



# Humanist Climate Action

## March 2023 NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the March newsletter. We're pleased to be including some more contributions and feedback from readers and supporters, along with news of recent and forthcoming actions, including a protest against the Rosebank oilfield development and a campaign to stop environmental laws being scrapped.

Humanist Climate Action represents a broad consensus among humanists on the urgent need to tackle the problems of climate change and environmental destruction. Within that consensus there are bound to be differing views both about the policies that are needed and the actions that humanists and others should be taking. We see HCA and the newsletter as a forum in which to discuss those differences. We won't all agree on the answers and we shouldn't pretend that we do, but it should be part of our role as humanists to exemplify the value of reasoned debate.

We also aim to combine an emphasis on the urgent need for political action, and for protest at the lack of it, with a recognition of the things we can all do in our daily lives to help create a better world. Again there will be differing views among humanists on the relative importance of these. In this as in previous newsletters we try to do justice to both.



**The Great Big Green Week, promoted by the Climate Coalition, is a celebration of community action to tackle the climate and nature crises. People come together to show that local actions can be taken to stand up for nature and support the communities already suffering because of the human-made climate crisis.**

In 2021, over 200,000 people showed up for the planet during the first Great Big Green Week. More than **5,000 events** nationwide celebrated how communities are taking action to tackle the climate crisis and protect green spaces, and encouraged others to get involved. In 2022, communities who believe in science and in working for a better future for all again came together with the support of many national organisations, institutions, businesses, and media outlets.

We believe this is the time to get more people involved up and down the country, and put pressure on the UK Government to up its game in working for solutions to this crisis that is impacting on us all. HCA is a part of the Climate Coalition and this is an opportunity for humanists to show support for science and stand with other environmental groups to protect our children's future. Take a look at [the Great Big Green Week website](#) to find ideas for local actions, and if you organise something in your locality, do let us know what you're doing and how it goes.

## **A CLEANER, GREENER FUTURE IS WITHIN REACH**

The Climate Coalition is the UK's largest group of people dedicated to action against climate change. Along with sister organisations [Stop Climate Chaos Cymru](#) and [Stop Climate Chaos Scotland](#), they are a group of over 140 organisations — including the National Trust, Women's Institute, Oxfam, RSPB, and HCA — and 22 million voices strong. They are reaching across the UK to show love for all the things we want to protect from the climate crisis, and to ask politicians to put aside their differences and commit to doing whatever is necessary to protect them.

## ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AT RISK

Rebekka Hill, who is the Communications volunteer for Young Humanists, also works as a Campaigns Coordinator for the group Grass Roots Activists, and has sent us this information about an important campaign.

On 22 September 2022, the UK Government made plans via the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill to either scrap or amend all retained EU laws by the end of this year. This includes a total of 570 British environmental laws, which means they are now at risk! The Bill passed its third reading on 18 January by 297 votes to 238. The laws at risk include habitat regulations, the purpose of which is to determine whether building development would have an adverse effect on European designated habitats and species, such as the Eurasian Otter.



Why is this important? If it is found development would harm the species, it can only take place if compensatory measures are taken, which effectively drives away infrastructure on important habitats. This is particularly important for the survival of otters, which rely on tree roots in the aesthetically appealing habitats for infrastructure, wetlands, to raise their pups. Research backs up the importance of these laws, as the most important factor in a species' resilience to climate change was found to be whether these regulations apply. Furthermore, other EU environmental laws cover water quality, sewage pollution and the use of pesticides.

As semi-aquatic animals, high water quality is vital to the species' existence. In the latter half of the 20th century, a large reason for their nationwide disastrous population decline was the result of industrial chemicals called PCBs and organochlorine pesticides, as they poisoned the water bodies where otters bathe, drink, and feed. Improvements in the legislature have lessened pollution and otter populations are recovering. However, toxic chemicals linked to miscarriage and cancer that have been leaked from factories are still found in otters. The potential removal of existing laws on water quality risks contaminating the species even further, and another

catastrophic population decline for these fascinating and rambunctious creatures could be on the horizon.

Other laws for scrap include air quality regulations, which are important in minimising air pollution from industrial chemical companies. Polluted air leads to eutrophication and acidification of ecosystems, causing reduced agricultural productivity, permanent ecosystem damage, and loss of biodiversity. In addition, the Wildlife and Countryside Link also did a compelling piece of [economic analysis](#) which shows that the cost of dropping or weakening EU environmental laws in just four sectors could reach over £82 billion over 30 years! The costs across all sectors would be far higher as the four only account for a small proportion of the 1,000+ laws in scope.

### What can we do about it?

[Grass Roots Activists](#) is the campaigns section of [Wild Ideas](#), a not-for-profit organisation which exists to support communities and individuals to connect to and take action for our environment. We recently launched a campaign called #StandUpForNature. All the above information is featured [on our website](#), as well as clear guides on how to take action which involve signing a petition, spreading awareness, writing to your MP, and more! Make sure to also like and follow our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#) page for regular updates on the Bill and more environmental campaigns we are doing!

Together we can #StandUpForNature and save our wildlife!

## STOP ROSEBANK

On 7 February, HCA Coordinator Lori Marriott took part in a vigil with representatives of different faiths and beliefs outside the Norwegian Embassy in support of the [campaign to stop the development of the Rosebank oilfield](#). Rosebank is the biggest undeveloped oil and gas field in the North Sea. An application has been submitted for UK Government approval to start developing the field by oil and gas giant Equinor, which is majority-owned by the Norwegian Government. It has been estimated that burning Rosebank's oil and gas would create more CO2 than the combined emissions of all 28 low-income countries in the world, including Uganda, Ethiopia, and Mozambique.



You can support this campaign by [emailing your MP](#) and asking them to Stop Rosebank.

## MORE ON LIVESTOCK FARMING

Previous newsletters have featured a debate on the environmental pros and cons of livestock farming. Fergus Webster and Chantal Lewis-Villien argued, in opposition to George Monbiot, that there is an environmental case for organic pasture-fed meat, and that such farming, especially on marginal land, can be important both for carbon sequestration and for the conservation of biodiversity. Jamie Woodhouse here offers another viewpoint.

I'm afraid the push-back from Fergus and Chantal to George Monbiot isn't supported by the evidence on the climate and environmental impacts of animal agriculture.

The core inescapable issue is that of feed conversion ratios. Of all the nutrition fed to a farmed animal (which includes ~80% of the global soy crop!) we only get 5-10% of nutrition back in animal products. That catastrophic level of waste and inefficiency drives the land and water use and pollution problems and of course, the process generates CH<sub>4</sub> and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for every day each animal is alive. These two data sets from Our World In Data give a great overview: [environmental impacts of food](#) and [land use diets](#).

Sadly, this also means that the less intensive animal farming is, the worse its environmental and climate impact. As animals live longer lives they generate more emissions and waste more resources. As animals are given more space they use up more land. Factory farming is particularly horrific – but it's slightly less inefficient than non-factory farming. That's why it dominates food production (~90% globally).

All too often, the pushback against a transition to plant and plant-based agriculture is driven by motivated reasoning. We've all been indoctrinated into thinking animal agriculture is a good thing – and we're all involved – so we're desperate for excuses to continue it. If we're going to be good humanists we have to look at the evidence with clear eyes and be brave enough to challenge the social norms we've been brought up with. Fortunately humanists are good at that. Most importantly, the humanist 'concern for other sentient animals' means we should consider their points of view as we do that of our fellow humans. That must mean, at least, that we wouldn't needlessly harm or kill any sentient being – human or not. But since all our nutritional needs can be met from plants and plant-based foods, that's exactly what nearly all animal farming now is: needless harm and killing. It's time for humanists to lead the way yet again and show the world that there is no 'humane' or 'sustainable' animal agriculture and that it's easier than ever to switch. It's a win-win-win for us humans, for non-human animals and for the planet we all share. We just need to choose it.

## IN OTHER FEEDBACK...

Gilbert Jackson has written: 'The big elephant is still in the room, i.e. population growth. Until this is curbed the things that you talk about unfortunately will not reduce global warming. If we reach another 1 billion in the next 12-14 years, then we are facing catastrophe.' And Mike Hinford has suggested that [support for Universal Basic Income would help with tackling climate](#)



[change](#). These are more good examples of the important issues on which humanist environmentalists will have differing views. We'd like to hear them! Contact us at [climateaction@humanists.uk](mailto:climateaction@humanists.uk).

## SPRING IS SPRUNG (ALMOST!)

Spring is almost here! Now is a great time to think about [planting some seeds or bulbs](#), whether you have a garden, a balcony, a windowsill, or an indoor pot – even cultivating a single plant can be very fulfilling. If you are able to grow in the open air, do take a moment to think about what you could do for our pollinator friends. Providing a variety of [plants that flower at different times](#) can be a food source for bees, especially in cities. As the weather gets warmer it can also be helpful to put out a small dish of water – but do make sure the bowl is very shallow, or has plenty of 'bee rafts' so thirsty insects don't fall in. It can also be very rewarding to grow your own food, and this can be a fantastic [activity to get children involved](#) with.



*11th floor balcony tomatoes*

Herbs, chilies, and even mushrooms can be grown indoors, and a huge variety of food can be grown in containers including potatoes, carrots, peas, beans, strawberries, salads, and tomatoes. You could even try [growing from your home food scraps](#), for example by saving some seeds from fresh tomatoes or by placing the root end of a bunch of celery in water! Seeing a flower bloom or eating something you have just grown and picked yourself can be satisfying, and good for the environment.

***Lori Marriott***

## **APPLICATIONS INVITED**

Humanist Climate Action is looking for volunteers [from Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) to join the steering committee. Wales Humanists has been invited to join Climate Cymru and this prompted a realisation that we need representation on the committee both for Wales and for Northern Ireland. If you are interested, please apply today!