

Learning to share and save our one and only planet



The United Nations has declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity – ‘an opportunity to increase understanding of the vital role that biodiversity plays in sustaining

life on Earth’. However, this is also a moment in the Earth’s history when species are disappearing at an unprecedented rate. The causes are many, but the one factor that threatens to overwhelm all others in extent and speed is unmitigated global warming.

In its 2007 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warned that if the Earth’s atmosphere warms by 2 degrees, there is a 50 per cent chance that up to 30 per cent of existing species will become extinct. What does this mean for Australia’s biodiversity?

Our special Focus section (p. 16) presents insights from a recent report to government compiled by eight of Australia’s leading scientists.

Setting and achieving strong targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is the most effective way of protecting global biodiversity, but as COP15 proved last December, few nations are willing to put the environment before economic development. Humankind now has an ‘ecological footprint’ that is 30–40 per cent larger than what the Earth is able to sustain. Why is it so hard for our ‘advanced’ consumer societies to switch to a more sustainable way of life? Our story on page 10 provides some surprising and thought-provoking answers.

Providing easy access to all available information on Australia’s plants, animals and microorganisms is the aim of an ambitious Atlas of Living Australia project (p. 24). Eventually it will offer

online public access to data previously locked away in university and institutional databases around the country, and include a ‘citizen science’ portal.

We hope you will be inspired by the story of Antonio Belonio’s stove (p. 8), an ingenious, affordable low-tech invention that is helping to reduce ‘black carbon’ emissions from developing countries. There is more good news on how the shift to a decentralised, low-emission distributed energy system can reduce our greenhouse gas emissions, save water and save billions of dollars – using technology that is available now (p. 14). And don’t miss our feature story on recent concerns about nanosafety (p. 20).

Enjoy your reading,

Mary-Lou Considine
Editor

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