

"Gaia" scientist says life doomed by climate woes (commentary by Culture Change)

Contributed by Peter Griffiths
26 February 2009

[Note: On almost as pleasant an afternoon as I could devise, I was jolted by this story. Read it and see our reaction that follows. - Jan Lundberg, Culture Change Editor]

* Climate scientist Lovelock sees death "on grand scale"

* Vast areas will become deserts, or flooded

LONDON, Feb 25 (Reuters) - Climate change will wipe out most life on Earth by the end of this century and mankind is too late to avert catastrophe, a leading British climate scientist said.

James Lovelock, 89, famous for his Gaia theory of the Earth being a kind of living organism, said higher temperatures will turn parts of the world into desert and raise sea levels, flooding other regions.

His apocalyptic theory foresees crop failures, drought and death on an unprecedented scale. The population of this hot, barren world could shrink from about seven billion to one billion by 2100 as people compete for ever-scarcer resources.

"It will be death on a grand scale from famine and lack of water," Lovelock told Reuters in an interview on Wednesday. "It could be a reduction to a billion (people) or less."

By 2040, temperatures in European cities will rise to an average of 110 Fahrenheit (43 Celsius) in summer, the same as Baghdad and parts of Europe in the 2003 heatwave.

"The land will gradually revert to scrub and desert. You can look at it as if the Sahara were steadily moving into Europe. It's not just Europe; the whole world will be changing in that way."

Attempts to cut emissions of planet-warming gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) in an attempt to reduce the risks are probably doomed to failure, he added.

Even if the world found a way of cutting emissions to zero, it is now too late to cool the Earth.

"It is a bit like a supertanker. You can't make it stop by just turning the engines off," he said before the release of a new book on climate change.

"It will go on for a long, long time. If by some magic you could suddenly bring the CO₂ down, it wouldn't suddenly cool off."

SAFE HAVENS

Campaigns to promote recycling and renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power are a waste of time, Lovelock adds, although he concedes that nuclear power will help meet growing demand for energy.

While financial markets and politicians promote carbon emissions trading schemes to reduce emissions and help the environment, Lovelock says they, too, will have little effect.

"I don't see the efforts of governments around the world succeeding in doing anything significant to cut back the emissions of carbon dioxide," he said.

Efforts should instead be focused on creating safe havens in areas which will escape the worst effects of climate change.

In his book, "The Vanishing Face of Gaia", he adds: "We have to stop pretending that there is any possible way of returning to that lush, comfortable and beautiful Earth we left behind some time in the 20th century."

The destruction of natural ecosystems for farmland, deforestation and the rapid growth of the human race and livestock have all exacerbated the problem, he added.

Scientists should not underestimate the crucial role of the oceans as an indicator of rising temperatures and tool for reducing carbon dioxide, Lovelock argues.

"Most of the Earth's surface is the ocean. That holds 800 times more than the atmosphere or the land. And there is no question that the ocean is steadily warming," he said.

A former sceptic of doom-laden predictions, Lovelock admits he is not entirely comfortable with his role as a modern-day Cassandra, the cursed prophetess of Greek mythology whose counsel was ignored.

However, he says the scale and speed of the looming crisis are so great he must speak out. He is still struck by the public's apparent lack of urgency about the problem.

"Don't blame me for the terrible predictions," said Lovelock, a sprightly, trim figure with silver hair who looks younger than his age and was soberly dressed in navy jumper, tie and casual trousers.

"The U.N.'s IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) even in its 2001 report was suggesting temperatures by 2040 and 2050 that were devastatingly hot. All I'm doing is drawing people's attention to it."

(Editing by Michael Roddy)

* * * * *

Comment by Jan Lundberg, oil-industry analyst and climate-protection activist:

As soon as the above news story came into my email "inbox" another one followed it instantly, from the author Derrick Jensen, thanks to the listserve Global Warming Crisis Council. He said,

Actually, I don't care about human safe havens. The thing almost nobody talks about is stopping further emissions now through dismantling the oil infrastructure? Those in power aren't going to dismantle it intentionally. We're only talking about life on the planet.

The planet is primary. ANY human culture is secondary. Human existence is secondary. No planet, no humans.

Derrick

At this point it's also "no humans, no planet" -- such is the damage modern culture has done with its population size. I'm all for leaving Nature to her own devices, but it is incumbent on us humans to save species we've placed on the gangplank to extinction. If we value life, the climate can be salvaged. There's a way. But we must first dispense with ecocidal thinking propped up by the slavish devotion to material wealth, modern convenience and antiquated power structures of elitist society:

We must retire the popular (funded) assumption that putting our hopes and funds into renewable energy systems is a preferred sine qua non approach. Because its proponents turn up their nose at simple living -- as they feel they must forever drive cars and use lots of stuff in hopes of recycling more -- the technofix adherents and overpopulation denials are sealing their own fate along with countless lives and species. The technofix- and economic-growth model is unconscionable at this stage in history, with what is known about energy reality and the urgency of climate action.

It so happens that if everyone on Earth planted a tree every day, it would take a few short years for the excess CO2 to be removed from the atmosphere. That, along with pulling the plug now on machines and turning our back on globalized economic activity, will do all that is possible for the climate in keeping with Lovelock's and climate-science consensus warnings. Because most people won't do it voluntarily -- no matter if Lovelock sat down with them at their bedside and said they were going to see their grandchildren's generation die out -- there must be a do-it-yourself approach to climate protection by those who are awake.

Culture Change has taken this approach, in fiction (The Global Coolers), with activism (The Pledge for Climate Protection, transportation/land use projects), as well as in essays, reports, etc. But without a real movement in the streets and fields, all we can do is pass the word and bide our time for the day when enough folks walk away from the scam of working on the treadmill of production for personal gain (others' megaprofits). The crashing economy can help.

Original article, interview of James Lovelock:

[reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com)

Further action:

The Pledge for Climate Protection

Join the GWCC listserv:

culturechange.org

Pedal Power Produce:

culturechange.org

Sail Transport Network:

culturechange.org

Read and heed The Global Coolers:

culturechange.org

This article is published under Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107. See the Fair Use Notice for more information.