

Opinion: When do we actually need to worry about climate change?

By Kevin Quinn on 04.05.16

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A polar bear dries off after taking a swim in the Chukchi Sea in Alaska, June 15, 2014. Photo: Brian Battaile/U.S. Geological Survey via AP, File

Have you ever wondered why a father polar bear is so protective over his young? Or the reason why an orangutan may spontaneously decide to groom its kin? How about the way a mother seabird regurgitates her own food to feed her babies while they grow in the nest?

All these animals have a few things in common. For one, they are families; comprising habitats and communities just like humans would in a city. They are beloved, sacred animals, and they serve as an integral part of the global diversity that makes our earth so beautiful and unique. Unfortunately, all three of these species have another thing in common — they are in danger of extinction.

Imagine losing your home to a raging fire. You've lost everything. Your shelter, belongings, and even some of your family. What do you do? Where do you go? Will your quality of life ever be the same?

Unfortunately for these animals, there is a harsh truth. The answer is no. Quality of life would never be the same again. The aforementioned species all have very specific habitat needs. Sadly, it is difficult to recreate the ice caps and freezing temperatures found in

Antarctica that allow suitable living for the entire polar bear species. That is why we as humans, the most advanced and environmentally high maintenance species occupying the planet, have an obligation to both save and protect our fellow animal friends by stopping climate change before it is too late. For those of you who agree with me, there remains one question...how? Well, let's start with what we know to be true.

There are two main factors that induce climate change. They are burning fossil fuels and deforestation. When we burn petroleum in our cars and coals in our trains, carbon dioxide, (CO₂, otherwise known as a greenhouse gas), is both released and trapped by the earth's atmosphere, making for higher climatic temperatures around the world. Today's levels of CO₂ are 40 percent higher than they have been over the past 800,000 years. Furthermore, deforestation of trees affects greenhouse gas levels as well, due to their natural output of oxygen and absorption of CO₂. When a tree is taken up from the ground, there is less CO₂ being absorbed, thus trapping more heat in the atmosphere. Although the list goes on, burning fossil fuels and deforestation are just two examples of human-induced global warming activities.

Now you might be thinking, 'Great, but how does this apply to wildlife and different animal species?' Well, let's figure that out right now. Any species needs four essential habitat requirements in order to thrive. Let's start with the subject of temperature.

An animal needs the right temperature in his or her habitat to survive. Regrettably, global warming involves drastic temperature change. Take the polar bear we were talking about earlier, for instance. Melting arctic ice removes their hunting grounds, thus resulting in less food to be found, and even the destruction of their homes. Whereas temperature may affect animals living above ground, it also affects aquatic life forms living below it. For example, warmer water temperatures caused by global warming result in population decrease for cold-blooded fish like salmon and trout, which rely on freezing water to survive. Furthermore, warm ocean temperatures cause coral bleaching, a process that kills otherwise healthy coral, hence destroying many underwater ecosystems, since coral serves as the string that holds many of them together.

Climate change also introduces many potential dangers in terms of water. When climate-induced flooding occurs due to high water levels, erosion increases. This in turn makes for polluted and degraded water quality. On the contrary, however, when we experience periods of too little water, (otherwise known as droughts), it kills the plants that animals consume to survive. This water cycle is vicious, and although temperature and water are two mere examples of global warming's effect on various species, there are other factors that we could discuss even further, if we wanted to. Depletion of food sources and places for animals to raise their offspring are among those important factors.

This all seems like important information, but it may seem as though it doesn't pertain to your personal life. It's normal to have that mentality, we call that skepticism. Skepticism is real, and it is a concept that basically says 'I, as a single human being, do not have enough power to change what is happening to the entire planet.' Yet when every person

living on this earth has that same thought process, it becomes very difficult to make any progress. So rather than focus on the few big things we can do, let's focus on the many small things instead. Among these little things include turning off faucets, carpooling, using reduced-wattage light bulbs, and riding your bike or walking whenever possible. Of course, there are many more ways to get involved and reduce your carbon footprint, but just like any other large movement, small change is required first. So why not start now?

If you would like to learn more about how you can do your part to save our beautiful planet and animal friends, please visit <https://www.carbonfund.org/reduce>. If you are interested in learning more about these animals in their natural habitats on a live camera feed, please visit explore.org to learn more.

Kevin Quinn is an American actor known for his starring role in the Disney Channel original series, "Bunk'd".

Quiz

- 1 Which of the following sentences would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?
- (A) They are beloved, sacred animals, and they serve as an integral part of the global diversity that makes our earth so beautiful and unique.
 - (B) Sadly, it is difficult to recreate the ice caps and freezing temperatures found in Antarctica that allow suitable living for the entire polar bear species.
 - (C) That is why we as humans have an obligation to both save and protect our fellow animal friends by stopping climate change before it is too late.
 - (D) Skepticism is real, and it is a concept that basically says 'I, as a single human being, do not have enough power to change what is happening to the entire planet.'
- 2 Which of the following contains the two CENTRAL ideas of the article?
- (A) Animals comprise habitats and communities just like humans would in cities. Animals are beloved and sacred, and they make our earth unique and beautiful.
 - (B) There are two factors that induce climate change: burning fossil fuels, and deforestation. Climate change also introduces many potential dangers in terms of water.
 - (C) Climate change affects everyone, from animals to plants to humans. Skepticism is real, and it makes it difficult for humans to believe climate change exists.
 - (D) Global warming is a real phenomenon affecting the lives of animals and nature. Humans must take action now to reduce the threat of climate change.

- 3 Read the paragraph from the article.

Imagine losing your home to a raging fire. You've lost everything. Your shelter, belongings, and even some of your family. What do you do? Where do you go? Will your quality of life ever be the same?

Which of the following BEST describes the author's purpose in writing this paragraph?

- (A) The author wants to make the reader think about what they would do in a similar situation.
- (B) The author wants to make the reader feel sympathy for animals in danger due to climate change.
- (C) The author wants to make the reader angry about rising temperatures.
- (D) The author wants to draw attention to the effects of climate change.

- 4 What is the PRIMARY purpose of this article?

- (A) to explain how animals are being affected by water pollution and rising temperatures
- (B) to inform readers about the statistics and facts regarding climate change
- (C) to make readers feel sorry for animals affected by climate change
- (D) to draw attention to the issue of climate change and inspire readers to take action

Answer Key

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 - (C) Climate change affects everyone, from animals to plants to humans. Skepticism is real, and it makes it difficult for humans to believe climate change exists.
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