

Instead of making teen moms famous, we should focus on the dangers of overpopulation

By Irene Messina

Bristol Palin, Amber Portwood and Maci Bookout are names we wouldn't be so familiar with except for one fact: They are all teenage moms. Seen on the cover of tabloid magazines and on television shows, these women represent a new crop of reality stars—unmarried mothers famous for giving birth at a young age.

Today, millions of viewers watch reality shows like MTV's 16 and Pregnant, and alarming figures are coming from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy: About three out of 10 girls get pregnant by age 20, and half of all pregnancies in the U.S.—3 million a year—are unplanned.

An even more alarming statistic: The world's population is expected to reach 7 billion this year. Each day, 350,000-plus

babies are born around the globe. How many more births can the Earth handle at this rate?

The answer to that question depends on who is asked. A September 2009 commentary by Arthur Sinodinos in The Australian reads, "One source of national power is population. On recent projection, we may hit 35 million by the middle of the century. Why stop there?" He determines: The population projection "for Australia is good news on economic, social and strategic grounds."

On the flipside, there are those working against the wave of increased population, including the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity. The organization points to evidence that our massive population growth negatively impacts the planet's resources and pushes more plants and animals closer to extinction.

In 2010, the CBD launched a country-wide distribution of 350,000 condoms, the last distributed on New Year's Eve, with the intent: "By choosing to take more care and responsibility for our reproductive behaviors, we humans can ensure a future in which the Earth is able to provide a living for all species, including our own."

The condoms weren't your run-of-the-mill Trojans. Instead, the condom packages contained original artwork of threatened or endangered species, including the polar bear, the jaguar, the American burying beetle, the snail darter and the coquí guajón rock frog. Catchy slogans were added, such as, "Wrap with care, save the polar bear." More will be distributed this year. (Visit endangeredspeciescondoms.com for info.)

Overpopulation campaign coordinator Randy Serraglio (also a Weekly columnist) said

hundreds of volunteers around the country helped distribute the condoms in various ways. Some brought them to parties; others gave them to teenagers; some condoms even made it home for the holidays.

Tucson volunteer Steve Cody distributed his supply of condoms to members of a local social group to which he belongs. When Cody heard about the endangered-species condom project, he thought it was an interesting idea and praised CBD.

“If you look at the major factors influencing environmental challenges that we have going on, the sheer number of people is a big issue,” said Cody. “A lot of people in Tucson are very concerned about the environment and our impact on the environment and how we can walk more lightly on the Earth. ... I think the Center for Biological Diversity is a real jewel in Tucson.”

Serraglio points to the proposed Rosemont mine as an example of how consumption to provide for the growing masses affects the environment. “(People say), ‘Well, we need this resource. We need copper out of the ground, and we’re going to get it.’ We petitioned for five

different species found in that area. ... There are all kinds of species who are unable to run away.”

Serraglio said that same type of situation plays out with thousands of species in areas all over the planet.

“The evidence is clear that, at this time, the cause (of mass extinctions) is the fact that one species is procreating beyond all reasonable bounds of sustainability,” said Serraglio.

In the discussion about unplanned pregnancies and the risks involved, Serraglio queried: “You might be willing to take that risk for yourself, but is it worthwhile taking that risk for jaguars and for people born 100 years from now? ... It’s going to impact everybody else who lives on the planet and all the other species.”

Considering that in the United States, we consume resources at a much greater rate than those in other countries, and we have millions of unplanned babies, it adds up to a losing proposition for the Earth. Only with increased awareness and behaviors can we turn attention away from famous teen moms and back to the planet.