful for those times, Elizabeth Kolbert's 2014 book, *"The Sixth Extinction,"* is not going to be very satisfying. It may sound like a new cinema offering but it is far, far from it. *"The Sixth Extinction"* is a series of personally crafted portraits of life in its many different forms in flux and, in some cases, ceasing to exist - even as we read the author's words. Drawing on her writing experience with *"The New Yorker"* Magazine, Kolbert blends knowledge, anecdote and eyewitness details to create a sense of authenticity so the reader feels like he or she is part of the experience. Those seeking more rigorous analysis and exposition should try *Scientific American's* collections such as the 2014 *"Storm Warnings: Climate Change and Extreme Weather"* (see my Amazon November 3, 2014 *"Whistling in a Warm Wind"* review - here's the link:

https://www.amazon.com/review/R3NXXCNADBUTUI/ref=cm_cr_rdp_perm). Through thirteen chapters the author presents pictures of various species in crisis, the probable reasons for their present state of emergency and the efforts undertaken to aid and preserve them. Each chapter has a particular species focal point such as golden tree frogs in Panama, the American mastodon, graptolites in Scotland, coral colonies around Australia's Great Barrier Reef, declining biodiversity in the Amazon, Sumatran rhinos in U.S. zoos and new insights about relationship between *Homo Neanderthalensis* and *Homo Sapiens* in Germany. Interspersed in the initial chapters is the history of the development of various scientific approaches to understanding fossil remains, historical epochs, eras and periods, and the development of evolutionary theory, whether by catastrophe or gradual change (or "long periods of boredom interrupted occasionally by panic"). While still anecdotal, the latter chapters weave some interesting fact-based information, for example: - Earth has an estimated 50 million habitable acres, of which 27 million have been converted by people for multiple uses such as cities, housing, and pastureland. The remaining 23 million acres are roughly 60% for forests in which various species live and the remaining 40% are mountains, deserts, tundra, etc. - The various species on Earth are composed of two to seven million for insects, ten thousand for birds and five thousand for mammals, including people. - Amphibians are the most endangered group followed by reef corals, fresh water mollusks, sharks and rays, mammals and birds. Along the way, other startling observations emerge: biodiversity is declining not only due to the "old causes" such as hunted to extinction for various reasons but also new ones such as global warming impact on life-sustaining ranges, the loss of habitat space, the inability to regenerate a species due to slower reproduction rate and the rapid vulnerability to new diseases (fungal, bacterial or viral). All of these causes are now achieving a dark and unexpected synergy. Kolbert is presenting the current conditions as potential for a Sixth Major Extinction of the planet's species. In the prior roughly 500 million years there have been upwards of 25 periods of species extinction, of which five are considered to have been major ones due to breadth and probably rate of surrounding change. Nearly all of these were due to factors beyond the control of the inhabitants at the time: changes in chemical balances, glaciations and global warming due to Earth orbit wobbles, volcanic eruptions and asteroid impact leading to global cooling that killed off many of the dinosaurs 65 million years

ago. What makes the concern for the next big extinction is that it may be triggered by us - very, very rapidly. At a speed of change far beyond anything that has happened before - be it global warming by burning millions of years of fossil fuels, by eliminating living space on land or in sea for other species, or by sheer carelessness. Shall we support initiatives for mitigating factors that we can affect such as global warming? Or shall we fiddle while home burns? 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A delightful read that can awaken your awareness and shift your perspective on the world By Joanna Poppink Elizabeth Kolbert gives us the gift of new awareness with this book. She combines a sense of adventure, thorough research, personal courage, acute observation and good story telling to bring us the story of extinction as we know it today. She speaks to us of worlds gone by along with their plants and animals. She tell us of the amazing (to us now) myths of what people made out of fossils before we knew animals we never dreamed of roamed the earth long before we did. And she brings us to far way exotic places as well as easily accessed practically in your back yard sources of remnants of life gone by. She introduces us to the people, the incredible scientists and their students, who brave the elements and tolerate the tedium in gathering bits and pieces that are many millions of years old as well as explore vast caves and jungles to observe extinction in action now. Her conclusions make abundant sense after your read her work. She makes you think. And she may make you reevaluate what you think now. She's inspired me to watch the documentary, "The Sixth Extinction." I recommend it. And I'm heading back to the Museum of Natural History to see what's available to us now. I haven't been for many years. Somehow, when I first learned about the really ancient past I took in the information as if it were as permanent as the rocks and fossils described. New bits of information got tagged onto the store of knowledge as it was packed in my brain. But science keeps exploring, delving, discovering. We keep learning. And as we learn we gain a new and sometimes quite different perspective on what we thought we knew before. Kolbert gives us this experience in her marvelous book. I highly recommend it. Joanna Poppink, MFT Los Angeles eating disorder recovery psychotherapist author of Healing Your Hungry Heart: recovering from your eating disorder 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A Must Read By MDCRABGUY Six extinction is a new concept that this book brought to my attention. While knowledgable regarding global warming I had little understanding of extinctions that have already taken place. I was aware of bats in the US in decline, but not aware that a disease has totally wiped them out across the U.S. Likewise I was aware of problems with some frogs becoming extinct, but not aware that frogs have already become extinct worldwide. Nor did I know some of the science of how coral reefs are impacted. Kolbert does a very good job reviewing previous extinctions, explaining the science behind current extinctions, and the potential for a sixth extinction due to human activitiy. Kolbert's writing style for The Sixth Extinction is personal interactions and discussions with researchers in locations throughout the world. Her approach is engaging, highly personalized, and detailed whle keeping the reader focused on the big picture. I found the Sixth Extinction to be a quick, easy read, and left me wanting to know more. See all 1466 customer reviews...

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