

Humanist Climate Action



Welcome to the latest Humanist Climate Action newsletter. Since our previous newsletter in May, national and international events have been, to say the least, challenging.

The [US Supreme Court](#), fresh from setting back women's rights by half a century, ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency did not have the authority to limit greenhouse gas emissions in 19 coal-dependent states. The court sided with conservative, coal-dependent states and fossil-fuel companies. Here in the UK, [the Climate Change Committee](#) warned the UK Government that if it is to meet its commitment to achieve Net Zero, 'holes must be plugged in its strategy urgently'.

In this newsletter, we report on our successful online event with Professor Maclean and Professor Zoe Davis, *In The Footsteps of Darwin: protecting biodiversity in the era of climate change*. You'll also find our response to an [important government consultation](#) calling for strong environmental protection targets, as well as a short article on the language that surrounds the climate crisis. And, we're encouraging all our supporters to get involved in [The Great Big Green Week!](#) Please do get in touch if you have your own plans and activities for the Great Big Green Week!

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DARWIN

Protecting biodiversity in the era of the climate crisis

Humanist Climate Action were thrilled to hold their first [free online panel event](#) on **biodiversity** on 18 May. Committee Coordinator Lori Marriott chaired the session and panellists Professor Norman MacLean, (Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences, Southampton University) and Professor Zoe Davies (Professor of Biodiversity Conservation at the University of Kent) provided their perspective on the current biodiversity crisis and responded to a significant number and variety of questions from the audience.

[Watch the event on YouTube](#)

Professor Maclean has been working on a book called *The State of World Wildlife*. He talked about the climate emergency and described the intensification of agriculture, pollution of air and water, the increase of the human population, deforestation, and over-fishing as some of the reasons wildlife has come under such intense pressure. He mentioned some successes over the last five years where a small number of iconic species have staged a recovery and proposed that this recovery is possible if a sustained effort is made.



Professor Davies said that she views the biodiversity loss from a conservation standpoint. Her view is that the environmental crisis is dual and that supporting biodiversity should be at the centre of the response to the environmental crisis. She fears that biodiversity does not have the same focus as the climate crisis and believes that for the response to be effective these must be dealt with together. Her view is that complete ecosystems are the best defence against the climate crisis. But combating the [climate crisis](#) is by no means the only reason for protecting and restoring the natural environment, and she pointed out, for instance, that human interaction with nature is very beneficial for human physical and mental health, as was seen in the pandemic.

Both [speakers](#) were concerned that much of the activity undertaken to address the climate crisis is ineffective. In particular, planting single tree species is harmful to biodiversity. The UK has very little native woodland left, and what it has is in pockets that are too small to sustain biodiversity. The UK needs to recreate larger natural mixed woodlands of native species.

A discussion focused on what we can do to contribute to the activities supporting biodiversity. It was felt that engaging with decision makers and becoming engaged and active within our own communities was important. Experience has shown that individuals who engage with the natural world become advocates of the importance of protecting it. The advice when engaging with others was 'don't preach'.

[The panellists](#) were asked what they thought members could do to support biodiversity and were provided with a number of very practical suggestions. It was felt that getting involved in citizen science initiatives like the RSPB annual count of birds in your garden or other open space, or with the Wildlife Trusts' activities, are valuable. The Wildlife Trusts organise butterfly and wildflower counts which are essential as they monitor the actual state of these environments and changes on a regular basis.

The other suggestion was understanding what you could do on your balcony or in your garden to support pollinators. This was another area where greater understanding has enabled local councils and individuals to support the insects that are so critical for our food security. While a single garden may be very small, the fact that even in built-up areas there are thousands of gardens makes them exceedingly valuable in providing insects, birds and other wildlife with what they need to survive.

The committee was very grateful to the panellists for their knowledge and advice and to the audience for their engagement and varied and thoughtful questions. [You can watch the event on Youtube.](#)

Pauline Element

GOVERNMENT ENVIRONMENTAL TARGETS

More ambition needed!

In June, Humanist Climate Action [submitted a response](#) to the Government's consultation on environmental targets. Whilst welcoming DEFRA's commitment to setting targets to address biodiversity decline, we called for them to be more ambitious in order to match the scale of the crisis.

For example, we said that the proposed target of a 10% increase in long-term species abundance by 2042 was too low. We were particularly concerned that DEFRA is proposing 2030 as the baseline for the 10% increase, with an interim target to 'halt the decline in species abundance by 2030'. That would mean that biodiversity could continue to decline between now and 2030, and a 10% increase after that could still leave the situation worse than it is now! We urged the Government to set a target of a 20% increase with 2022 as the baseline.

The [Government](#) also needs to set a more ambitious target for the overall condition of rivers and streams. Under the proposed framework, there is no overall target for water quality, only targets for specific pollutants and sectors such as agriculture and water companies. This limited

ambition could mean that targets for these specific sectors might be met, but overall water and river quality could remain low or even worsen.

On the proposed targets for increasing tree and woodland cover, we agreed with the level of ambition, but regretted that the target says nothing about the quality or the location of the woodland to be created. A substantial amount of the new woodland cover should expand and connect existing woodlands, so that the existing wildlife can thrive and expand in line with wider biodiversity targets. And we added that new woodland should also be of a high quality, with an emphasis on planting native trees in appropriate habitats.

Our [response to the consultation](#) was in line with those of other national organisations such as the RSPB and the Wildlife Trusts. In view of the urgent need for action on biodiversity, we're hoping to see revised targets which match the urgency.

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE!

Here's why we should say 'climate crisis' or 'emergency' and not climate change'

Language expresses and evokes ideas, thoughts and feelings. It is very important to use language that matches purpose as inappropriate language use can damage credibility, undermine the argument, and/or mislead. As the science changes so does the issue, and language affects how we visualise the severity of the issue we're dealing with, so why is 'crisis' more effective than 'change'?

In the past few years, journalists, academics, and people who care about the environment have been referring to climate change as the 'climate crisis' or the 'climate emergency'. While appearing to be semantics, language affects how people visualise the reality and scale of the issue; the greatest issue of the last 50 years. The shift in language quite clearly signals that the climate crisis is something to be dealt with now, rather than passively observed. As we face a real existential threat, it's become more widely accepted that the language we use needs to match the severity of the situation.

'Climate change' implies the climate crisis is slow and natural, and not long ago it was talked about as something that was to happen somewhere in the future. But referring to the climate crisis, as a crisis, reminds us that it is a time of intense danger, entirely man-made, and a crisis to be dealt with now.

Geoff Sallis

THE GREAT BIG GREEN WEEK



This September, people across the country will come together during [The Great Big Green Week](#) to take positive action with their communities; hosting events and activities to inspire others to step up for climate, nature and people, and call on decision makers to create a safer, greener future.

Humanist Climate Action is encouraging humanists to join activists across the country during [The Great Big Green Week](#), to demonstrate their commitment in tackling the climate crisis and protecting nature. We are hoping to organise an event in London – look out for more details in the September newsletter. Setting up an event in your own area? If so, let us know your plans!

From safeguarding the places we know and love, to protecting and restoring our natural world, there are an endless number of reasons why people from all walks of life are taking action - you can hear just a few of them in [this new film](#). And, if you'd like to know more about how to plan an event in your community for The Great Big Green Week, you can find out more on [The Great Big Green Week website](#).

ASK HCA A QUESTION!

Are you curious about the Humanist Climate Action position on an environmental issue? Do you want to live a greener lifestyle but aren't sure what changes you can make? Send us your questions!

Email campaigns@humanists.uk with HCA in the subject line and we will get back to you and your questions may even be featured in a future newsletter! Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).