

Opinions of Canada's globally renowned environmentalist echoes the warnings already sounded by many scientists, writes Heidi Kingstone

Behaviour will affect many generations after us

David Suzuki, one of the world's leading environmentalists, is not optimistic about the future. His Commonwealth Lecture in London is titled *The End of the Line*, and he's pretty sure we've reached it.

Suzuki has been banging on about the environment for decades in his native Canada and the rest of the world.

Scientists long ago concluded that human activities are the major contributing factor to global warming. Despite this, we are taking very little heed of the evidence that points to the destruction of the planet. "There was never a time when we needed to look ahead more and act on it than today," says Suzuki.

Suzuki, Canada's David Attenborough, is 72 and has been a national hero since the 60s. He was recently voted one of *Time* magazine's 60 Visionaries and Leaders.

He still has the immensely youthful, handsome telegenic looks that propelled him to media stardom. As a child he was enraptured by fruit flies and was brilliant enough to be made professor at 33, going on to become Canada's premier young geneticist.

Most Canadians were weaned on his environmental TV programme *The Nature of Things*, though he has gone global – an author of more than 40 books, with a string of international awards, plaudits and degrees. Nor has he lost any of his passion

or passion for straight talk.

Over the years he has referred to himself as Cassandra or Chicken Little whose catchphrase was "the sky is falling, the sky is falling", but he believes his predictions of planetary doom are coming true and we are heading right down the chute at a phenomenal speed.

"A lot of my colleagues say we are past the tipping point. There is no question we have added over 30% more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere than there was 150 years ago. To right that is going to take hundreds of years, well after the lifetime of our grandchildren's grandchildren. Meanwhile we're adding even more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere."

He adds: "To go from a cold period to a warm period or a warm period to a cold one would constitute a change of one degree every 1 000 years. We're almost one degree warmer now and we're talking about going up another two degrees this century, and every indication is that we will be going way beyond this."

Suzuki's concern is that we have been ignoring this information for 40 years.

Politicians rationalise this by saying it will cost too much or that it will destroy the economy. He likes to remind people that the leading scientists in the US predicted for 30 years that New Orleans was a disaster waiting to happen, a big city built in the midst of a hurricane path.

"Then everything they predicted happened. So we need to use that foresight."

Suzuki makes simple, effective suggestions so we as individuals can reduce our carbon footprint in three key areas – food, transportation, housing. If you eat meat give it up once a week – that is a start.

In ice hockey-mad Canada 600 star players have signed up to reduce their carbon emissions, as has the national ski team.

They were shocked at how slopes were getting higher and higher as the ones below were depleted of snow.

Is it time for SA's rugby, cricket and soccer players to also lead the way? Africa may seem remote from Canada's melting tundra, but the impact is global.



DR DAVID SUZUKI

10 simple things you can do to make a real difference

1. Reduce home energy use by 10%
2. Choose an energy-efficient home and appliances
3. Don't use pesticides
4. Eat meat-free meals one day a week
5. Buy locally grown and produced food
6. Choose a fuel-efficient vehicle
7. Walk, bike, carpool, take public transport
8. Choose a home close to work or school
9. Support alternative transportation
10. Learn more and share with others

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