

In this essay I am going to be discussing the connection I have to the environment as an autistic person and why we need to do everything we can to help save the planet and the wonderful animals in it. Throughout this essay I will be voicing my opinion on how my surroundings in the environment have helped me through my day-to-day life.

My first word in this essay will be connection and how nature and the environment connect to me on a personal level as someone with autism and why I constantly surround myself within the natural world. I will then be moving onto discuss the ongoing pollution problem we are seeing in our oceans and what is happening to innocent marine life. My last word I will be discussing is overexploitation and how we are harvesting natural resources and animals faster than we can replace them. To back up my points I will be using a number of artists and theorists who have the same passion for the environment as I do and have dedicated most their life to the cause. By the end of my essay, I will come up with a question that will determine my ongoing practice in the third year.

Connection

Being autistic means I have many sensory problems and lack some social skills, busy cities can be a major problem as I get extremely overwhelmed with the excessive noises, crowds and smells, whereas when I'm in nature everything feels tranquil and I feel connected to the environment I'm in.

I got diagnosed with autism later in life than most but since the diagnosis everything from my childhood now makes sense. I've always had a connection to animals and respect them as they have been a part of this planet for a lot longer than humans have. One of my favourite aspects about animals is there isn't any desire for social communication, and our minds connect on a spiritual level.

I went without animals for years due to my mother's obsessive-compulsive disorder as she couldn't cope with the fur around the house and the constant need to clean it up. This all changed when I was diagnosed with depression when I was fourteen years of age, I was trying multiple variations of antidepressants to stop the emptiness I was feeling.

Alexithymia is common within neurodivergent people, and I find it hard to

describe how I'm feeling, and I don't like physical touch with another human beings.

In 2021 I got my cat Sky to help me through my day-to-day life, as soon as I had her there was an instant connection and the world around me became more manageable as she was my main focus, even though she is a cat we share a lot of the same qualities. She doesn't meow and has a quiet nature about her. Each day when I went to school, I would have her to come home to and just be with, no words or thoughts, I was just happy to be in her company. A few months later I decided to get another Cat whose name is Magic, she is the complete opposite to Sky as she loves attention, people and is very vocal. In Recent studies written by (Dr Emma Rogers Smith) "Can cats sense autism' 2023", she explains that a cat isn't likely to recognise someone might be autistic by direct ways, but they are highly tuned into their owners' emotions and know when something is off. I currently have two chickens called Sun and Moon although they are more on the louder and uncontrollable side, I like the responsibility of making sure they are well and looked after, and it keeps me in a routine as I need to clean and provide them with food and water. My chickens supply me with eggs daily and I believe if there was a zombie apocalypse and there was no

food left in the supermarkets, I think I would survive because I have a regular supply of eggs, and they can live off greenery and insects.

Overexploitation

Overexploitation is one of the leading causes for animal extinction and deforestation, as humans we are removing living resources from the environment faster than they can be replaced, resulting in biodiversity loss.

Overexploitation can be caused by many attributes such as 'overfishing' and is one of the main threats to marine life as thousands of animals are being caught using a method called trawling. Essentially it's a type of fishing net which drags across the sea floor catching different types of species resulting in massively reducing populations and destroying habitats.



Palo Fanciulli

Palo Fanciulli is an Italian fisherman whose aim is to save sea life from illegal trawling. Italian Law states that trawling is illegal but not far off the coast it's not uncommon for fishermen to carry out these illegal acts. The trawling nets are weighted and rip up the seabed destroying habitats, reefs, and killing eggs that have been laid. In 2006 the Tuscan Italian Government dropped a concrete block into the ocean to lay on the seabed to try and stop the trawling, but this operation was unsuccessful as the blocks were too far apart. Palo got permission from the Environmental

Protection Agency to his own expense to place 80 more blocks into the ocean. He got in touch with local artists to carve into marble stone blocks to then be lowered into the seabed. He worked with multiple artists who have the same passion for this cause as he does.

Another issue overexploitation refers to is deforestation, this occurs when forests are cleared for agriculture, mining, urbanisation and causes long-term damage to the ecosystem and harms wildlife. Trees inhale and store carbon dioxide a toxic greenhouse gas we put into the air, from transportation, industrial processes and electricity. The leaves and roots of a tree inhale carbon dioxide storing it and releases oxygen into the air as a result of photosynthesis. When deforestation occurs all the carbon dioxide is released into the atmosphere acting as greenhouse gas.

One of the main reasons deforestation occurs is the need for materials such as timber and planks as they help secure infrastructure to our homes. Another reason for deforestations is the need for palm oil as it's found in 50% of the packaged products in our supermarkets, such as shampoo, toothpaste, and crisps. Clearing land for urban cities takes away a huge percentage of forests, as well as construction production such as mining.



Aerial view of Amazon Rainforest where it borders a previously burned and cleared section, outside of the Parque Estadual de Guajara-Mirim in Brazil's state of Rondonia in October of 2018.

Daniel Beltrá is a photographer who shows the brutal truth of the environment. In his photos he captures current events such as war, deforestation, oil spills, and the polar ice decline.

He takes a large majority of his photos from an arial view as he believes the viewer can get a better perspective when looking down at a bigger picture.

In this photo there are clear signs of deforestation as one side of the forest is alive and the other has just been burnt and cleared down.

I am fascinated with the Amazon Rainforest as it is the biggest rainforest in the whole world reaching 67million squared kilometers and approximately 28 times the size of the United Kingdom, it is also home to 10% of the worlds animals that we know of. The trees in the Amazon Rainforest inhale so much carbon dioxide they act as regulators and slow down global warming. The Amazon Rainforest produces 20% of the world's oxygen as it holds 200 billion tons of carbon dioxide, therefore when trees are cut down allot of that gets released into the atmosphere. Cattle are one of the main reasons for deforestation in Brazil as there is a high demand for their beef.

A major problem for deforestation is the harm it is doing to animals and the homes they live in. Due to deforestation many animal species have become extinct as their homes are being destroyed along with allot of their food supply. By removing the trees in the forests there is increased risk of predators as there are fewer places to hide, this also comes alongside pooching. Some animals struggle to adapt to new environments as it doesn't have all the resources they require to survive.

As humas it's sad to see that the world is killing innocent animals due to our need for supplies and in the process we are also harming the

environment they live in. A quote from David Attenborough's book: A Life On Our Planet, he stated "We live our comfortable lives in the shadow of a disaster of our own making. That disaster is being brought about by the very things that allow us to live our comfortable lives".

Ways to help stop deforestation include reduce, reuse, recycle, check labels when buying brands and make sure they are cruelty free and have been harvested properly. There are a lot of environmental movements in place to help raise awareness and support the animals within these horrible conditions. A very well-known movement is WWF (World Wildlife Fundraiser) and was founded in 1961 to help save endangered animals. They work with scientists, governments and people who live in near villages to help make a lasting impact.

Pollution

My last word that I will be discussing is pollution and how it is killing marine life with either waste debris, plastic, or oil pollution.

Pam Longobardi is an environmental artist and activist who makes art out of the waste she finds washed up along shores. In 2005 Pam Longobardi was hiking in South Port Hawaii when she came across a massive array of everyday plastic materials that had been washed up onto the shore. She remembers that day as she states, "It changed my life".

After this day she started to investigate the materials that had washed up onto the shores and was working with scientists, activists and other artists. She started to create art using the materials wash up onto the shore as it was a crime of overconsumption.



*'Bounty Pilfered' by artist Pam Longobardi
2014,2015.*

Pam Longobardi participated in the 2013 GYRE expedition visiting remote coastal areas of Alaska and created specific works for the 'GYRE'. The Plastic Ocean exhibition at the Anchorage Museum February 2014. Pam Longobardi was the leading artist on this expedition along with leading scientist Carl Safina. Even though they have different careers they both have a passion for animals and creates awareness for the environment. The main object of this expedition was to find washed-up waste along a 500-mile radius around the Gulf of Alaska and make artwork that would then be exhibited at the Anchorage Museum. When approaching the island, they were shocked as they were convened by the garbage waste rather than the

beautiful wildlife that should be there, as a generation ago none of it existed. The team visited multiple places along the Alaskan coastline collecting garbage waste looking for different materials to create their art piece. One of the beaches they visited was 10km long and they were extracting several thousand pounds of waste off the beach.

Her final piece she exhibited was the representation of a whale's stomach and how when they swallow plastic and it can't be broken down as its not biodegradable therefore resulting in internal injuries, toxic poisoning and eventually death. Marine Debris Program Director Nancy Wallace displayed in the Anchorage Museum' Gyre: The Plastic Ocean" exhibit explains how debris impacts large marine animals such as grey whales, with a quote stating, "Grey whales are bottom feeders", which means they eat near the sea floor, filtering tiny prey from water, sediment, and foreign objects through large baleen plates. Unfortunately the food they filter is not always food; it can be plastic bags, textiles, or any other debris found in industrial, coastal waters.



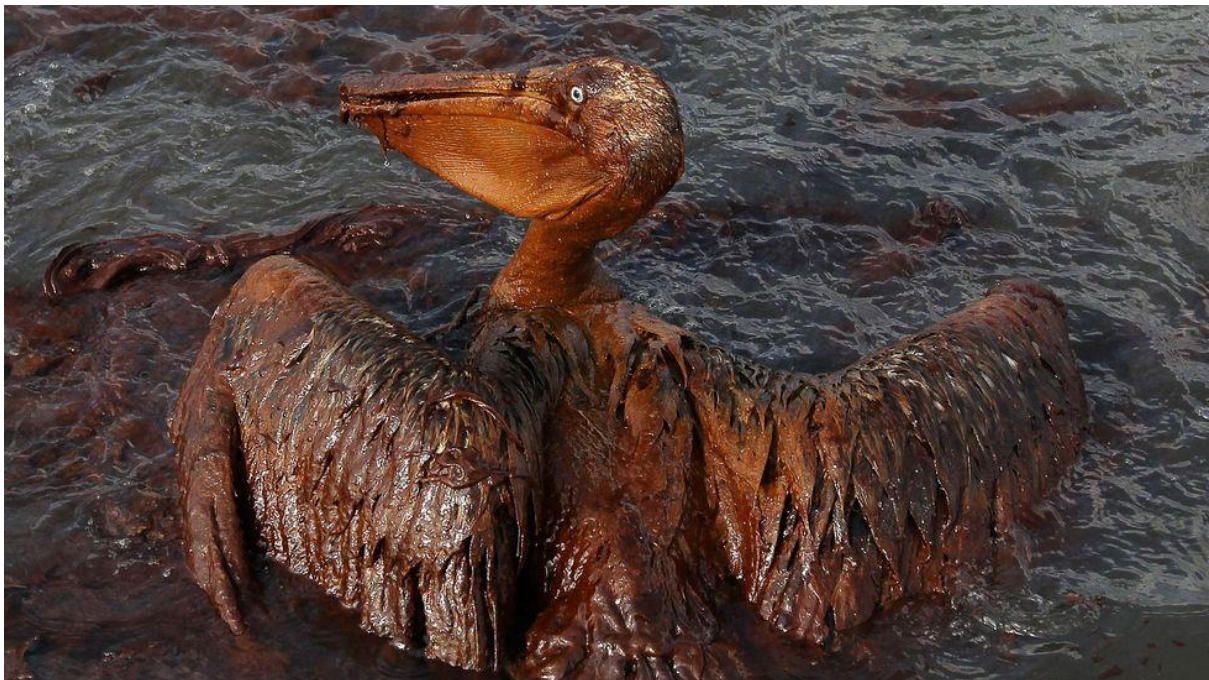
Pam Longobardi, '*Crime of Wilful Neglect (For BP)*' 2014

Ocean plastic from Gulf of Mexico, Alaska.

On 20th of April 2010 Deep Water Horizon's oil rig exploded resulting in the death of 11 crew members and killing over 800,000 coastline birds, 6,000 sea turtles and over 25,000 marine animals, this was the worse accidental oil spill in history. 2 million gallons of oil were poured into the Sea of Mexico and only 25% of the oil was recovered, the spill was so big it could be seen

from space. BP oil also made the local residents of the Mexican Gulf sign nondisclosure agreements as they were trying to cover up due to the fact they knew the rig needed work. Rachel Carson states in her book, 'Silent Springs', "It is also an era dominated by industry in which the right to make a top dollar at whatever cost is seldom challenged."

The piece is personal to Pam as she calls the Gulf Mexican beach her home as she got married there and her sister also lives there. The piece consists of over 500 elements that had washed up onto the shore and she placed them in a droplet shape to represent the oil spill.



Win McNamee

This is a photo took the world by surprise as Win McNamee (chief photographer at Getty images USA) took this photo of a brown pelican which stood before him after the oil spill. This is a really hard image for me to look at/discuss as the look of confusion and pain the brown pelican is experiencing is true sadness to me as the species had nothing to do with the oil spill; the management in charge of BP Oil could have prevented this. In the BBC report carried out by Riley Ferrell, 2023, the photographer Win McNamee said, “It's difficult to describe the feelings of helplessness that a person feels when they see wildlife caught up in the middle of an environmental disaster”.

I was given an article ‘why does imagining the end of the world feel easier than saving it’, by Rebecca Tamas, 2022, the image of the oiled pelican reminded me of it. “I hoped that by imagining the worst fate possible for the planet, people might be scared into changing their behaviours”. I was reminded of this quote due to the realisation of how bad the oil spill was.

Conclusion/question

Throughout this essay I have been sharing some of my personal life as someone with autism and unfolding the revealing harsh truth what happens within the environment and why that affects me.

I hope my research and work make people rethink their attributions to the environment and inspire them to help make a change, this is why I'm ending my essay with the question.... How can the fascination autistic people have with the environment and the animals within it create a positive effect?

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