## Topic 3: The value of species

### *General topic notes*

Two different, but related, questions:
- Are species valuable? Should we regret it when they become extinct? If yes, how valuable are they? Should welfare of the species be prioritised over wealth of individuals?
- Do species have intrinsic value? Are they inherently valuable?

Is the act of killing the second last member of a species worse than killing the third last member?
→ maybe the act of killing it equally bad, but depending on the wider implications of the extinction of the species (such as resultant over production of another species) make it 'worse'

Species = a group of actually or potentially interbreeding natural populations, which are reproductively isolated from other such groups
(doesn't sufficiently cover organisms that produce asexually)

Can species be thought of valuable in their own right, or only in certain evolutionary and ecological contexts? Would creating more species (e.g. through genetic engineering) add value?

Species can be instrumentally valuable because:
- Ecosystems are made up of species; could collapse with extinction of certain species
- Organisms contribute to human welfare (e.g. consumption or companionship): but is this not instrumental value for the individual members?

Implications may be that species without instrumental value are unworthy; or that if we can replace their value (e.g. synthetically) we have no need for them

Scepticism of idea that duties can be awarded to a collective

Controversy about the existence and nature of intrinsic value

### *Elliot reading summary*

Is there any value to species conservation over and above that for preservation of individuals? Two reasons for species preservation:
- value of species preservation is in the benefits it has for its members and members of others species (extrinsic/instrumental value)
- value in the continued existence of species itself (intrinsic value)

Support for instrumental value argument: inter-connectedness of ecosystems; disappearance of diversity (ecological collapse?); hidden resource argument

If we allow one species to become extinct, does this set a precedent for others?

Concludes: diversity of animal species does not, in itself, have value

# Topic 4: Ecosystems

## *General topic notes*

Are ecosystems valuable? Should we regret if they are destroyed? And do ecosystems have intrinsic value? Does it matter if particular ecosystems disappear if all the species remain present elsewhere? Or does it matter if ecosystems disappear from one area, but similar ones remain in other locations?

Ecosystem = biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment

Individuating ecosystems is tricky

Type/token distinction: whether the type of ecosystem disappears altogether (type), or whether it is one such ecosystem of many that disappears and the type of ecosystem is not under threat (token)

Instrumental value of ecosystems:
- Loss of ecosystem can result in species loss as well (e.g. certain animals or crops)
- Ecosystems maintain fertility of soil and remove contaminants from water
- Can provide pleasure (e.g. aesthetic value; knowledge through studying them; ability to explore them)

Intrinsic value of ecosystems:
- Arguments *for* intrinsic value may rely upon ecosystems having properties such as "stability" or "integrity" and having these properties is controversial
- Valuable as the result of a historical process that has produced complexity & relations of mutual dependency between organisms
- Morally significant interests of their own (if we think they can flourish and suffer)

## *Leopold reading summary*

Leopold defends the intrinsic value of ecosystems; locates humans *within* ecosystems, rather than outside of them

Shallow environmental ethics: value ecosystems for their contribution to human welfare
Deep green environmental ethics = ecosystems/species have intrinsic value

## *Cahen reading summary*

Cahen attempts to *deny* that ecosystems deserve moral considerations because they have interests; allows that they may have intrinsic value for other reasons

Plants have interests/goals towards which they strive; therefore, frustrating attempts to realise these goals harms the plants
→ but could these apparent 'goals' just be behavioural by-products?
Cahen supports that plants have interests, but ecosystems do not