

Video: With climate change, are we like the whale in 'The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy?'

December 13 2017, by Robert Sanders

One of many strange scenes in Douglas Adams's novel "Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy" involves a sperm whale "suddenly ... called into existence several miles above the surface of an alien planet" with little time to contemplate its "identity as a whale" or its perilous situation in midair before going "splat."

That's analogous to the situation today with climate change, says paleobiologist Charles Marshall, director of UC Berkeley's Museum of Paleontology and a professor of integrative biology. "We are in [free fall](#)," he says.

Life on Earth is used to gradual environmental change; species are able to evolve and adapt over thousands or millions of years. Yet now, the planet is experiencing an unparalleled increase in [greenhouse gas emissions](#) accompanied by soaring population growth and resource extraction – almost all of it occurring within a single lifetime.

In a five-minute talk in May at the Cal Future Forum, Marshall reminded us of Earth's long history of environmental change and called out UC Berkeley's rich community of scholars, postdocs and students who, partnering with private industry, government agencies and NGOs, are now working to retard today's fall.

"At present, the world is giving us lemons," Marshall said. "But here at

Berkeley, we're really good at making lemonade."

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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