



Who Needs the Night?

In November 2008, Verlyn Klinkenborg (in *National Geographic*) described how humans had “invaded the night” with stray light. Is it really ours to occupy? Vast numbers of the world’s species are nocturnal. The invasion of their world by artificial lighting has consequences we are only just beginning to investigate and quantify.

Animals disturbed, and killed, as a result of stray light have no curtains to pull. There are many reports of its deleterious effects on vast numbers of different species: insects, birds, fish, reptiles and mammals.

On June 16, 2009, the American Medical Association (AMA) voted unanimously to support efforts to control light pollution. Why has the AMA, a powerful and influential group, decided to support light-pollution legislation? They cite glare from bad lighting as a public-health hazard; the unnecessary energy waste; extra CO₂ produced; and finally, the fact that all species (including humans) need darkness to survive and thrive.

Nearly every organism on Earth (with the exception of some abyssal sea creatures and species that have evolved to live permanently in caves) has wired into it the day-night cycle caused by our planet’s rotation. We tamper with this ancient programming at our peril.

We have a choice:

pretend that our lighting creates no ecologically damaging effects, or own up that our lighting must be causing ecological effects, and then obey the precautionary principle which says that since some of those effects are likely to cause serious harm, we should act now to ensure a night for all species.

Nobody has said it better than Catherine Rich and Travis Longcore, authors of the definitive book *Ecological Consequences of Artificial Night Lighting*: **“Nature needs the night”**.