
preface

Climate change isn't new. Since the first microbes, drifting in a bubbling prehistoric ocean, noticed it was getting a bit chilly, life on Earth has had to either adapt to changes in the climate or die. What *is* new is a rapidly changing climate driven by an enhanced greenhouse effect – humankind's uncontrolled experiment on the planet whereby we pump enough greenhouse gas into the atmosphere to double or triple its concentration and then see what happens.

The reason I've written this book is simple: I don't want to see what happens. I don't want my family and friends to see it, I don't want you or your loved ones to see it. Most of all I don't want our children and grandchildren to see it. I'm frightened by what climate change has in store, really frightened.

I haven't always been this worried. For years my interest in global warming was more professional than personal. As a fresh-faced graduate my research centred on the descendants of those chilly microbes in the frigid waters of the Southern Ocean, asking: how will they respond to a warming world?

(Some liked it, some died.) For the next seven years, I carried on counting the climate change beans in the belief that politicians would see the need for action, and act. When the Kyoto Protocol emerged in 1997 I knew that, by itself, the treaty wouldn't be enough. Nevertheless, I felt reassured that with so many nations on board something would finally get done. Then, in 2001, US president George W. Bush withdrew his nation – the world's single biggest greenhouse gas emitter – from Kyoto. For a while I just wandered about at work muttering "What the hell happened?". At the time it looked as though Kyoto was dead in the water, that there was to be no concerted action on cutting global greenhouse emissions, and all the scientific research (my own algae boiling included) counted for nothing.

It would have been easy to continue feeding George W dolls to my Labrador and moaning about politicians, but there was a way to fight back. Alongside the research I was being paid to do, I started to look into the greenhouse gas that I was directly responsible for, the emissions which were mine to increase or decrease as I saw fit. I found that I was a big emitter, but also that I could do something about it. The politicians may have been dithering, but I was going to cut my own emissions – to do my bit.

And so were sown the seeds of this book. First came a short paper in the journal *Nature* called "Kyoto Begins at Home" about a family of four in the USA who met their own equivalent of the USA's Kyoto commitment through a few simple lifestyle changes. During the subsequent years I researched everything from green burials to the global warming contribution of Labradors. Along the way our big car was swapped for a Smart car, low-energy bulbs spread through the house, and the mail-order composting worms arrived (a fun evening in, I can tell you).

During this time I was also running a website covering climate change research. Each month the workload increased as the column inches that global warming was attracting shot up. These stories were no longer only about its impacts in the developing world. There were now headlines about Alaskan communities sinking into the ground, heatwaves killing tens of thousands across Europe, flash flooding in the USA, drought in Australia, and even bankrupt ski resorts here in Scotland. Climate change, it seemed, was coming home.

All this, along with some severe sleep deprivation, led to this book. *Climate Change Begins at Home* takes a long hard look at life on the two-way street of global warming and brings our impact on the climate face to face with the shifting climate's impact on us, our neighbours, and generations of first-time buyers to come.

