

World experts discuss climate change at RSPB co-organised event

Title

Some of the world's leading experts on climate change, wildlife and natural systems gathered earlier today at the UK's Royal Society, to discuss the latest research on the ecological impacts of global warming. The event, ***Climate Change: Biodiversity and People on the Front Line***, takes place just three weeks before world leaders gather in Durban in South Africa to push forward the international climate change agenda. Speakers at today's event included Government climate change minister Lord Taylor, UK Government's chief scientist Professor Bob Watson, leading environmental researchers including Chris Thomas of York University and experts from the RSPB (BirdLife in the UK), WWF and Natural England. The event discussed the latest scientific knowledge on the implications of climate change for biodiversity, ecosystems and people who depend on them. Critically, the event considered the implications of the growing gulf between what conservationists and development specialists consider to be 'safe' levels of climate change and the trajectory that the world is currently following, with global emissions at a record breaking high in 2010. Environment Minister Lord Taylor said: 'We all have a part to play in mitigating climate change and protecting the natural environment by reducing our carbon footprint. 'More and more UK companies are recognising that green policies make good business and we're encouraging others to follow their lead and disclose what they are doing to reduce emissions. 'Early next year, we will publish the Climate Change Risk Assessment ' which will help us all identify and prepare for the significant risks to our environment, economy and society from our changing climate.' Defra Chief Scientific Adviser Professor Bob Watson said: 'The world is facing a human-induced loss of biodiversity and significant degradation of the ecosystems on which we all depend. 'Significant progress has been made in assessing the value of ecosystems, both economically and socially. We need to build on this knowledge to mitigate climate change and loss of biodiversity together, whilst adapting to their combined effects.' Martin Harper, RSPB Conservation Director and a speaker at the event, said: 'Durban is just a few weeks away. It is a key opportunity to tackle climate change and we must not let it slip through our fingers. 'Global emissions continue to rise at an alarming rate. Unless we take action now the best available estimates show that an increase in global temperature by an average of 4°C is likely by the 2070s. This is widely considered to translate into climatic changes that are beyond what humans and ecosystems can adapt to in many areas around the globe. 'At the general level it will mean ecosystem collapse in the most vulnerable areas such as the Arctic, tropical forests, and the loss of a large proportion of the world's coral reefs. We cannot let this

happen, and that's why we are calling for faster progress towards a global deal to contain greenhouse gas emissions. Expectations for an effective global emissions deal are low, but there is still much to fight for. If we can contain the temperature rise below 2°C that will be a significant victory for our planet and something future generations will thank us for in years to come. Jo Phillips, Head of Climate Change Adaptation at WWF-UK and speaker at the conference said: 'World leaders are understandably focused on addressing the immediate economic crisis, but in doing so they must not ignore the urgent need to address the looming climate crisis. The solutions are interconnected; business as usual is not an option. Our choices and behaviour in the next few years will determine whether we have a prosperous and healthy world. We need urgent and rapid transformation to renewable energy, a green economy, sustainable land use and responsible behaviour that is fairer and recognises our planet's boundaries. Current limited global ambition means that children around us today could be living through this worst case scenario. We have to take responsibility now. We know what we have to do and we have the solutions we now need the leadership and commitment necessary to tackle this global problem before it is too late. Because of what is at risk and the time lag in the climate system, we cannot afford to wait.'