

Study: Global species extinction not quite so desire

By Amina Khan, Los Angeles Times

Hit the snooze on that ecological doomsday clock for a minute: The world's species may not be going extinct quite as fast as we thought they were. Scientists may be overestimating the crisis by as much as 160 percent, according to a recent study.

The research was published online last week in the journal Nature.

While stressing that the global extinction crisis is still indeed a crisis, the study's two authors called for a better mathematical model to predict how fast the world's diversity is disappearing.

The massive loss of species occurring today may constitute the sixth mass extinction of life on Earth. It is caused in large part by habitat destruction, which can be blamed on human encroachment. The rate of biodiversity loss, however, is difficult to estimate, said study coauthor Stephen Hubbell, an ecologist at UCLA.

One of the models that scientists use reverses what's called the species-area relationship: This starts with the number of species in a certain area and then measures how many new species pop up as the surveyed area increases.

Extinction rates, at first glance, should be the opposite of that relationship – losing species as land is lost. So researchers run the equation backward to calculate how fast species are disappearing.

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