

The Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in what is now Ukraine experienced an explosion on April 26, 1986, in one of its four reactors. Europe received more than 400 times the amount of radioactive material that was dispersed by the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It accumulated in the soil when raindrops and snowflakes dropped to the ground. It made its way into the food chain. Numerous estimates place the number of premature deaths in the hundreds of thousands.

While the Chernobyl disaster was undoubtedly one of the worst environmental disasters ever perpetrated by humans, we are currently experiencing one that is considerably worse. And it is taking place in front of our eyes. The wonderful biodiversity of our earth is falling as a result of how carelessly we have taken our environment for granted.

Although we are all responsible, it is not our fault. The earlier generations who established the harmful systems that we now take advantage of were unaware of the actual cost of their actions.

The truth is, however, that we are aware. And we need to adapt. The good news is that there is still time—just a little time—to take action.

In these chapters, you'll discover

- How recording whale songs resulted in anti-whaling legislation
- What the state of the world will be in 2100 if we don't take action; and
- Why using sustainable energy instead of fossil fuels is the most crucial thing we can do to save the environment

Chapter 1 - As Attenborough aged, his enthusiasm for nature progressively gave way to worry.

David Attenborough, the author, used to spend entire days riding through the countryside of Leicester, United Kingdom, in search of ammonites, which are small fossilized sea creatures that date back millions of years. The young boy's fascination with the natural world and the laws that govern it was aroused by their spirally small shells, which were preserved in time in the limestone.

He eventually discovered that the ammonites had perished during the last mass extinction, which occurs when a cataclysmic event brought on by climate change causes a mass extinction of species. The 175 million-year era of the dinosaurs came to an end with the last global extinction. Since then, life has restarted into a long period of stability where people can finally grow.

We were able to develop something unique—culture—unlike any other species before us. We created ever-more complex methods to make the natural environment simpler to live in thanks to culture and our developing capacity to preserve and transmit knowledge from generation to generation. A great deal of responsibility came along with this new power.

In what is now the Middle East, people began growing grains and domesticating wild animals around 10,000 years ago. In the end, there was enough surplus that some individuals could exchange their crafts for food rather than spend the time to grow them. This marked the start of civilization. Every improvement these sophisticated cultures made, however, was dependent on one factor: environmental security.

Attenborough realized that this stability was in danger for the first time in human history as his career at the BBC, which he had joined in 1952, advanced from presenter to executive. As he traveled the globe doing natural history programs, he observed growing evidence that humans were not only affecting the planet's precious biodiversity but also causing places to completely vanish.

Attenborough had the opportunity to visit Rwanda in 1978 to film mountain gorillas. What he discovered there profoundly altered his perspective. One unexpected and incredibly private meeting stands out in his memory when a large female gorilla emerged from a bush behind him and started playing with his face. When something landed on his feet, he saw that her two infants were playing with his shoelaces.

These animals that resembled humans were in terrible condition. There were less than 300 people left. People have seriously damaged their habitat by removing forests to make cultivated areas. In addition, poachers were killing the gorillas and selling their severed body parts as souvenirs.

This was Attenborough's first awareness that we were harming the most precious of the planet's wonders irreversibly. It was unfortunate that it wasn't his last.

Chapter 2 - As Attenborough traveled the world, his worry for the environment evolved into alarm.

Attenborough's career as a television naturalist had flourished by the end of the 1970s. An estimated half a billion people worldwide watched the first series he produced after quitting his managerial position at the BBC, entitled *Life on Earth*. In more than 30 nations, the 1978 television series featured footage of more than 200 different animal species. It provided Attenborough with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to tell the narrative of life in a way that had never been done before and to see firsthand what was happening to the natural world.

When he discovered the blue whales, the largest mammals in the world, were in danger, one of Attenborough's worst shocks occurred.

One of the biodiverse places on the earth is a rainforest. More than half of the land-living species on Earth reside there, where the moderate environment of the rainforests is ideal for their survival. However, we are destroying the rainforests at an incredible rate. Two million hectares of rainforest, nearly the size of Colombia, had already been replaced by oil palm

plantations by the time Attenborough traveled to Southeast Asia in 1989. Half of the world's rainforests are now extinct.

The situation is not any better at the poles of our globe. The earth was one-degree centigrade warmer when Attenborough started filming *Frozen Planet* in 2011 than it had been when he was born. In the last 10,000 years, that is the fastest change to have occurred. The extension of summers at the poles has serious implications for the future of our planet.

By burning fossil fuels, we have also contaminated the oceans. Huge volumes of carbon dioxide stored by ancient plants are released into the atmosphere when humans burn coal and natural gas. The waters get more acidic and warmer as a result, which has caused a major coral reef die-off. These reefs are essential refuges for biodiversity when they're in good health, but they're disappearing at an alarming rate right now.

However, Attenborough's broadcasts have had some effect. While making *Life on Earth*, his crew made the first recording of a whale song. These recordings captured the attention of the general public and motivated anti-whaling activists to persuade governments to outlaw whaling. As a result, whale populations are currently recovering.

But unless we take immediate, serious action, life on Earth will start to deteriorate to the point where it is irreversible.

Chapter 3: Our standard of living on Earth will drastically decline if we do nothing.

The age of David Attenborough is currently 94. He started his career in the 1950s when he was 19 years old, during the end of the Second World War. There was a lot of technological development and optimism during this time. There was a mindset that said there was no ceiling on our potential.

We didn't realize that the seeds of our current discontent were already beginning to sprout. The Great Acceleration occurred throughout the 1950s. From having children to releasing carbon emissions to overfishing, everything we did expand enormously. However, there is a limit to how much our world can bear, and any biologist will tell you how the narrative ends: there is a sharp fall in population after all the resources are used up. The Great Decline will span the following 90 years.

Just ten years from now, in the 2030s, the Amazon rainforest will be destroyed because it can no longer produce sufficient moisture in its canopy to nourish the rain clouds. The destruction of the enormous rainforest would cause unexpected flooding, water contamination, and wildfires throughout South America, and there will be a catastrophic loss of biodiversity. Reduced natural carbon capture due to fewer trees will exacerbate the rate of global warming.

In the Arctic, where global warming will accelerate, the first summer without ice will occur in the 2030s. The white ice typically bounces the sun's light back into space. The natural air conditioner of the globe is shut off when there is no ice.

The Arctic permafrost will melt in the 2040s, resulting in enormous landslides and floods. Permafrost also holds large amounts of carbon gas, which is another substance that is kept hidden away along with the water. Up to 1,400 gigatons of carbon will be released into the atmosphere when the permafrost thaws, starting a carbon leakage that will never stop.

By 2050, 90 percent of all coral reefs will be destroyed because of ocean acidification. Additionally, fish populations will decline, which would finally spell the end for the fishing sector.

However, there will be a danger to food production on land as well as in the ocean. Due to depleted soil and insect die-offs, food production on land will be in danger by the 2080s.

Things will be so horrible by the year 2100 that a significant portion of the global population will be required to emigrate. The world's average temperature will have risen by 4°C, and many of our cities will have become unlivable as a result of rising sea levels. With a mean temperature of 29°C (heat found today only in the Sahara), more than 25% of the population will have to endure this.

Nobody desires this to occur. Therefore, how do we stop it?

Chapter 4 - Increasing equality will aid in reducing the rate of population expansion.

In case we need to say it again, nobody wants to see the horrorscape from the previous chapter take place. For many, it would mean death, and for many, many more, it would mean a dramatically diminished quality of life.

But if we keep going in the same direction, the worst-case scenario is unavoidable. Nine planetary boundaries have been recognized by scientists as key environmental thresholds that enable humankind to live sustainably on Earth. The following list includes air pollution, land conversion, depletion of the ozone layer, acidification of the oceans, fertilizer use, chemical pollution, freshwater depletion, and climate change.

For four of these, we have already gone across the finish line.

But there is still hope. By adopting drastic, urgent action, we can reduce the damage we're causing to the world and perhaps even stop it. We'll discover how in the following few chapters.

According to current UN estimates, there will be between 9.4 and 12.7 billion individuals on Earth by the year 2100. The most individuals of a species that can be kept in a given

environment in wild populations are known as the carrying capacity. When the population reaches that point, people start dying off until the equilibrium is reestablished.

The fact that we are unsure of the carrying capacity for people is the scariest aspect of population scientists' future predictions. And if we don't achieve this number before our population stabilizes, we're in for a dreadful catastrophe.

The good news is that if we concentrate on improving conditions for everyone, our population will eventually stabilize. Populations first see a boom as nations progress toward development before naturally leveling down. In the 20th century, Japan experienced this; the population has been constant since the year 2000. The rate of population growth has declined every year since 1962, and we can see this happening throughout the world. In terms of the planet's overall health, the sooner we hit the peak of the global population, the better.

There are strategies to promote a lower threshold and an earlier peak. Women's empowerment is one approach. We've observed time and time again that women prefer to have fewer children when they have greater freedom and control over their life. A key aspect is also education. The peak may be reached 50 years earlier by investing in education, which would result in two billion fewer people on the planet. This would greatly reduce the stress on our planet.

But it still falls short.

Chapter 5 - Rewilding the planet will enhance biodiversity, sequester carbon, and protect our food sources.

It is no surprise that the planet's instability increased at the same time that biodiversity around the world decreased. We've discovered over the past few decades that the biodiversity of Earth and our potential to live comfortably here are intrinsically tied. We must thus establish the circumstances for biodiversity to flourish again to restore stability. The Earth has to be rewilded!

Since no one has ownership over international waters, fishing crews have engaged in irresponsible practices like trawling that have destroyed ecosystems and reduced fish populations. All international waters must be declared no-fish zones to prevent this. By doing this, the high seas would be transformed back into a thriving wilderness, restocking the coastal waters with more fish than they had in decades.

High-seas fishing regulation alone, however, is insufficient. Biodiversity thrives in nutrient-rich coastal waters. We should establish a global network of no-fishing zones in coastal waters to safeguard them. Let's look to Cabo Pulmo, which is located in the southernmost point of Baja California in Mexico, to see how this approach can work.

This region was so severely overfished in the 1990s that the fishing industry needed a remedy. They ultimately decided to designate more than 7,000 hectares of their coast – almost the size of Iceland—as a Marine Protected Area. For 15 years, there would be no fishing at all.

The years that followed were the most difficult the society had ever seen. However, fish shoals eventually grew bigger when they returned to the waters off Cabo Pulmo. After two decades, the amount of marine life in the area had expanded by more than 400%. Sharks had returned to Cabo Pulmo, which elder fishermen were only able to remember from their youth. After 15 years had passed, fishermen were ultimately given restricted permissions enabling them to fish again in coastal waters. The teeming waters also provided new streams of revenue, such as dive shops and guesthouses, allowing them to catch more fish than they had in previous decades.

The situation is different when it comes to protecting natural land. We believe we understand the value of the land that people own. However, there is no way to determine the true worth of the environmental services provided by wild land. On paper, 100 hectares of rainforest is less valued than 100 hectares of oil palm cultivation.

Moving ahead, we need to redefine what value means. We should value land based on its biodiversity rather than the crops we can cultivate on it. Deforestation would cease instantly if we took this action.

However, not even these fixes are sufficient. We'll learn how to switch to clean energy and environmentally friendly farming practices in the last chapter.

Chapter 6 - The most crucial action we can take to build a more sustainable world is to switch to clean energy.

We need to turn back to an earlier way of life to lessen and eventually reverse the harm we've already done to the earth. We need to get back to being a part of nature as opposed to being apart from it.

That does not imply that we must give up technology and go off the grid. The development of a more sustainable world is greatly facilitated by technology.

Most importantly, if we want to transition from fossil fuels to clean energy at the required rate, we must use technology. This is not at all impossible; entire countries like Albania, Iceland, and Paraguay currently produce all of their energy without using fossil fuels. It only takes willpower.

Fossil fuels have been the driving force behind human development. Since the 1950s, we have released carbon into the atmosphere that has been there for millions of years.

The greatest pressing problem we have ever faced is a result of our careless use of fossil fuels. We currently have less than ten years to transition to clean energy derived from renewable resources such as the sun, wind, and waves. The Earth's average temperature has already increased by a degree. We must prevent it from rising above 1.5°C if we want to keep living the way we do. If we don't do something about it, it will likely rise above that level by the end of this decade.

Although we've come a long way, technology isn't quite there yet. The most difficult task, however, is determining how to withdraw from major oil and gas businesses. Currently, all significant corporations and governments rely on fossil fuels for their energy production and distribution.

What steps can we take to change the harmful status quo? The majority of people believe that the best way to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels is to impose a carbon fee. This implies that any organization emitting carbon would be subject to a financial penalty. Since the introduction of a similar tax in Sweden in the 1990s, many of that country's industries have subsequently withdrawn from fossil fuels.

Another promising approach is carbon capture, which would remove and sequester carbon from the atmosphere. However, "plants," the original carbon capture method, remain the best. The quantity of carbon that can be removed from the atmosphere if we rewild the planet is limitless. We should all be making investments here, and we have to if we want to survive on this planet.

A Life on Our Planet by David Attenborough Book Review

Environmental degradation has been severely exacerbated by our actions over the past few decades. Unless we take quick action to rewild the Earth, stop our reliance on fossil fuels, and recover biodiversity from our suffering planet, we are on course to hit disaster.

Producing meat, especially beef, uses an astounding amount of resources. 80 percent of agriculture in the globe is used for the production of meat and dairy. We must all start cutting back on our meat consumption if we want to make a significant difference in the world of the future.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/a-life-on-our-planet-by-david-attenborough-book-summary-review/>