

Is it time for our destructive relationship with nature to end?

Background reading

Setting the scene:

A report released in 2019 (<https://ipbes.net/global-assessment>) highlighted how much damage we are doing to the natural world. It is thought that a million species are currently at risk of extinction in the coming decades. The report identified habitat loss and the overexploitation of wild animals and plants as the major causes.

Focusing on economic growth means we have carved roads into wild habitats, granting easy access to poachers, traders and traffickers and making the collection and trade of wild animals easier. As people travel deeper into isolated wild spaces, wild animals come into increasing contact with people, escalating the risk of new zoonotic diseases, such as covid-19, being transmitted to people.

A zoonotic disease is one that is transmitted from animals to humans. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that about 75% of new infectious diseases, which have affected people over the past three decades, originated from wild animals.

But what happens when this crisis is over? Dr Mark Jones, Born Free's Head of Policy, recently said: "We need to make the most of this opportunity to achieve real changes that will not only reduce the risk of future pandemics and protect public health, but also help to halt and reverse the devastating impacts we're having on wildlife and the natural world.

"I think we need to dig deep and treat our planet and all its inhabitants with a great deal more respect, for its sake and for ours."

Dr Nikki Tagg, Born Free's Conservation Programmes Manager, added: "We need to recognise that healthy ecosystems are essential for human health and wellbeing. Biodiversity and healthy functioning habitats provide us all with crucial ecosystem services – like storing carbon to combat climate change – and they provide a buffer for these naturally occurring viruses.

"If the covid-19 lesson is ignored, the cost to both nature and humanity will be huge."

Finally, Born Free's Executive President & Co-Founder, Will Travers OBE, said: "Covid-19 has cleared the sky of planes, the railways of trains, the roads of cars. It has shown that, if we must, we can change the way we live.

"Now is the time to invest in nature and in the planet – not for sentimental reasons but because it is in our self-interest to do so."

A few things to consider:

- Cost to life: www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports
- The cost to the global economy is predicted to run into trillions of dollars
- Probable source of the pandemic: the trade in live wild animals at a market in Wuhan, China www.bornfree.org.uk/coronavirus
- Currently, far more money is being used to support industries that are harmful to biodiversity and the environment, than is spent on protecting nature
- "The world's people face 'untold suffering due to the climate crisis'..."
www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/05/climate-crisis-11000-scientists-warn-of-untold-suffering
 - But we can change: "Temporary reduction in daily global CO² emissions ...": www.nature.com/articles/s41558-020-0797-x
- Critical to the successful protection of nature are:
 - Reducing poverty and inequality
 - Sustainable food production and consumption
 - Investment in alternative livelihoods for those who currently rely on destructive activities for their living.

Letter template

Tips for writing a persuasive letter:

Power of three
Emphasis
Rhetorical questions
Say again
Undermine opposing views with facts
Anecdote
Direct address
Emotive language

Possible addressees:

Prime Minister

10 Downing Street
Westminster
London
SW1A 2AA

WHO Headquarters

Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva
Switzerland

Institute of Directors (business)

116 Pall Mall
London
SW1Y 5ED

Template:

(Your address)

(Date)

(Addressee address)

Dear (name)/To whom it may concern,

Introduction, for example:

I am writing to you to encourage [the UK government] to play its part in making sure that, after covid-19, we invest more in the protection and care of nature and green alternatives.

Main paragraphs:

Choose three to five of your strongest arguments, for example:

Currently, far more money is being used to support industries that are harmful to biodiversity and the environment than is spent on protecting nature.

Final paragraph:

Now is the time to invest in nature and the planet.

Yours sincerely,
(Your name)