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**Chris MacKenzie**

## **The Ever More Silent Spring**

***Vortrag auf dem GeoMUWA Herbsttreffen am 14.11. 2014***

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Geologists should understand better than any other sector of the population the nature of equivocality. So may I respectfully ask the Geological Society to think twice about it's Amended Climate Change Statement.

Call me a "Denialist" if you have to, but let's have a broader environmental debate. Carbon dioxide is fine, it occurs in nature, it has been around acting as an agent of evolution far longer than oxygen. Plants make themselves from it. Nature deals with it.

But the biosphere is suffering from a huge increase of man-made substances which nature cannot deal with. Should we not be more concerned about any chemicals that do not occur in nature, and hence have not been "evolved for" by anything in nature? CFCs (remember them? Lovelock's discovery of how they affected the Ozone layer appears lost in an acidifying sea of disinformation nowadays), PCBs, BPA and a whole host of other catchy TLAs are a case in point. All plastics and synthetic products, overwhelmingly produced by Big Oil, are a huge environmental catastrophe in the making. Non-natural radionuclides are another example. The clamour to demonise CO<sub>2</sub> does us a disservice.

Nothing ever evolved to deal with 2,4,5-Trichlorophenoxyacetic acid. When mixed with 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid and dioxins it made an effective herbicide. Today we know a lot more about "Agent Orange". The swathes of tropical rain forest it was used against are still suffering, decades later. Humans died, nature died, the poison persists. Bio-accumulating, like all these poisons which cannot be metabolised by nature.

Nowadays, neonicotinoids are implicated in the loss of our bee colonies. Whilst the scientific evidence may not be concrete, do we really need more data to realise that the unintended consequences of synthetic chemical usage are huge.

We're all concerned about "sustainable development" and other such Newspeak buzzwords. But looking back on billions of years of evolution, it is clear that the main issues facing this planet resulted from the transition of one primate from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to that of a farmer. As soon as human populations came to control their food supply, rather than the food supply controlling the size of human population, things went seriously awry.

We can't turn the clocks back. We must minimise our impact, and massively reduce the amount of synthetic, non-natural chemicals in the biosphere. Revert to the use of natural materials where possible, rather than plastics and synthetics. Even as an eternal optimist (fossil hunter and mineral explorationist!) I personally hold little hope of progress given the quality of debate about CO<sub>2</sub>. Rachel Carson never saw even the tip of the iceberg. In one village in Tanzania where I work recent river sediments contain up to 5% plastic debris.

Anthropocene, my foot – Plasticene more like.

*Silent Spring* was written a long time ago, now chemicals are far more abundant, far more complex and long lived, and appear to be making significant inroads into the natural environment at a cellular level.

That is a clear and present danger, one which I hear nothing about from my Society.

*Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing?*

*Where have all the flowers gone, long time ago?*

*Where have all the flowers gone?*

*They haven't gone: their populations are exploding;*

*Equilibrating with increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels*

*Equilibrating with increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels*

*Where have all the bees and insects gone, long time passing?*

*Where have all the bees and insects gone, long time ago?*

*Where have all the bees and insects gone?*

*Pesticides and Neonicotinoids killed them, every one.*

*Oh, when will they ever learn?*

*Oh, when will they ever learn?*

With apologies to Pete Seeger



*Stream in Saza village, Chunya District, Mbeya Region SW Tanzania: dry season. Drinking water supply in riverbed. Looking South.*





*Stream in Saza village, Chunya District, Mbeya Region SW Tanzania: dry season. Looking North.*





*Farm land near Njombe village, Chunya District, Mbeya Region SW Tanzania: tilled farmland (mainly for maize the local staple). Awaiting the rains and growing season. Note the synthetics of all sorts in the field and furrows, most of it litter. Note also that the stubble gets burnt and plastics get burnt with them, as a precursor to the growing season.*



*As Above*





*As above*





*As above*





*As above*



*As above*





*Nest of Hammerkop (Scopus umbretta) at Utengule, Mbeya, S. Tanzania. Majority of paler materials are plastics.*

Adresse des Verfassers: [chris@helioresource.com](mailto:chris@helioresource.com)