

MY WAY OF THINKING

## MARK CARWARDINE

The broadcaster and campaigner discusses the recent UN report on nature's dangerous decline, and invites your thoughts on the subject.

**B**rexit, Brexit, Brexit. The irony is that it doesn't really matter what happens – whether we leave with a deal, crash out with no deal, or remain – because, if we ignore a recent, ominous report by the UN, then Brexit won't even register on the scale of problems ahead. It states categorically that we are destroying Earth's natural life-support system at such an alarming rate, our own future is in jeopardy. Now that puts things into perspective.

The *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* is the most thorough planetary health check ever undertaken. Compiled by hundreds of the world's leading scientists, representing many different areas of expertise, its warnings are unusually stark for a UN report (which has to be agreed by global consensus).

The natural world is unravelling at a rate unprecedented in human history, it says. The human footprint is so large that we are leaving little space for anything else – indeed, one million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction in the near future. Deforestation, overfishing, bushmeat hunting, poaching, climate change, pollution and the invasion of alien species are the chief culprits.

Consider a few facts from the report. The world's population has more than doubled since 1970 (from 3.7 to 7.6 billion). More than 100 million hectares of tropical forest were lost during the period of 1980–2000. We have destroyed more than 87 per cent of the world's wetlands. Urban areas have doubled in less than a quarter of a century. More than one-third of

the world's fisheries are being fished beyond their biological limits and most of the others are being fished to capacity. And so the catalogue of destruction continues.

The report argues that we need urgent transformative change across all areas of government and every aspect of our lives. Values and goals need to change. We have to face up to the fact that conservation – at least, this kind of life-or-death conservation – is going to be painful. It's going to require sacrifice and bags of money.

We must stop obsessing about economic growth. We need revised trade rules that account for nature deterioration. Hundreds of billions of pounds currently paid out in subsidies to the energy, fishing, agricultural and forestry sectors need to be redirected to reforestation and other incentives

**“The human footprint is so large that we are leaving little space for anything else.”**

to protect and restore nature. We must address population growth and unequal levels of consumption. We need new environmental laws and stronger enforcement. We need greater support for indigenous communities. And we need dramatic changes in our own behaviour, such as lowering our consumption of meat and goods.

This time, we can't get away with business as usual. There can be no more excuses from economists, big businesses and those with vested interests. But this is no longer something that conservation groups and volunteers can fix alone. Governments must heed the report's warning that we are 'eroding the very foundations of our economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life' and get on board.

It's not impossible. Climate change has surged up the political agenda since last year's frightening report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Why not nature in crisis? Indeed, the authors of this report propose a Global Deal for Nature – much like the Paris Agreement to combat climate change – aimed at protecting 30 per cent of the planet by 2030 and half by 2050.

There is a chance to do just that at the UN Biodiversity Conference, to be held in China next year. It could be our last chance. We ignore the UN's warnings at our peril. ☒

**MARK CARWARDINE** is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK?** If you want to support Mark in his views or shoot him down in flames, email [wildlifeletters@immediate.co.uk](mailto:wildlifeletters@immediate.co.uk)



Fire is used to clear land for agriculture in the Amazon, to the detriment of myriad species.