PREFACE

# CONNECTEDNESS OF BEINGS

**Extinction of one species can trigger a sequence that causes the end of others. The process is often quick and indiscernible**

On February 19, 2019, Australia's environment minister announced name of the first species to have gone extinct due to human-induced climate change—Bramble Cay melomys (*Melomys rubicola*)—a small brown rat belonging to Class Mammalia of the Animal Kingdom. The rodent was found in Bramble Cay, a small vegetable coral key in Australia's extreme north.

The minister only made official what the world had speculated for long. The rodent, which dug furrows in herd fields and among strandline plants, was feared to have been extinct for some time. The government of Australia's Queensland province reported the species to be extinct in June 2016. Any member of the species had not been seen for about a decade. Some researchers, though, maintained that there was still an outside chance of its survival. It was placed in the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of Threatened Species. "The Bramble Cay melomys was a little brown rat. But it was our little brown rat and it was our responsibility to make sure it persisted. And we failed," Tim Beshara, federal policy director for the Wilderness Society, told the country's Senate, reported news agency Xinhua. A five-year

**Cutting of palm trees ended the 20,000-strong human population in Easter Island of the Pacific Ocean within just 1,400 years. Humans settled here in 400 AD, sbut when Dutch travellers arrived in 1722 all they found was a grassy wasteland**

plan to save the species was introduced in 2008, he added. The plan, however, did not lend due importance to the immediate risk.

Australia has been the theatre of several extinctions, be it megafauna (including giant marsupials like diprotodon) of pre-historical time or the more recent cases since the advent of European colonisers. Varieties of emu, like the dwarf emu and black emu, vanished in the 1820s, less than half a century after Arthur Phillip's First Fleet landed in Sydney in 1788. Since then, scores of birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals have gone extinct. They range from beings as small as sterlings and parrots to those as big as the Tasmanian tiger, with kangaroos, bandicoots, frogs and a whole lot of other animals in between.

It reminds one of another historical human escapade in triggering extinction. The story of Easter Island in the Pacific Ocean is the perfect parable for extinction. This 165 square kilometre island had fertile soil and mild climate. Humans settled there in 400 AD and, through the centuries, the population became as high as 20,000, estimate archaeologists. But when Dutch travellers reached there in 1722, they found a grassy wasteland, with hundreds of very large sculptures strewn all over. What had happened?

At its peak, Easter Islands' dense forests had hundreds of massive endemic palm trees. The islanders used them to make fishing boats and to drag, position and erect the huge sculptures the Dutch travellers saw. Soon, the islanders had cut one palm too many. The available trees had shrunk to stumps. Unable to make canoes, they stopped going to the sea. By 1400 AD, fishing stopped. The people began eating the island's animals: porpoises, seabirds, land birds, rats and seals. The delicacies were cooked in ovens fired by wood from the forests. As meals increased, animals and forests vanished. The disappearance of birds brought pollination to a halt. Then, cannibalism became the islanders' only option. They ate and killed each other and turned the island bare again in just 1,400 years.