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# Where next for eco-activism?

Special report by Bibi van der Zee

# What's the future of direct action?

Ecologist readers will be familiar with, and in many cases involved in, eco-activism in the UK. Yet rarely does anyone get to see very much of the secretive world behind the environmental direct action community- that small group of people that put their bodies in the way and are not afraid to get arrested to do something about climate change.

A new film, Just Do It, launching on July 15th gives us this glimpse. Director Emily James spent over a year embedded with some of the major direct action groups - the ones mainstream media despair over, and like to portray as terrorists. Just Do It paints a fuller picture and gives us the inside story of who they are and why they do what they do.

And, as an advocate for radical environmental action since our first issue back in 1970, the Ecologist took this opportunity to look more closely at the issues shaping the future direction of Britain's eco-activism movement. In this newsletter you can read Bibi van der Zee's compelling piece addressing these issues, whilst online you'll find this article plus further comment and analysis, including:

- Where next for eco-activism in the UK? After the failure of the Copenhagen climate talks, the undercover police scandal, the disbanding of Climate Camp - and the sudden rise of UK Uncut - Bibi van der Zee takes the temperature of Britain's green activism movement
- Joss Garman: coal and runways looked unstoppable until we stopped them. Co-founder of activist group Plane Stupid, Joss Garman reflects on the environmental movements' successes and why, when things look bleaker than ever, we need to remember this
- Tools of resistance: the insiders guide to grassroots direct action Molly James & Dan Glass outline the most powerful tools in the grassroots action toolbox - plus information on how you can get involved
- How to inspire the next generation of eco-activists Constructive engagement, optimism and campaigns that benefit local residents are the best tactics to move eco-activism forward
- Just Do It: the story of modern-day outlaws A new film launching on July 15th gives an in-depth look inside the clandestine world of environmental direct action

The Ecologist has, over the years, published a number of guides on powerful tools activists can use to press for change, from the basics such as letter writing, to video activism, data activism, to communicating your campaign and working with the media. Visit www.theecologist.org and check out the Make A Difference section for all these and other related stories.

Matilda Lee, Ecologist Community Affairs editor

# Where next for eco-activism in the UK?

After the failure of the Copenhagen climate talks, the undercover police scandal, the disbanding of Climate Camp - and the sudden rise of UK Uncut - **Bibi van der Zee** takes the temperature of Britain's green activism movement


*Climate change activism has dominated the UK's recent protest scene - but will it last?*

Exhaustion set in after Copenhagen. After three years of campaigning ever more intensely, only to be engulfed in the dark sand storm that was the international climate summit in December 2009, you could feel the whole movement subsiding into cramping collapse. 'Copenhagen was kind of a pinnacle, a culmination; people in Climate Camp had been working towards it for a very long time,' says Daniel Garvin, who travelled with Climate Camp to the summit. 'I came back very tired. And during the year afterwards, for Climate Camp at least, a lot of internal politics raised their head. In truth we just weren't very clear about what to do next. And a lot of people took to soul searching.'

Copenhagen, was after all, the culmination of a crescendo of effort by thousands of activists around the world over several

years, frantically trying to whip up political will to take action on a crisis that campaigners could see coming ('one of the most concerted pieces of mobilisation ever seen' as Guardian journalist John Vidal describes it).

In 2001 Campaign against Climate Change was founded by Phil Thornhill. In the next few years Thornhill was relieved to see a growing engagement with the subject: 'It felt as if things were finally taking off, I felt very optimistic. After that the NGOs really started talking, and Stop Climate Chaos coalition [the umbrella organisation for co-ordinating action on climate change] emerged, and I feel as if we really accelerated all that.' Direct action group Rising Tide formed at the same time with the slogan 'Carrying out action on the root causes of climate change.' Progress was slow, but movement appeared to be in the right direction.

And then in 2006 a group of activists decided to set up camp beside Drax power station, announcing that 'Shutting down a power station isn't enough to stop climate change but it's a start.' It certainly was. Over the next few years Climate Camp snowballed into a colossal national phenomenon; the camp at Heathrow the following year dominated the news agenda for weeks, and Kingsnorth, the following year was equally headline-prone.

At the same time organisations like Rising Tide, Plane Stupid and Climate Rush were carrying off stunts that kept climate change constantly in the papers while Greenpeace managed to confer public legitimacy on the whole campaign when the activists who climbed the chimney of Kingsnorth power station were sensationally cleared of criminal damage by a jury.

By 2009 a huge head of steam had built behind the movement, and was having a direct effect on UK government policy. 'The direct action movement over the last few years really raised the temperature in government,' says Vidal, 'which needed to feel that this subject had a constituency. That's why Ed Miliband kept telling people to protest, he knew that it gives a government legitimacy.'

## Sense of hopelessness

But it was not enough. Copenhagen came and went, and there was no agreement, and worse, now a palpable sense of hopelessness. While protesters marched for miles and miles in the darkness and icy cold of a Scandinavian December, the politicians had seemed less engaged than ever: Barack Obama's dull-voiced address to the summit killed off any hope that something incredible would happen and that world leaders would rise to the challenge.

A shattered silence fell. In Bolivia some activists rallied in Cochabamba; a little revival, like water sprayed over a thirsty crowd. But for those who did not travel the 6000 odd miles, 2010 was a year for painful contemplation of what on earth to do next.

The result of these soul searchings have been, undeniably, a change of focus. For most the failure of Copenhagen forced them to look hard at the political structures which made the failure possible. Hanna Thomas of Rising Tide and the Otesha Project had never taken part in direct action when she went out to Poznan, one of the earlier climate summits.

'When I first got involved, I really believed that we just needed to rebrand environmentalism, make it sexy, just get people excited enough to make them want to get involved. But when I went to Poznan with the UN, I came back completely radicalised, I came back thinking oh my god. I'd thought, oh the authorities will sort it out, and when I saw them working first hand I realised they didn't know what they were doing." For her events have been profoundly radicalising. 'Since Copenhagen, to be honest, I find myself thinking less about climate change, and more about bigger power structures and what they mean for climate change. And what we can do about it.'

## Social justice

Dan Glass, who famously super-glued himself to Gordon Brown in 2008, agrees: 'My focus is more and more on the social justice aspect. In fact for many people the climate movement has morphed into an environmental justice movement. Basically, unless we're making the comparison between what's causing the problem and who's being affected by it, no one's going to listen. Does the social justice focus detract from the environmental issue? No, because it's good for the environment. We're not in the mess because of accident. We're in this mess because of calculated policies which have prioritised the wealth of the few over the health of many.'

But does this mean that the movement has splintered? Garvin admits bluntly that the division between the 'reformers' who believed that change could be achieved in the current political system and the more radical activists who wanted to see ground-up systematic reform was one of the main divisions which sprang up in Climate Camp and more or less tore it apart. 'There were other problems – there were some internal politics, which would be too dull to talk about. But certainly that issue was the biggest problem

Climate Camp faced and it really split people. So many people who'd been there in 2006, 2007, 2008 fell away. The 2010 camp in Edinburgh was fantastic but it was set up and run by completely new people and lots of the older crew boycotted it because they felt it was too liberal.'

That rift has been dealt in some ways by an increased focus on specific issues rather than policy. Climate change as a campaign topic is just no use anyway at the moment; what's the point?

## Tar sands 'biggest issue'

'Media coverage has switched to the cuts,' says Jess Worth of the Tar Sands Campaign. Instead Worth, like many other activists has searched for a new way to carry on the battle. 'My rationale, after Copenhagen, is to look for what is going to have the biggest single impact – and for me that's tar sands. So if we can stop that then that's the biggest contribution I can make to climate change.' Like others after the painful debacle of Copenhagen, she sees little point in continuing to follow the UN negotiations. 'A lot of people just want to bypass getting involved in targets and negotiations, in the international talks, we're just trying to stop specific emissions at source. So you've got coal action in Scotland, Manchester runway camp, tar sands, biofuels... You don't hear so much because it's not as attention grabbing but I think it's more effective because people are in it for the long haul, people are acting locally, stopping projects and having a real impact. We're fighting on a lot of different fronts.'

There are plenty who are glum about the movement. Tony Cottee of Rising Tide says frankly: 'It seems to have passed its peak. All social movements have their curve, but this is catastrophic, really, that's the only word for it. Just as we need to be pushing hardest people are preoccupied with other things.' He agrees that there have been some advances in UK policy, but derides the 'greenest government ever for taking away all the genuine support for green policies. 'Sure we've got the climate act but at the moment it's just an umbrella with nothing underneath it all.' It is hard, in reality, to be optimistic when the news about emissions is relentlessly depressing.

But Daniel Vockins of 10:10 and Climate Camp is more optimistic. 'Did it have the impact we hoped for? Yes, it had a big impact in the national consciousness, it really moved forward the national debate. Has it solved climate change? No. But I do think there has been a sea change – in the UK at least – in the way we think about the environment. Most organisations have a green champion now, lots of communities up and down the country have got green campaigns and projects going on. I think it's become embedded in our lives in a way that people just don't realise.'

## UK-UNCUT takes place of Plane Stupid?

And Danny Chivers, author of the No-Nonsense Guide to Climate Change, and Climate Camp poet, shares some of that optimism. 'The huge groundswell of anti-cuts and privatisation campaigns is incredibly inspiring and is feeding through into the climate movement in a number of important ways. In the short term, it's drawn some energy and people away from organising climate action – most people who care about climate change are equally concerned about unemployment, health care, education, and all these other urgent battles that we're suddenly having to fight. In the longer term though, the campaign against the cuts is getting many people of all ages involved in political action for the first time. A genuinely inspiring network is being formed outside of the political mainstream – people who started off by campaigning to save their local library or their friend's disability benefits are now linking up with students, trade unions, anti-tax-dodging campaigners.'

We really do need the activists, says Asad Rahman, climate change negotiator for Friends of the Earth. 'What needs to be happening now is that developing countries need much stronger civil societies to lean harder on their governments. And the role for direct action in the UK remains huge. Look at Germany, where there have been huge campaigns against coal and nuclear which have forced the government to consider its position. The role of NGOs is to mobilise, and you've got to think of the fight against slavery. You knew this fight was not going to be over straight away, but you didn't change the argument.'

And John Stewart, founder of HACAN Clearskies, sees an interesting future for the movement. 'My fear was that, after the victories at Heathrow and Kingsnorth, both of which gave it issues and campaigns to focus around, it might dissipate in the way it did in the late 1990s after it lost the anti-roads focus. But it has found a new focus in the cuts. In many ways I would see UK-UNCUT as the successor to Plane Stupid (if focusing on a different issue): focused; creative; media-savvy; with a clear message.'

'What's interesting is that similar things are happening on the streets of Spain, Greece and Italy. It's too early to know how all this will pan out but I suspect we will see a new generation emerge at least comfortable with the idea of direct action.'

# Climate change fuels violence as hunger drives cattle poaching in East Africa

*East Africa's population is increasingly on the sharp end of climate change impacts. Photo: Jocelyn T Edwards*

The cattle keepers of Karamoja have raided each others' herds for generations: for prestige, to pay dowries and increase wealth. But the thefts are increasingly driven by hunger caused by a changing climate. **Jocelyn T Edwards** reports from Uganda

Travelling north in Uganda, the land flattens out and becomes drier, turning from tropical to semi-arid. Paved roads change to dirt and after a few hours you reach the most remote region of the country. Home to a semi-nomadic cattle keeping people, the Karimojong, Karamoja is scarred by dry river beds and dotted with manyattas, small settlements made of sticks and ringed by fences of thorns.

About ten kilometres outside of Moroto, the largest town in the Karamoja, in one of these manyattas, lives Lowakabong Tapem. Crawling through a small opening in the fence, you'll find him and his eight wives and 40 children. Tapem used to be a rich man. He carries a walking stick and wears a navy blue suit jacket over cargo shorts. Around his wrist is an ivory bracelet that he bought for ten cows. But then last year, warriors from a neighbouring clan came and stole all his animals in a series of raids. He lost 70 cows, 30 camels and 40 goats.

'I don't have anything to give my wives; they are the ones who take care of me now, by going and looking for herbs,' Tapem says. The elder blames the drought that has plagued the region of Karamoja in recent years for the theft of his livestock. 'The hunger has increased the raids,' he says. 'Someone sits under the tree for a whole day. He doesn't have anything to do; he doesn't have anything to eat. "So he thinks, let me just go for a raid"'.

The hardships of climate change that environmentalists warn of have already arrived in the poorest and least developed region of Uganda. Three out of the past four years have seen poor or no harvests in Karamoja. But in addition to starving the region agriculturally, climate change is also exacerbating violence in the region. As UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said in 2007, 'changes in our environment and the resulting upheavals - from droughts to inundated coastal areas to loss of arable lands - are likely to become a major driver of war and conflict.'

The conflicts Moon spoke of might seem abstract and apocalyptic - too far in the future to worry about. But in Uganda, it seems climate change driven violence is already here. The cattle keepers of Karamoja have raided each other's herds for generations: for prestige, to pay dowries and to increase their wealth. But today, many in the region say that warriors are increasingly driven by hunger.

## Global warming reality

Sitting on a bench in the stark afternoon sunlight, the elders of Tapem's manyatta agree the climate of Karamoja has undergone a transformation in recent years. 'Previously during this season there was rain and it was green around. Now you look around . . . everything is different. It's completely changed,' says Apangamea Lobur.

Before, 'we would expect that when you came around here you would find green grass and plants of medium size,' Lokawa Pareo says.

The government of Uganda estimates that the average temperature has increased between 0.2 and 1 degree C in the country since 1974. The semi-arid region of Karamoja, already suceptable to drought, has been particularly affected by this change.

Andrew Achila-Ododongo is the Production and Marketing Coordinator for the district of Moroto. In his office in Moroto town, he gets out a chart showing plunging rainfall patterns in the area.

'If you look at our crop calendar, by now we should be recording maximum amount of rainfall. This year, we only got three days of rain,' he says. 'It used to be every five years you would get a serious drought, but now, almost every year you get drought.'

It adds up to an undeniable change in Karamoja's climate, says the official. 'Climate change is aggravating the situation and the impacts are being seriously felt. [Global warming] is becoming a reality.'

And as the environment has worsened, the people`s hunger pangs have sharpened. A 2010 report by the Danish NGO DanChurchAid concluded that in Karamoja 'climate change is worsening food insecurity dramatically.' According to the report, 85 per cent of people surveyed in two districts of Karamoja have only one meal a day.

The change in the environment has meant that families that used to look to agriculture, as an alternative to livestock, to feed themselves are no longer able to rely on that either.

Achila-Ododongo says the drought has decimated harvests. 'Production and productivity are going down every day. It's been crop failure, crop failure, crop failure for the last four years. There are no bumper harvests like we used to have. We have been relying on food aid for the past four years.'

Back inside the manyatta, one of Tapem's wives shows off an empty garden. 'If we plant anything, the sun will just come and burn up all the crops, so we don't even think of planting. If we last up until the following day, we thank God for that,' says the patriarch.

These days, the people of the manyatta are largely dependent on

NGO and government assistance for food. It's a change from Tapem`s younger years, when the community was more self-reliant. 'We were better off because we didn't depend on the government so much. It's just these recent years and especially this one where we don't have anything at all,' Tapem says.

## Raiding for food

Cattle raids are a tradition in Karamoja going back to before colonisation. When guns proliferated in the region in following the overthrow of Idi Amin, however, they became increasingly destructive. A decade ago, the government of Uganda launched a massive disarmament program designed to stamp out raiding in the area. But despite the army's collection of over 30,000 guns, the effort hasn't put a stop to raiding in Karamoja.

Rather, cattle raids have changed nature. A number of factors, including increased demand for land and high youth unemployment and, of course drought, have resulted in raids of a different type. Instead of the massive ritual raids of the past, today warriors who steal tend to steal only a few animals at a time.

'Cattle wrestling has been transformed into organized crime,' says the DanChurchAid study. That's partly a function of a changing climate. Instead of raiding for prestige or to pay dowries, warriors now steal to feed their families, explains Simon Kiru, food security officer of the community based organization Action for Poverty Reduction and Livestock Modernization in Karamoja. 'If the children have slept for two or three days without food, then a man is forced to go and raid because there is no other alternative.'

Raiding has become a commercial activity and a coping strategy more than a cultural practice, Kiru explains. 'Now the cows they raid are just for survival. They bring them and sell them straight away so that they can buy food.'

Father Charles Omenya, the chairperson of the Catholic church's Justice and Peace committee for Moroto Diocese, has lived in Karamoja since the 1970's. 'These people who used to have guns, now they have resorted to arrows and pangas,' he says. 'Now they can't launch major attacks, so what they do is to go to vulnerable people and [even] take away the food stuffs that they have at home, chickens and utensils.'

And in spite of the government's efforts to eliminate the violence in the region, Karimojong continue to die at the hands of their neighbours. At least two or three people die each month in raids in Moroto district, admits resident district chairman Norman Ojwe. And that's in just one region of Karamoja's seven.

## Only hope

Outside of Tapem's manyatta, several boys in their late teens are escaping the mid-afternoon sun under a lone tree. These boys used to be charged with keeping their families' cattle. But there's little for them to do since their fathers' herds were raided.

'I knew all the colours of the animals and when one got lost and was missing, I could find it,' says Lokwango Nachiro, whose father lost his cows in a raid last year.

'[Usually] at this time in the afternoon I would be returning from the grazing area and I would be sharpening my knives to draw the animal's blood. I don't have anything to do these days. When we had cows, I would drink their milk and blood but now I have nothing to do but sit under this tree.'

In a society where cattle raids have become a strategy for coping with the changing climate, the future threatens to bring more violence. His friend Lobur Angella recalls the night his family's cattle were taken. 'We were sleeping and suddenly we heard gunshots. We took off without our shirts or shoes and ran to the bushes and hid. Some people were killed and some animals were injured. It's only because of the rescue of the soldiers that we were saved.'

The drought means that these boys have given up on agriculture as a means of producing food. 'The weather is not favouring us now. The soil is not fertile; if it was we would try and grow sorghum,' says Paul Louse. Though their community was devastated by raiding, they see the violent form of theft as the only way to obtain a good life for them and their families. 'The only hope of getting rich would be to go and raid,' Louse says.

# How one man could inspire a new generation of horse drawn travellers

**Jean Vranic** meets Pete Delaney, the remarkable traveller challenging stereotypes and proving that - even in modern Britain - alternative, sustainable lifestyles are still possible

*Wagons under construction near Redditch. Unlike many wagon builders, Pete Delaney works where he lives, and has not taken up a yard. Photo: Vjeko Vranic*

When Pete Delaney and his family's painted wagons arrive at the Sainsbury Island in Redditch, the local people know that Christmas has arrived. They've sold hand made holly wreaths and decorations at this spot for many years and when Christmas is over, Pete, his wife Rachel, their children and their sturdy horses are a regular feature in the lanes of Redditch and the nearby countryside.

Although many people assume their decorated homes belong to Romany gipsies, Pete and his family are actually known as 'horse drawn travellers'. There are approximately 1000 such travellers now and the number is growing. The Delaney's home is a Romany Style Bowtop Vardo - the Romany word for caravan, taken from an Iranian word vurdon.

On a warm spring day, sitting around the camp fire under a thick coppice of trees seemed very appealing, but I wondered what it was like during the recent freezing weather conditions: Pete assured me that the caravans were as warm inside as a conventional home as they are heated by wood burning stoves. The only concessions to modern technology are the solar panels used to power the children's d.v.d. players and a battery operated radio and mobile phone. Food is cooked over a camp fire.

Recently this family drew a great deal of interest by Pete building a new Bowtop wagon which could be seen on the side of the road, which he uses as his workshop. Unlike many wagon builders, Pete works where he lives, and has not taken up a yard.

It takes many hours of painstaking hand work to build the curved frame and then cover the frame with a canvas. Pete can supply just the frame for the buyer to decorate or do the complete decoration as well. He paints them in traditional scroll style using a great deal of paint and gold leaf which can cost several thousands of pounds. Rachel does some of the more intricate gold leaf work.

The gold leaf alone can cost up to £1000 per wagon and completely decorated wagons can sell at £60000 or more, depending on the art work and internal fittings, although Pete is yet to get one of those commissions. Most travellers build just for themselves and their family.

## Rethinking lifestyles

Well known as 'Pete the Painter', 'Pete the Brummie' or 'Pete the Hippy Traveller', some of his customers are fellow travellers, some are former travellers who have settled in conventional housing and want one for sentimentality's sake, and the others are simply house owners who are enthusiasts of this type of accommodation and lifestyle. One traveller living on a 'settled' site bought a Bowtop as a Christmas surprise for his family and it now sits alongside their more conventional mobile home to be used by the children – a new take on a rumpus room.

In spite of the plethora of shiny motorhomes and conventional caravans, there are still people who prefer the romantic idea of an open air way of living and travelling with a horse, even if it is only for once a year. More of us may start considering this mode of transport as fuel prices soar and environmental concerns prompt us to rethink our lifestyles.

It was the love of horses that first drew Pete into travelling as a way of life. Leaving his Birmingham city home at the age of 17, like many young people at that time, Pete did a variety of casual jobs, such as grape picking in France, hop picking in Herefordshire and fruit picking in Worcestershire, which Pete now regards as home.

Whilst working with travellers on these farms, Pete got involved with horses and he soon realised he had a natural affinity with them. He has been called a 'horse whisperer' because of his knack of calming excitable horses. His favourite source of income is from training young horses and schooling them, and their owners, to draw carts and to cope with any hazards such as traffic and unexpected noise.

Any horse rider will know these can easily panic a horse. Having experienced some hair-raising moments, Pete – now a middle aged granddad - is considering giving up the more dangerous parts of training. He still breeds horses occasionally using his 16 year old stallion. Pete is known for producing friendly horses and currently owns eight and is training two.

Starting off with converted trucks, then bender* tents, Pete took to the road as a traveller. He taught himself how to make his first Bowtop** wagon 19 years ago and then as his family arrived and grew up he built more wagons for them. He still has two children living with him, a daughter aged 16 and son aged 13, each with their own wagon. His youngest son built most of his own wagon under his father's instruction and is learning to decorate wagons as

well. Cart constructions needs good numeracy and manual skills. Two older adult daughters live away from home. His eldest son travels with various music festivals.

## Green festivals

Pete is a talented musician, with his own group 'The Hedgerow Crawlers' and he organises the Horse Drawn Camp and music festivals himself. One of them is the Beltane festival which has been held in various venues in Worcestershire for the last few years without problems, but had to be moved from Inkberrow at the last minute this year because of opposition from local villagers who feared 'the arrival of 500 gipsies' following the distribution of an anonymous leaflet to all homeowners.

The camp relocated to fields near a very select area of Redditch, owned by a sympathetic farmer, and although there were complaints in the paper a few days later by a few aggrieved neighbours, there were no problems reported to the police at the time.

The Ecologist visited the camp and apart from one roadside traffic cone showing the actual track entrance which led to the fields, there was no indication at all that there was a festival taking place. The noise was not discernible at all from the houses or even until you got right close to the tent some two fields away, where the music was playing.

The music festivals are strictly regulated, family orientated and environmentally friendly, using solar powered acoustic sound equipment and only allowing wood fires. Recycling bins are prominently sited. Small groups of people were sitting quietly near their tents or vans, whilst children played with hula hoops.

Sadly those who opposed the festival had not bothered to find out about the organisation or the festival's good reputation. Pete was very disheartened after this latest setback. The location of the summer solstice festival in Warwickshire was kept secret until the last minute to avoid further objections.

## Horsedrawn camp

Villagers and townies can find out about all aspects of the horse drawn life and its rich culture at these events. There are demonstrations of horsemanship and craftsmen such as farriers, wheelwrights and blacksmiths show their work. Children today rarely get to see these activities or even have the opportunity to get close to horses.

The idea of the Horsedrawn Camp itself grew out of this particular group of travellers' attending the Big Green Gathering in 2000. Up till then there had been no common gathering point. The Horsedrawn Camp is dedicated to presenting the horse and cart culture in the modern age and was formally constituted in 2007. Its aims are to create a gathering place and sense of purpose for the Horsedrawn Community at which they will be able to promote and demonstrate skills relevant to their way of life as a means of employment and sustainability. They enjoy sharing their way of life with outsiders.

All Pete and Rachel's children have been home educated and have gained many life skills lacking in children more conventionally educated. Although subjected to inspections occasionally by educational officials, the children have all impressed them with their level of knowledge, literacy and numeracy. They are keen bookworms.

One educational inspector thought it appropriate to ask a five year old to read his golf club membership card as a reading test, rather than a child's book, and was rather amazed when the lad could. His attitude however showed the contempt with which Pete and his fellow travellers are frequently treated.

There is much to be learnt from the culture of the horse drawn folk. Many of their ideas started with the Hippy movement but are even more relevant today as those of us who live more conventional lives are striving to adopt environmentally friendly lifestyles. Who knows, we may yet revert to horse drawn taxis in London - there's plenty of grazing land in the Royal parks!

## Notes:

*Bender tent: made out of hazel twigs covered with canvas.

**Bowtop: this caravan has a front door and rear window. Weatherproof canvas is stretched firmly over an arched wooden frame. The ceiling inside is generally patterned and any woodwork inside is gaily painted.

# Chemical companies 'misleading' gardeners over toxic pesticides

**Despite a surge of interest in organic gardening, green fingered consumers continue to favour toxic chemicals to combat pests. But are they being exploited by clever marketing and inaccurate labelling? Sarah Bentley investigates**

*Gardeners may unwittingly be contributing to an environmental and health crisis*

Mary, Mary Quite Contrary how does your garden grow? If Mary answered in a way that's reflective of the majority of British gardeners today, instead of silver bells and cockle shells the answer would be a resounding, 'With 2,4-D, clopyralid and neonicotinoids.'

As oxymoronic as it may seem un-green gardens and sheds full of toxic chemicals are endemic across the UK. For most amateur gardeners the closed loop system - as striven towards by followers of permaculture and organics - is an alien concept. Instead fossil fuel dependent, mass produced, often imported products – pots, seed trays, lanterns, pond liners, ornaments, green houses – are the norm, as are a battalion of toxic chemical based products to feed, defend and purge plants, crops and lawns.

In an increasingly urbanised country gardeners may not realise the crucial role their hobby can

play in maintaining local ecology. A recent RHS report 'Gardening Matters: Urban Gardens', found that urban gardens help to cool cities, prevent urban flooding, provide urban biodiversity and support human health. The report stated there was growing evidence that some declining species such as the common frog, song thrush and hedgehog once common in low-intensity farmland, are now more abundant in urban areas, and particularly in domestic gardens.

Pauline Pears, Publishing Editor of Garden Organic, would like all urban gardens to be, 'an oasis for biodiversity displaced from the countryside as monocultures and heavy pesticides and herbicide usage has pushed them out.'

However the shopping habits of the nation reveal we are far from that ideal. Figures from sales tracking organisation Gfk Retail and Technology found between April 2010 and 2011 the sales of flying insecticide products grew by 64 per cent and weed killer by 58 per cent, the largest growth rates of any domestic garden product.

## Quick chemical fix

Despite increasing mainstream media coverage and heightened awareness about the ecological benefits of organic growing (which supports a greater range of biodiversity and doesn't negatively impact upon pollinator populations, wildlife, the water table and human health) British gardeners are still reaching for quick fix, chemical based solutions.

Dominic Dyer is the Chief Executive of the Crop Protection Association, the industry body that represents agrochemical companies such as Montsanto, Dow, Bayer Garden and the Scotts Company. He believes that having invested time and money to create a desirable garden, 'Gardeners want to protect their valuable plants from pests and disease and that sometimes the most efficient way to do this is to use a garden chemical.'

Ben Raskin, Horticulture Advisor for the Soil Association, believes such products are an illusion of efficiency as they don't eliminate the cause of the problem. 'For example, rather than use a herbicide the best way to get rid of moss in your lawn is to scarify it (rake it) which removes the conditions moss needs to grow. Moss killer adds to the problem as decomposing matter provides the perfect conditions for more growth.'

This vicious circle also applies to the use of insecticides. 'They're not pest specific – they kill everything in that area including aphid eating insects such as lady birds,' explains Raskin. 'Once you've started killing off the natural aphid predators, you're hooked into the product cycle.'

RHS Entomologist Andrew Whalstead concurs that most pesticides are, 'not selective and do kill non target insects.' He highlights the fact that although many herbicides have, 'No direct insecticidal activity' using them will consequently affect 'all the wildlife associated with the plants that have been killed,' an insight which many amateur gardeners may not be privy too.

## Lack of awareness

Along with the cultural paradigm for manicured, weed free gardens Nick Mole of the Pesticide Action Network believes lack of awareness about the interconnectivity of insects and eco-systems and non-chemical alternatives has fuelled the ongoing rise in garden chemical sales.

'For the last fifty years the huge belief in the value of chemical growing has displaced old knowledge. What would be genuinely effective is for modern technology to be combined with traditional husbandry – crop rotation, terracing, companion planting. But that doesn't fit the profit margins of agro-business. Domestic weed and pest control is a huge money-spinner. Knowledge isn't,' he says.

Outside the realms of advocacy groups and industry lobbyists the consumer rational for using herbicides, pesticides and insecticides is pragmatic and often boils down to local influence.

The majority of allotment growers in Grantham, Lincolnshire, for example, use a mix of chemical product using vegetable growers with a hand full of organic dedicates. One grower said he used pesticides simply because his grandfather (who first got him started on vegetable growing) told him to use it whilst another grower kept their plot weed free through regular applications of herbicides because they liked it to look 'neat and tidy.'

Knowledge about techniques such as biological intervention, companion planting and IPM (Integrated Pest Management) was patchy and perceived as 'time consuming' and 'probably not as reliable as products.'

One of the few organic growers, who asked not to be named, said. 'Some of the older growers throw chemicals about like water. They've got stuff in their sheds that's ancient. I've seen people empty bottles onto unused plots. I don't think they realise how strong the

stuff is and how far it can spread.'

## Toxic marketing

Given the nature of how these products are marketed it's hardly surprising many consumers don't realise just how toxic they are and what the potential ecological impacts – water table poisoning, loss of biodiversity, ground contamination - are of over zealous application and improper disposal.

Nick Mole of the Pesticide Action Network says 'it's not known to what extent home and garden pesticides contribute to contamination of our environment. However, in densely populated areas, such as the Thames region, it is highly likely that use and inappropriate disposal of home and garden pesticides contribute significantly to water contamination.'

The lack of publicised, accessible information also means when chemicals are withdrawn products such as bifenthrin (a pesticide withdrawn in May 2010) and chlorpyrifos, (an organophosphate insecticide withdrawn in August 2008) will linger in garden sheds and be used for years after.

Dr Stephens Woodward, a Professor in the Institute of Biological and Environmental Sciences at Aberdeen University says 'organophosphates probably cause nerve damage to humans. There were cases of shepherds getting the shakes thought to be caused by exposure to it in sheep dip. I don't like the idea of this hanging about in people's gardens.'

The jarringly different messages on the front and back labels of these types of products verges on the comical. Front labels depict picturesque displays of social and ecological harmony – jubilant children, magnificent flowers, frolicsome fauna – while the back features warnings such as - DANGEROUS TO THE ENVIRONMENT, ACUTE TOXICITY TO AQUATIC LIFE – alongside foreboding silhouettes of dead fish and barren trees.

There is little regulation about how such warnings are displayed but from December 2011 garden pesticides on sale in the UK must state 'Use pesticides safely. Always read the label,' on the front of the packaging.

It could be reasonably argued that the marketing of domestic chemical products can be misleading. On the Scotts Company's marketing website a cartoon frog features next to advice on how to use Ever Green lawn care products, despite the warning on the products back label stating, 'Harmful to aquatic organisms, may cause long-term adverse effects in the aquatic environment.'

## Lack of regulation

Surprisingly there is no EU or UK regulation that governs the use of terms such as organic, natural and chemical-free (an amusing example of bad science given that water is a chemical substance) and consequently they are bandied about with impunity.

Pauline Pears believes British gardeners are 'totally bamboozled by the plethora of labels' – many of which manufacturers have created themselves. 'There's a lot of green wash,' she says. 'There's products with trade names such as Organic Choice that would never be considered organic as far as the movements concerned.'

At the recent Garden Organic Conference 'Maximising retail potential in a sustainable world' one garden centre owner told of her success at steering customers towards organic lines by creating a display using a sunflower organic logo she'd made herself.

'Although it is concerning logo's can be invented like this,' says Pears, 'it is encouraging consumers want this guidance and therefore garden centre's can and should be more proactive about encouraging sustainable gardening solutions.'

According to DEFRA pesticides have been available in the UK for amateur use for well over 100 years. Prior to the introduction of statutory controls on pesticides in 1986 there were two voluntary safety schemes, the Pesticides Safety Precautions Scheme (PSPS) and the Agricultural Chemicals Approval Scheme (ACAS).

Today for a chemical to be sold legally it must be approved by the EU and then in the UK by the Chemicals Regulation Directive (CRD), a branch of DEFRA. These safety tests are organised and paid for by the agrochemical companies and a dossier of findings presented to the CRD for approval. The costs of getting a new chemical on the market can be as high as £175m with CRD fees to carry out the evaluation needed for a new chemical to be given a unique registration number known as MAPP, between £50-£180,000.

## Products withdrawn

Most amateur garden pesticides and herbicides are a diluted versions of products developed for commercial agricultural use. From 2003 the EU has been undertaking a review of such products and consequently over the last decade many have been withdrawn not just for toxicity reasons but because it wasn't commercially viable for manufacturers to carry out additional safety tests.

Tim Davis, Head of Pesticides Policy Development Team at the

CRD says that 'about 1000 chemicals went through the review process and about 300 came through it. Some products are withdrawn and then come back again after they've gone through the necessary procedures. It's more often about investment and economics as opposed to toxicity, although this is occasionally the reason for withdrawal.'

Of the garden products currently on the market the chemicals with the most controversy around them are neonicotinoids (acetamiprid, imidacloprid, thiacloprid, thiamethoxam), 2,4-D and clopyralid.

Neonicotinoids are found in insecticides such as Westland Bug Attack, Bug Clear Gun! and Provado Ultimate Bug Killer Spray. There is concern they harm pollinator populations, in particular bees, and that the current approval processes are insufficient to detect their long-term ecological impact. They have already been banned in France, Germany and Italy and environmentalists, MPs and the general public are putting pressure on the UK to follow suit.

Defra's Chief Scientific Advisor Bob Watson has asked to receive regular updates on any new research in this area but has not, as has been widely reported, launched an investigation.

Clopyralid is a herbicide that targets broad leaf weeds and can be found in domestic lawn care products such as Evergreen Lawn Weed Killer, Vitax Lawn Clear 2 and Weedol Lawn Weed Killer. After conducting research the US Environmental Protection Agency said that clopyralid had 'the potential to leach to ground water and or contaminate surface water.'

Studies in the US and New Zealand found clopyralid in compost from domestic grass clippings treated with lawn care product and in the UK it has been found in the manures of animals who have grazed on treated grass. Compost and manure containing clopyralid can kill a range of plants and crops.

In February following discussions between WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Program), the CRD and manufacturers it was decided new wording must appear on all amateur products containing clopyralid by February 2014. 'After treatment, leave the clippings from the first mowing on the lawn. The next three mowings should be composted well, for at least 9 months, before being used as a mulch. Do not dispose of the grass clippings via council composting schemes.'

## Mixed messages

Pauline Pears finds this a bizarre course of action. 'It's a mixed message. So it's OK to compost grass treated with clopyralid at home, but it's not OK for the council. Where are people who don't compost supposed to put their grass clippings? And do you want the first cut of grass sitting on your lawn because it's too toxic to put elsewhere? Also it's impossible to police. People will still put clippings in their green wheelie bin as they either won't have read the label or won't have anywhere else to put it.'

Herbicide 2,4-D is ubiquitous in domestic lawn care products and weed killers. The Environment Agency says 2,4-D can be 'harmful to fish and other wildlife and is toxic to humans at high concentrations.' Despite its prevalence Dr Stephen Woodward is surprised it's still in use. He says it is 'potentially a carcinogenic but it's definitely very toxic. I wouldn't like to think of people dusting it about on their lawns, especially if they've got children.'

Do any significant changes lie ahead for the domestic garden industry? It would appear so. By November Defra will have put new legislation into place based on the EU's pesticides Sustainable Use Directive.

But Nick Mole of The Pesticide Actions Network says this will change very little. 'Had the government implemented the directive in the spirit it was intended it would have meant a paradigm shift in the way pesticides are used, sold and marketed across all sectors. The government and industry fought tooth and nail against it and will not be implementing anything of consequence.'

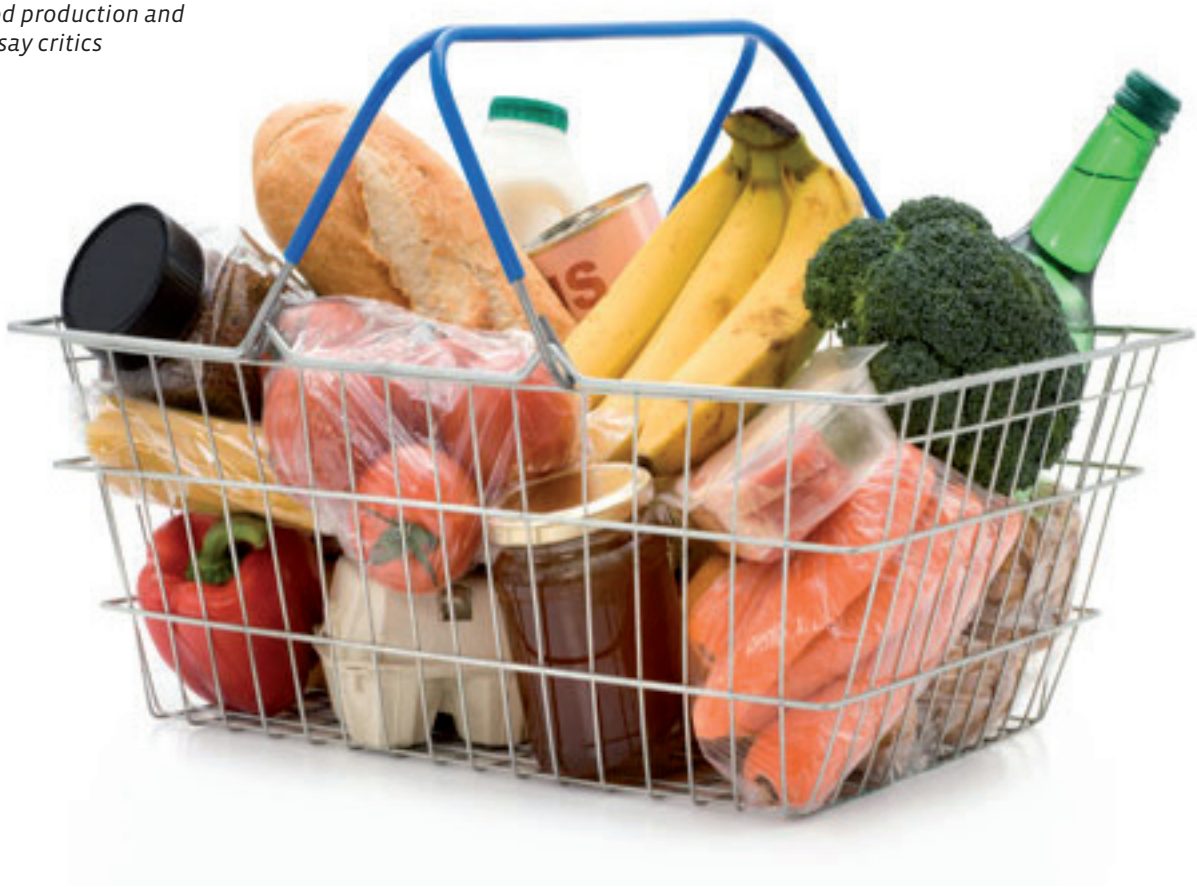
New practices the Pesticide Action Network wanted to see adopted included a ban on the use of pesticides in schools, parks and hospitals; a targeted phase out of the most hazardous pesticides; mandatory prior notification to residents if a pesticide is being sprayed near their homes; the halting of sales of domestic use pesticides in shops that don't have trained staff to talk to customers about the product and alternative methods; and the introduction of a robust system of IPM fully supported by advisory and research services to help farmers and home growers make more informed choices.

Outside the frustrations and red tape of bureaucracy Mole believes one of the most powerful ways of reducing chemical use in home gardens is to change people's attitudes. 'Love your weeds, accept a bit of collateral damage from pests and ask yourselves does a bit of moss, a few dandelions and some aphids really justify using a toxic chemical?'

# Sustainable food production and healthy eating strategies under threat

**The Sustainable Development Commission has been axed, the Food Standards Agency has had its powers stripped and DEFRA appears to be stalling. Where then does this leave planning for a national sustainable food strategy - and healthy eating plan - asks Nick Hughes?**

*Ministers are stalling on plans for sustainable food production and healthy eating say critics*



The self-styled 'greenest government ever' has been in power for over a year yet its contribution towards delivering a sustainable food strategy for the UK remains embarrassingly meagre.

Against the backdrop of soaring global food prices, which this month Oxfam chillingly predicted will double by 2030, the need to reduce the UK's exposure to commodity price volatility has never been greater. However, progress to put in place a national strategy for long term sustainable food production and consumption has ground to a near halt since the coalition assumed office.

In his final report in March this year as commissioner on the now

defunct Sustainable Development Commission, Tim Lang, professor of food policy at City University, wrote that work on food sustainability went into 'suspended animation' after the 2010 election. Three months on and Lang has no reason to alter his opinion. 'Nothing has happened at all. No initiatives have taken place and the progress which was being made under Labour with cross party support has just stopped,' he told the Ecologist.

Lang is a food policy doyen who has advised successive governments on issues of health and sustainability. He describes government action on food security over the course of the previous decade as 'crabby and reluctant' and says that it took two events - the spike in food prices and revelations as to the extent of the country's obesity crisis - that occurred towards the end of the last decade to frighten the Labour government into action. The upshot was the publication of the seminal 2008 document Food Matters, which identified the importance of food security to the long term prosperity of the UK and spawned the Food 2030 document of January 2010, which set out a vision for how this strategy could be delivered.

## Sustainable diets

A key plank of Food 2030 was the need for central government to provide a definition of a sustainable diet in order to give consumers guidance on how they themselves could contribute towards future food sustainability through the products they purchased and how they used and disposed of them. By this stage, two government agencies – the Food Standards Agency and the Sustainable Development Commission – had already begun work on how to incorporate sustainable eating into healthy eating advice, resulting in the publication in December 2009 of an SDC document called Setting The Table in which Lang suggested some high priority win win measures that consumers could take to improve the sustainability of their diet.

The top tier advice included reducing food waste, cutting down on junk food and eating less meat and dairy, while he also advocated eating seasonal food, cutting out bottled water and shopping on foot or over the internet.

The government's intention was to fine-tune the guidelines and then incorporate them into the Food Standards Agency's Eatwell plate, which advises consumers on how to maintain a healthy diet. Yet less than three months into the coalition's tenure both the FSA and SDC had lost their remit on sustainable eating. The SDC was axed as part of the bonfire of the quangos and the FSA responsibilities for nutrition and sustainability were folded into the Department of Health and Defra.

Since then, the silence on sustainable eating advice has been deafening.

Lang believes the government's inertia is primarily driven by an internal focus at Defra brought about by crippling budget cuts – at 30 per cent the most severe of any government department. 'All my intelligence both inside and outside of Defra says the reason nothing is happening is entirely and solely because the department has been... internally focused. You can't expect government policy to move forward on something as huge as food and sustainability unless there are people to shepherd it, audit it, chair it facilitate it, do all the things that civil servants do,' he said.

## Political questions

In Defra's 2011-2015 Business Plan, the sustainable consumption agenda is conspicuous by its absence - replaced by nebulous discourse on the need for more sustainable production albeit with very few practical examples of how this will be achieved. Meanwhile, the lack of evidence of delivery of policies set out in Food 2030 has prompted MPs to question the government's progress in this area.

On 5 April this year Labour MP William Bain tabled a question in the Commons on what steps the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had taken to implement the terms of the Food 2030 plan since May 2010. The answer, offered by Agriculture and Food Minister Jim Paice, cites numerous reviews, engagements and pieces of research but very few decisive actions. On the issue of sustainable diets specifically, the Minister points vaguely to the commissioning of 'research to develop the evidence base on sustainable, healthy diets', which in itself suggests a regression from the point of defining a sustainable diet reached by the SDC 18 months ago.

One Westminster source close to Defra concedes that 'they [Defra] really haven't done very much at all' in taking forward the Food 2030 plan, and reveals that the Environment Food and Rural Affairs Committee is still awaiting a government response to its request for a document updating progress on delivery of Food 2030.

## 'Clear messages'

Unsurprisingly, the government itself is reluctant to divulge too much information on its strategy, preferring to deal in generalities. In answer to a question on what steps it has taken to provide integrated healthy and sustainable eating advice to consumers, a spokesperson for Defra says: 'We encourage people to eat a more sustainable diet, and we are working with the Department of Health, NGOs and the industry to create clear messages that will help consumers understand the impact of the food they choose.'

The only sign of affirmative action is in the forthcoming publication of new Government Buying Standards for public sector food, which aim to cost-effectively increase the amount of food bought by government

departments and their agencies to British or equivalent standards, including sustainability standards. However, these standards will only be mandatory for central government and, furthermore, there is no clue offered as to how sustainability standards will be defined. Given that the Healthier Food Mark - the only previous attempt at establishing guidelines for procuring healthy, sustainable public sector food - was dropped last year it seems unlikely that a rigorous formula will be applied.

Another dynamic to consider in the sustainable food equation is the role of industry. The food industry has always sought to resist prescriptive advice on what people should eat and lobbied hard behind the scenes for the FSA to lose its responsibilities for driving nutrition policy, having opposed the agency's preferred system of traffic light nutritional labelling from the outset.

## Constraints and lobbying

There is evidence that a similarly combative stance has been adopted on the issue of defining a sustainable diet. In a recent submission to the Environmental Audit Committee's consultation on sustainable food, the Food and Drink Federation, the body that represents food manufacturers, wrote that models of sustainable diets are 'restrictive and prescriptive in terms of consumer choice' and 'impose constraints on manufacturers and retailers in terms of potential sourcing'. In 2009, meanwhile, the same organisation labelled Lang's effort at defining a healthy, low environmental impact diet in his Setting The Table report as 'at best simplistic and at worst deliberately disingenuous', before going on to argue that defining a sustainable diet was an inherently paradoxical task.

To a degree the FDF has a point. The difficulties in defining a sustainable diet are myriad and inevitably involve trade-offs between competing factors such as nutrition, animal welfare, carbon, water and economic sustainability. Fish is a classic example of a food where potential for conflict is rife as the common assumption that fish is good for you must be balanced with the fact that stocks of many of the most popular varieties of fish are severely depleted.

In any given choice equation conflicts are likely to emerge. Is a tomato grown in the UK under artificial light more sustainable than one grown naturally in Spain but shipped in? Should consumers favour a Fairtrade rose grown in a water scarce region of Africa over a domestically produced flower? How economically sustainable is an organic chicken when the retail price is double that of a bird produced to poorer welfare standards? The answer, invariably, will lie in the priorities of the individual consumer. Yet all the while no template for sustainable eating exists, consumers are lacking a vital tool needed to make the most informed possible purchasing decision.

## Retail responses

To say the entire food industry is inherently anti-sustainability would be wrong. There are ample examples throughout the food supply chain of manufacturers and retailers reducing the carbon and water footprints of their operations and moderating the volume of waste sent to landfill. The British Retail Consortium has come out in favour of the government prescribing a sustainable diet while some supermarkets are taking matters into their own hands and choice editing products on sustainability grounds. Sainsbury's decision to stock only Fairtrade bananas and Tesco's move to take out frosted and white light bulbs and replace them with energy-saving bulbs are just two examples of retailers taking the responsibility for making sustainable purchasing decisions away from consumers.

But there are limits to what businesses alone can achieve. 'It's taken some bold leadership by some of the supermarket chains to start to get consumers to understand about things like Marine Stewardship Council fish and sustainably sourced food but I don't think there's much price elasticity there,' says Shaun McCarthy, director of sustainable procurement consultancy Action Sustainability. 'There may be certain groups of people who are prepared to pay more for things like organic or sustainably sourced food but I think the vast majority still expect supermarkets both to be competitive and to do the right thing.'

The hardest challenge for retailers, according to Jack Cunningham, Sainsbury's head of climate change and environment, is how to engage the consumer on the issue of sustainable consumption. 'It's not a challenge that we're shirking away from; but I also think wider society plays a part here - it's not just down to retail, it's not just down to business, it's down to wider civil society, central government and local government as well as individuals taking responsibility for their own actions.'

The British Retail Consortium, in its own submission to the Environment Agency's consultation, says only government can define what a healthy, sustainable diet entails and goes on to criticise the coalition for failing to progress the work that went into Food 2030.

The fact is that as long as the diets of UK consumers are significant contributors to critical sustainability issues such as climate change, biodiversity and land and water use, the need for government to take ownership of the food sustainability agenda will remain paramount. For every day the government resists giving consumers the help they need to make sustainable choices, the long-term security of our food supply will look that little bit bleaker.