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WORLD LEADERS: WAKE UP, PLEASE!

The situation is far, far worse than we previously thought.

Until now, we believed that today's extinction rates are 100 times faster than in the good old days before people arrived on the scene. But a paper just published in *Conservation Biology* reveals the true figure is closer to 1,000 times faster.

The latest research, using DNA evidence from evolutionary family trees as well as the fossil record, estimates the 'normal background' rate to be 0.1 extinctions per million species per year (compared to previous estimates of 1.0 per million

species per year). For comparison, thanks to us, the current rate is roughly 100 extinctions per million species per year.

This revelation shouldn't come as a surprise. We are surrounded by evidence of environmental degradation. Last year's State of Nature report, for example, revealed that 60 per cent of assessed native species were in decline, and no fewer than one in 10 were heading for extinction.

And it's not as if the conservation world isn't in uproar. A recent conference organised to find game-

changing solutions to the escalating crisis was full of outraged speakers pleading for urgent action.

So what *are* the world's leaders doing about it?

Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper is pushing through policies designed to weaken or even abolish environmental protection. President Obama's record is mixed at best, and he's yet to make his most contentious environmental decision

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– whether to approve the Keystone XL pipeline from Alberta's tar sands.

Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott is scrapping efforts to tackle climate change, culling sharks, dumping dredging spoil on the Great Barrier Reef and felling Tasmania's ancient forests. David Cameron, meanwhile, has told his aides to "get rid of all the green crap".

The western world is mainly governed by people who are hostile to conservation. How many more scary statistics do they need before they wake up?