

Meeting the challenge of a changing climate

Suddenly, it seems, climate change is for real. Dr Nick Paling looks at how we can respond to the emergency

DO you have climate resilience anxiety? Do you worry about the impacts that climate change will have on your life and the lives of your family over the next 10-20 years...? It's perfectly understandable if you don't.

We all prioritise the things we do and don't worry about in life. Determining whether information we hear about climate change is true or not is extremely difficult (if not impossible) and it is our natural tendency to believe what people in authority or experts are telling us. They are, after all, paid by us to look after our interests and why would they conceal the truth from us anyway...?

In recent months, the public debate around climate change has begun to change significantly. Now, for the first time, people are talking about these potential impacts, not as a challenge that will be faced by future generations or by people in far-flung lands around the world, but as one that we will face in our lifetimes, here in the UK.

Alongside this 'awakening' in the public consciousness, suddenly this year has also seen many local councils, community groups and businesses declaring officially that we are in a state of 'climate emergency'.

For many people, this sudden change in language has come in

stark contrast to the platitudes, reassurances or even complete silence that have been presented in relation to this subject over many previous years.

It seems, all at once, that there is now a growing realisation that everything may not in fact 'be okay' in our not-too-distant future.

While many experts have known with certainty for many years that the impacts of our changing climate will begin to be felt with increasing severity and frequency in the UK over the next two decades, it does now seem that people are waking up to the very real threat that this could pose to our way of life here.

'It does now seem that people are waking up to the very real threat to our way of life'

At a local level here in the South West, I have been amazed in the last year by the number of people now voicing their anxiety about how environmental degradation may negatively impact their lives both now and, more importantly, in the future.

However, because there remains



very little concrete information about what the future challenges may be, and most people have no idea how resilient we as individuals and communities are to withstand them, this increased awareness has not inspired and empowered people to act.

It has instead reinforced their sense of helplessness and seems to have created a great deal of what I am calling 'climate resilience anxiety'.

In recognition of this emerging anxiety about climate change in communities across the South West, and to build on the burgeoning interest in the issue of climate resilience and adaptation, we are holding a Water Resilience Summit in Totnes on 12 September 2019.

This event, which is free and open to all, will be a day of action-orientated discussions, learning and planning, with people from all walks of life, to explore how our local water

environments (river catchments, wetlands, lakes, estuaries, coast and marine) provide us all with benefits every day and to discuss what their resilience (or non-resilience) might mean for people, communities, businesses and nature over the next 20 years.

Visit wrt.org.uk/events-2/ to find out more.

■ **Dr Nick Paling is head of evidence and engagement at West-country Rivers Trust**

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