

'Sixth mass extinction' may wipe out 75% of animal species

By Alan Neuhauser, U.S. News and World Report

From rhinos to tigers to elephants, three out of four "familiar" animal species – those commonly thought of and well understood by human beings – will be extinguished within three human lifetimes, a new study finds, confirming that Earth is in the midst of what's become known as the "sixth mass extinction" driven by runaway development, shrinking animal habitats and climate change.

"Scientists never like to say anything for sure, but this is close as we're ever going to get to saying, 'We're certain that this is a huge problem,'" says study coauthor Anthony Barnosky, a paleontologist at UC Berkeley, calling the problem "quite dire."

The hundreds of species eliminated in the past century alone would otherwise have lasted at least another 800 to 10,000 years, the study found. Coral reefs "are in danger of annihilation" as soon as 2070, Barnosky says, potentially erasing a quarter of the ocean's species.

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