



Audio file

Episode 4: Eco-anxiety, Marine Heatwave & Secretary of State Speech at Wildlife Trusts Event

Transcript

Sophie

Hello and welcome to the Nature In A Nutshell podcast. This is the podcast which breaks down the latest ecology and environmental news affecting people and nature. My name Sophie and I'm the marketing officer at the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management and as always, I'm joined today by my 2 colleagues and co-hosts, Jason and Douglas.

Jason

Hi, I'm Jason, CIEEM's Head of Policy.

Douglas

I'm Douglas. I'm CIEEM's Policy Officer.

Sophie

But today, we're also joined by first ever guest – CIEEM's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Engagement Officer, Lea Nightingale. And she'll be talking to us all about eco anxiety.

Lea

I'm Lea and my pronouns are she/her. Thank you so much for inviting me onto the pod to talk about what eco anxiety is and what we can do to better support ourselves and others as we notice those telltale feelings of eco anxiety.

Sophie

So as well as eco anxiety, what else are we covering in this episode guys?

Jason

So this month, we're also covering the marine heatwaves and also a recent speech by the Secretary of State that she gave to the Wildlife Trusts. And then we'll also be doing our usual good news section.

Sophie

OK. Well, let's kick things off then by going straight into eco anxiety. Lea, can you explain exactly what eco anxiety is?

Lea

Absolutely. So the term eco anxiety first originated in the mid 2000s. And it's short for ecological anxiety. It can also be known as eco distress or climate anxiety. I should say that those terms are, like, completely interchangeable and used to describe feelings towards specific topics on any given



day. They can change in what they mean, but today, to avoid confusion and I will use eco anxiety as a catch all.

What exactly is eco anxiety? Eco anxiety can be described as a sense of foreboding that worry or fear about the environmental future of humanity, our planet, and all the amazing species that we share it with. Eco anxiety is not a diagnosable or recognised medical recognition. But rather it can be seen as a completely rational reaction to the current climate in which we find ourselves.

Sophie

And are there any feelings that we should look out for when we're talking about eco anxiety?

Lea

Oh, absolutely. Some emotions that you would look out for alongside that fear and worry can be anger, indifference, which sometimes is called apathy, frustration or feelings of powerlessness. You can encounter exhaustion.

Eco anxiety is known to be more prevalent amongst young people, women and people already working to affect change in this area. Whilst eco anxiety is not a diagnosable condition, it should be said that prolonged exposure to thoughts and feelings of eco anxiety can result in a decline in mental well-being and mental health. In really severe instances, I myself have generalised anxiety disorder and so I know first hand how eco anxiety impacts my own mental well-being. We would encourage anyone who's struggling with their mental health to reach out to their GP or a confidential support service such as Shout on 85258. You can also find amazing information and support through the climate psychology and we'll provide links in the show notes.

Sophie

And can you tell us about any things that can worsen the feelings of eco anxiety?

Lea

I absolutely can, and I bet before I even say it, you can probably guess it's the content that we choose to consume, particularly online, be that the news, social media, documentaries. It's so easy to get pulled into online debate or doom scrolling on social media. I myself am completely prone to falling down a YouTube wormhole of environmental catastrophe and feeding that vicious cycle of negativity. Until I feel like all of my efforts to make a difference are just completely for nothing.

Douglas

It's a really interesting topic to bring up. I myself definitely have felt eco anxiety and I think the most interesting thing is the more I've learned and sort of, you know, doing a degree in environmental studies with climate change being a big focus, the more I learned, the more worried I became. And it just was that process of the more involved I got in it and then getting involved in policy and looking at what's actually changing and the more tools that you would have felt that I was giving myself to help felt that actually was making it worse because just the more I knew, the bigger this issue kept getting in my head. Yeah. And it's really important to just, I think take the time to evaluate what you're feeling and you know validate that and say you know, it's OK to be concerning. These are



worrying things, really acknowledge it as an actual issue because it is worrying and it's not something that should just be dismissed. Yeah, I've definitely felt eco anxiety.

Sophie

Yeah, it can feel like really, really disheartening as well when you just hear all this negative news, which is why we kind of end our episodes with some positive news. Lea, how can we combat these feelings of eco anxiety.

Lea

It's like we've just said, I think the most important thing about eco anxiety is to acknowledge that these feelings are real. And that they're valid. And to really offer ourselves some self compassion. It's completely normal to worry about the things that we feel are outside of our control, particularly as you've said, you know, the more you start getting involved in this sector, the more news you have and you create that vicious cycle. It's normal and it's important to recognise that we're not alone in experiencing these feelings.

I recently read an amazing book by Jessie Panazzolo called How To Conserve Conservationists. And in her book, and indeed on her incredible blog, Jessie and other conservationists from all over the world describe feelings of eco anxiety and the impact that phenomena has both on the professional and their personal lives. Such great book and blog. Again, I'll pop it in the show notes. It's just so important to know that you're not alone in these feelings.

Sophie

That's what I'm taking from this. It's really great to hear that we are not alone. And more people are kind of experiencing eco anxiety than we might think.

Lea

Oh 100%, that's one of the things that helps me when I notice the feelings of eco anxiety. I know that I'm not the only one with these feelings and something else that really helps me is to get outside into nature. Being in nature, whether that's sitting in your garden or moving through a park or wood, it's known to increase our mental resilience, shinrin-yoku, which is literally forest bathing, is an ancient Japanese tradition that's now considered like a national pastime. It was so interesting to me the impacts of our mandated walks during the lockdowns because they actually inspire me to get out more and explore my neighbourhood. And now I walk my dog, Rollo, for an hour every day listening to podcasts and taking in my local area. Even urban environments can be great places to pay mindful attention to nature running wild. Maybe a dandelion growing up through the pavement, or a row of trees lining the street. The changes you notice throughout the year, wherever you find yourself, to quote Jeff Goldblum, "Nature finds a way". So really taking time to prioritise joy and rest, particularly in those natural environments. Another great book called Light Makers Manifesto by Karen Walrond. She really focuses on finding our joy within our work and not defining ourselves by our work. I think as people working in the environment sector, it's very easy to sort of make our career our personality. Therefore, when the news downturns and it's not going necessarily in such a positive way, we tend to put that reflection back on ourselves and almost we're failing. And rather



the system is failing. So I think being able to find joy where we can is a really, really important coping mechanism. As is belonging to a community of like minded individuals can absolutely help with their anxiety, I feel so lucky to be part of CIEEM and I draw so much resilience from being surrounded by our incredible community. The shared belonging is such a great sense of support for me as sort of working towards some of the issues that we face and actually taking tangible steps to address those challenges. It gives me a much greater sense of control in such overwhelming circumstances. I think the key to working towards solutions is looking at the local and not the global. So can you find or maybe even form communities in your local area to address a challenge or enhance the green space?

Sophie

Thank you so much Lea.

Douglas

Yeah, I mean, just looks like I've got more to add to my reading list. Thanks Lea. I'll be following those up.

Sophie

We've also got a lot of show notes about eco anxiety, so please go and have a look there if you want to do some extra reading. And Lea will be sticking around with us because she's got a positive news story to share at the end of the episode. For now, I think you know, brace yourselves, everyone. I think we're heading into a bit of a eco anxiety inducing news story now about a marine heatwave that we're currently experiencing. Doug, take it away.

Douglas

Yeah, I'm really sorry about this. It does seem to be me who often is drawn to these stories and then brings them up. So yeah, maybe I should be having a look at that in the future. But this is something that's happened quite currently. I think we can all sort of, I guess feel this is happening. You know, we've all sort of been experiencing a pretty significant period of heat and it's not just sort of nice weather which is lovely. You know, in the UK it's really good to see the sun. But at the moment there's a really significant marine heat wave happening in the North Atlantic and the North Sea. So the US national sort of oceanic and atmospheric administration, who monitors the huge amount of the North Sea and also they've got loads of equipment, have categorised parts of the North Sea as being an extreme heatwave. So what this means is that it's all of above a significant level for a prolonged amount of time. And this is off coast of the UK around 5 degrees C in places which is massive in terms of ocean temperatures, they might not even fluctuate that much in a year. So to spike up like that in a sort of a semi short period of time is big, is really big.

And while you might sort of expect these fluctuations in warmer or more enclosed seas like the Mediterranean, where there's less sort of cold water currents flowing in, so it's easier for it to heat up, you get really warm seas. In the North Atlantic, where, as anyone who's swum in the North Atlantic and North Sea it's pretty chilly. Even in the middle of summer, it's not always the nicest sea to swim in. So for it to be this warm and this sort of prolonged is, yeah, speaks to some big changes.



So the sort of the main reason for this is it's a combination of the El Nino effect, which we talked about in our last podcast and just human induced climate change, which is really cranking up the impact and then the severity of natural climate variability that could be happening anyway. But the greenhouse gas, the atmosphere, the trapping of heat just makes this all infinitely worse, as sort of your general temperature increases, the ocean stores a lot of heat. So we've really been spared a lot of the impacts of climate change as the ocean. You can think of it like a little protective bubble, so as the Earth warms up, the ocean stores the majority of that heat gain. And then you get to these points where it suddenly starts to change. There's so much heat throughout the ocean that you then start to take these changes. It can't just buffer it anymore, so it's sort of nearing that point, particularly when we're in sort of prolonged heat wave of like we're at the moment.

I guess why is this important and what's the sort of impact of this? Obviously, we're looking here at a sort of on a species edge. So like when you know you have heat waves on land, heat waves in the water can be really damaging to a lot of species, particularly sort of coral reefs and your sort of mollusks, you know, sort of sneeze sales, all that sort of stuff, and even fish communities. So what you could see is if this carries over the summer, you could end up seeing mass mortalities in a lot of our sort of seagrasses, in our fish and our kelp and our oysters. So those sort of species are quite vulnerable because they can't migrate particularly smaller animals. And you might not think it, but the UK does have coral reefs and some people would say that they are as beautiful as those found in the tropics. They're sort of these cold water coral reefs. They're quite new to science in terms of their sort of the hot new thing on the scene in a lot of circles, but they are quite far down the marine shelves. They're quite deep waters, very cold, but as you can imagine, if they're sort of used to these colder temperatures, they suddenly get a warm spike and you can get mass bleaching like we see in the Barrier Reef in Australia. So we can get those sorts of things in the UK too. And these are really important habitats for lots of marine species, particularly sort of younger communities as juveniles, are growing up and then advancing into the sort of the wider ocean.

So I thought this was really important, sort of, you know, raise attention to this is, as we often see, and we're always seeing these sorts of things. This is a current impact of climate change. You know, this isn't a sort of 40 years old, 2050, that's when things start changing. You know, we're seeing these changes now. Climate change is happening. It's not going to happen. It is happening and this is a really good example of that and it's on the UK as well. You know this isn't happening near the tropics. It's not happening somewhere. We can say, oh, well, it's happening somewhere. You know where else we don't to worry about it. This is home turf. This is around our ocean, and they're really warming up. So hopefully those temperatures start to decrease, but yeah, that's where we are at the moment.

Jason

Adding to our eco anxiety, but I suppose it just highlights the need for action, doesn't it? We really need to get on with this.

Douglas

Absolutely, always more action.



Sophie

And now moving on to our final topic of the episode, Jason's going to walk us through the Secretary of State speech at the recent Wildlife Trust event.

Jason

Yeah. So I picked this out because I thought was quite interesting on a number of points really. The Secretary of State, Therese Coffey gave a speech on the 20th of June at an event organised by the Wildlife Trust and Hogan Lovells, a law firm on the importance of nature, recovery and biodiversity. I found it quite interesting just because it was useful from an information gathering point of view in that it covered a whole broad range of activities that the government is undertaking on nature recovery in England and it's almost set out a list actually. So it was just really nice as an update on where Government's at, what they're doing and how they're getting on with things. There's some good and there's some bad in it. I was going to sort of run through some of the highlights from it.

There was lots of emphasis on international cooperation, which is absolutely critical and absolutely needs to happen. But I do sometimes think this is a bit of a distraction from local activity and local implementation and local action. The UK is one of the world's most nature depleted countries, but we're also one of the richest countries, so if we can't do it, who can? You know, we've got really low hanging fruits to aim for and the resources to do it. So we really should be setting an example. There was also a lot of emphasis on private finance. This has been a theme for some time now, getting private money into nature recovery. And it's not just the UK Government focused on that. There's an initiative that came out of the global COP15 agreement around getting money from the private sector into nature recovery, absolutely need to make that happen.

Our current government isn't too keen on spending more public money. The general focus on private Investment Partnership coming into that as well, but we do need to remember there are some things that need to be done simply for public benefit and there are gonna be things that can't always be done for a financial return.

Coming back to the international points as well, it's great the governments intervening global summits to talk about how to mobilise the \$200 billion that was promised to the COP15 for nature recovery. Absolutely need to get that found and distributed and starting action on it.

There was also an odd statement from the Secretary of State in the speech as well around the fact that we only just starting to understand the impacts of nature loss on business and her actual quote in the speech was "we are beginning to grasp only now the future risks and very real impacts on business" I thought this was a really strange quote. We've known for a long time the impact on business and the economy from nature loss. And just to point out one example, the government's own Commission report, the Dasgupta Review, which was a review of the economics of biodiversity, set this up really clearly and that was published back in early 2021. So at least for a couple of years, we've really known the impacts on business and the economy. So we need to get moving on that.

The Secretary of State also talked about the huge importance of getting the farming schemes working in the environmental and land management schemes rights. And making sure we get big land owners in on that and on board with nature recovery, which is absolutely right. We need to get



this right, I do think we need to push them further around the public benefit, the environmental and nature recovery aspects of it. And it's probably not held even from a farmer's point of view that the schemes have been rolled out in a bit of a piece meal fashion. We've had it's information almost drip fed over time, rather than getting a chunk and go right, this is how the plan is gonna work. So it'd be good to see real progress on that.

It's not all bad news. Or necessarily sort of stuff that would cause you eco anxiety. There's some positive stuff in there. I was really pleased to hear her talking about raising nature recovery at a recent World Bank event. Absolutely need to get the topic of nature recovery into those kind of places and also around the UK supporting the work of the task force on nature related financial disclosures. So that's around how money affects business and that's been going for a while now as well and their transition plan.

She also talked about the importance of shifting harmful and preferred subsidies. Definitely need to get those sorted out, because otherwise we're fighting against the tide. You know, as much money as put to good stuff. There's bad stuff being funded as well. Doesn't help. She talked about 500 million that's already been pledged for with the International Blue Planet Fund and the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund. And then there's a new, forthcoming big Nature Impact Fund as well. And they talked about the money that's already being invested in forest cover and peatland restoration, which we know are critically important around climate change adaptation as well with mitigation.

I thought the one thing in terms of money that she didn't talk about, which is a bit of an elephant in the room, was money for Natural England and local authorities. They're going to be critical to all of this work, they're almost the bottleneck in trying to get these things done. So I thought that was a bit of an omission. She also noticed that England's on track to meet the 30 by 30 pledge, so that's having 30% of land and sea are set aside and you know, and a state for nature recovery by 2030.

She didn't, really give any clues around the government's criteria or what those are going to be although she did say a little bit, but there are different views on what that 30% includes and we're hoping for that to be explained a bit more in the near future. Not all landscapes that may look natural or working in the way they should for nature and some are designated as a social landscape cultural landscape rather than a for nature, so we need to make sure we're careful about those. But to be fair to the Secretary of State, she did mention, and she did note that our Sites of Special Scientific Interest SSSI's are not all in good condition and certainly need help.

At the end of the speech, she did a Q&A session as well, and there were some commentators who were upset about how she brushed off Beavers so easily and Beaver reintroduction, saying there are more important things to talk about. But you know, Beavers definitely have a place in nature restoration, particularly around the sort of water stresses that we started to see last summer. We'll probably see the summer and water management, but we'll see where that goes so all in all, I'm not sure we learned that much knew, but it was a really useful Roundup of government activity. And just interesting to see all of that pulled together, that's it for me on that item.

Douglas



Yeah, just to say I don't think some days I can't think of anything more important than beaver reintroduction, to be honest. So I'd love for that to be higher up on the agenda there. They solve so many of our issues in terms of Land Management, in terms of water retention and it's just you know, they're such a charismatic species, they're great. So and I think definitely try and push that one up on their agenda.

Lea

I completely agree. I love a good beaver. What I think is really, really interesting, Jason, is the sort of that distraction for the International Corporation and not the local action. And maybe there's something in that our SSSI's are in poor condition. Maybe we could encourage our Members, our listeners, to go out and get involved with the local SSSI's and find out what they can do to help, because I think that would really help with those feelings of eco anxiety if there are volunteering groups that could maybe help turn around the state of our SSSI's.

Jason

I mean, as this was a Wildlife Trust event, that's probably your first point of call to go and get involved in their work, their local nature reserves and the SSSI's that they'll have on their land.

Douglas

Yeah, it's a great idea. I mean, sometimes the best sort SSSI's or nature reserves that I've been to have been really out of the way and sometimes quite small, but no one knows about them and there's one not far from sort of the middle of Wales, it's just off a couple of farm tracks and then it's this fantastic peatland with sort of small Birch growing up at a really acidic ground. It's just fantastic, but it's middle of nowhere and it's really small. You wouldn't know it exists, but it's a really unique environment, so it's really important to try and find them.

Lea

We have Holme FEn just up the road here over in Cambridgeshire and that's one of the SSSI's, even though it's considered low value.

Jason

Thanks guys.

Sophie

We're going to move on to some positive news now to end the episode on. I think we all remember last year when the bison were reintroduced to a conservation site in Kent by the Kent Wildlife Trust which was a milestone achievement at the time, but now they're getting their very own animal bridges to help them move around southern England. So they currently live in 50 hectares of woodland, but the bridges will allow them to roam up to 200 hectares and these animal overpasses or wildlife bridges have been installed around the world. And they basically allow wildlife to safely cross busy roads and highways. So that was just one thing that kind of stood out to me this month and put a smile on my face.



Lea

I love that bison and Beavers. My goodness. So. We've obviously just finished Glastonbury and I'm always so excited to see what happens at Glastonbury and how it overcomes the challenges that it faces being a really large festival and really lives into the values of Worthy Farm. This year alongside compostable loos and the banning of disposable vapes, organisers have worked to address challenges before revellers even reached the site. National Express ran a 0 emissions shuttle bus service between Bristol and the festival site through partnership with the electric vehicle infrastructure specialists Zenobē. At the festival grounds revellers may have encountered these 6 degrees pavilion, basically based on the Kevin Bacon Idea, 6 degrees of separation and the pavilion is shaped like the number six and was constructed from mushroom roots, otherwise known as mycelium, highlighting the connectivity of humans, and the pavilion showcased findings through an exhibition, giving evidence on how mycelium can replace polystyrene and plastics in the festival industry. A documentary, is set to be released now that the Glastonbury Festival is wrapped for the year so watch this space to find out more about this endeavour and to see if there's mushroom for innovation in future years. Finally, Octopus energy have constructed a temporary wind turbine at the site, and the turbine combined with on site solar panels, meant that the festivals run entirely on renewable energy this year.

Sophie

That's what we like to hear.

Lea

We love it.

Jason

You're giving us plenty to follow up on here, Lea.

Lea

It's what I do.

Jason

Guest appearance prerogative giving us documentaries to watch and books to read.

Sophie

Jason, over to you.

Jason

A quick one for me. Pine Martin recovery in Northern Ireland is really great news. So new research by the Ulster Wildlife Trust has shown that Pine Martins, one of our smallest native carnivores, have in their words of the Ulster Wildlife Trust, a phenomenal resurgence, which is great. So they're present in all six counties across Northern Ireland, but their presence has doubled when they measured them in 2016 from the surveys then compared to surveys five years previously, so it's great. And it's



also, really great news for red squirrels, so Pine Martins will predate red squirrels, but they also predate grey squirrels and the grey squirrels are a threat to our native red ones. So grey squirrels outcompete red squirrels because they're bigger, but also because they spread a disease called squirrelpox, which kills red squirrels. That seems to lead to grey ones unaffected. So red squirrels have evolved with pine Martens and have escaped an evasion behaviours, whereas the non-native grey ones don't. And indeed the survey showed that grey squirrel numbers have declined in those five years. So good news for Pine Martins and red squirrels.

Sophie

OK, well, that's the end of the episode then. Thank you so much for listening to another episode of Nature In A Nutshell. Please do go ahead and rate and review the podcast as it really does help us to reach more people and we will see you all next month.