

15 new conservation concerns

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A review carried out by a group of international specialists has identified several emerging issues that are likely to damage biodiversity in the coming years.

The review was conducted by 22 specialists from 20 institutions, including the University of Cambridge and the European Centre for [Environment](#) and [Human Health](#), and aims to provide a 'critical list' of issues that need investigating in the near future.

The analysis focused on changes in climate, technology and [human behaviour](#), with particular attention on the way developments in these areas could impact on the conservation of biodiversity. The authors hope that by identifying these issues, which are often at the very edge of our current understanding, researchers and policy-makers can be given [early warning](#) of what tomorrow's problems are likely to be – allowing them to take appropriate preventative action now.

A total of 15 issues have been highlighted by the review, each focusing on a specific development. One of the issues is the potentially damaging impact of pharmaceuticals that are released into the environment after human use. As populations age and our use of drugs increases, these chemicals are beginning to affect fish, birds and other organisms, but the larger scale impact on our ecosystems is mostly unknown. Another area identified by the study highlights the increasing use of nuclear batteries and the safe disposal of their waste. These novel power sources could provide electricity to remote and deprived communities but the implications for the environment are yet to be determined.

In order to identify each issue, the team used a technique referred to as Horizon Scanning. This method is regularly used by businesses to identify new market opportunities and scientists use it in a similar way - to determine emerging areas of concern that will need to be investigated. As with business, the successful use of this technique will allow researchers to expose issues with enough time to react, and hopefully lessen their impact.

The European Centre for Environment & Human Health (part of the Peninsula College of Medicine & Dentistry) is a co-sponsor of the review together with the University of Cambridge and the Natural Environment Research Council. The European Centre has already set its sights on several of the areas identified and regularly conducts its own horizon scanning activities.

Professor Michael Depledge, co-author of the study and a leading specialist at the Centre said

"This review has highlighted a number of issues that are likely to be of great importance throughout the 21st century. From the warming of the deep sea to placing hydro-electric turbines in rivers, it is clear that our potential to damage the natural environment will continue to be a crucial area in which we should conduct research. By identifying these issues at an early stage we hope to gain an understanding that can drive changes in policy and behaviour, ultimately helping to preserve biodiversity and increase the adoption of sustainable ways of living."

Provided by The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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