

## There is no Planet B

According to a recent survey, the UK's top fantasy neighbour is Sir David Attenborough. If he did live next door, you'd probably find yourself often discussing the environment. Just the other week he presented a BBC documentary on '*Climate Change – The Facts*', with dire warnings about the disastrous effects we face unless we take drastic action to reduce the production of carbon dioxide, methane and other greenhouse gases. In this he joins the almost unanimous opinion of expert climate scientists worldwide. Attenborough's popularity, even when saying uncomfortable and unpalatable things, can be seen from the flood of protests when he was criticised on TV by Richard Madeley after the documentary.



The topic is certainly in the news currently, with the Extinction Rebellion protests on the streets of London and elsewhere, and their earlier high-profile disruption of a Brexit debate in Parliament. The *School Strike 4 Climate* movement started by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg last year has been joined by many, with much support from some of their families, teachers, and leading politicians; this article's title is one of their slogans. Environmental campaigns are also attracting well-known actors and musicians.

Climate change, while being particularly prominent, is by no means the only environmental problem we currently face. A marked decline in insects, including bees and butterflies, and many other wildlife species is a consequence of human activity such as intensive farming methods, wasteful fishing practices, and gross international inequalities in food production and consumption. Mike Pratt wrote about the loss of insects in his article in the last TVE, together with human responsibility for it.

I've just returned from a science conference at which the first talk was about the PET-digesting enzyme that was discovered last year (you read about it here in the Tyne Valley Express!), and now scientists are trying to modify this genetically to make it work on a wider range of plastics. It would certainly help! Another speaker, presenting new research on the science of battery materials for practical applications, was pointedly asked by someone in the audience if she drove an electric car; the answer was that she has a hybrid.





Meanwhile highly controversial plans for the development of opencast coal mining have been hotly contested legally for a site at Druridge Bay on the Northumberland coast, and more recently approval has been sought for similar plans in our more immediate local area near Throckley. The Druridge Bay (Highthorn) scheme has gone right up to the High Court and to two successive government environment ministers, and a delayed final(?) decision is due during May according to the latest information.

I was pleased to hear last month that our local Newcastle University stands very high up in an international league table of universities judged by their environmental impact, taking in teaching, research, policies and practice; the use of 100% green electricity, rapid progress in reducing investment in fossil fuels, an emphasis on recycling, and a strong policy of sustainable food purchasing all contribute to this success, and are institutional models for the sorts of things we can all contribute individually. Do you know that many people aimed to give up, as far as possible, single-use plastics for Lent this year? It makes a change from chocolate and alcohol!

If you're interested in finding out more, you may like to come to a day conference I'm organising on Saturday 18 May in Durham. The title is '*Stewards of Creation: Christian perspectives on environmental issues*', but it's designed for a general audience and no particular scientific or religious background is required or expected. There's a small fee (with a reduction for students), but this includes lunch. You can see further information on our website [bigquestions-anyanswers.org](http://bigquestions-anyanswers.org), including a link for buying tickets in advance (before 13 May) for catering purposes. The topics to be presented and discussed include nature conservation,

sustainable living, and our use of mineral resources – all very relevant to the issues mentioned above. And we'll be asking, and trying to answer, the fundamental questions of why we should bother anyway, and what we can do about it. What you do personally really can make a difference!

## Stewards of Creation

Christians in Science  
Northern Conference 2019



Christian perspectives on environmental issues. A one-day conference planned with non-specialists in mind, tackling topics of current concern.

Admission charge includes lunch, morning and afternoon refreshments (special diets available). Reduced admission charge for students.

St John's College • Durham University, 3 South Bailey  
Durham, DH1 3RJ  
Sat, 18 May 2019, 10:45 – 16:40 (register from 10).  
Tickets from <https://bit.ly/2uNc3qt>

### Speakers

**Carmody Grey** – Saving the earth: why should Christians care?

**Darren Evans** – Whose earth? Faith and nature conservation in the 21st century

**Nick Higgs** – 'A little lower than the angels' – How evolution informs our view of suffering and the human condition (Oliver Barclay Lecture, given by video)

**David Manning** – Mine for ever? Our use of the earth's mineral resources

**Jonathan Leake** – Sustainable living to love our neighbour and care for creation

**Bill Clegg**

Modified version of the article in the Tyne Valley Express for May–June 2019