
Re: u3a Second Nature July 2023 - erratum

John Baxter <u3asecondnature@gmail.com>
To: John Baxter <u3asecondnature@gmail.com>

4 April 2024 at 16:56

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Oops

A few factors of 10 seem to have gone missing in the first section below. The figures for cumulative emissions are in billions of tonnes CO₂e, not millions, so your carbon legacy is around 1,160 tonnes. It couldn't be millions, I must have had a brain freeze earlier. Sorry.

Bulletin 002 (that difficult second bulletin)

*I've got the apolitical blues
And it's the meanest blues of all
- Lowell George*

U3a is an apolitical organisation, so I won't be commenting on the CCC's recent report on the UK Government's progress in reducing emissions. The interim chair of the CCC is Piers Forster and you can read his summary of the situation in [The Conversation](#). (If you've not heard of the [CCC](#), it is "an independent, statutory body established under the Climate Change Act 2008 to advise the UK and devolved governments on emissions targets and to report to Parliament on progress made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for and adapting to the impacts of climate change"). I won't comment on the Government's decision to issue a hundred new licences for oil and gas exploration, and certainly not on Greenpeace's action in sitting on the Prime

Minister's roof or his fondness for flying.

Subscribing and unsubscribing

There was a minor cockup last month in loading the list of subscribers, so not everybody got Bulletin 001. You can still access it if you view this email in a browser and click on the 'Past Issues' tab. If you have been forwarded this email and wish to subscribe then you can use the Subscribe tab.

You can unsubscribe at any time using the link in the footer of this email. If you did this last month then the reload of the member list may mean that you may have been re-subscribed. I apologise for this - I don't keep details of unsubscribed contacts so I can't fix this without your intervention.

The China Question

1% is, or so I hear so often on the radio, is the UK's current contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. This number is usually put forward as an argument for the UK doing nothing - now it's all up to the big emitters like US, China, and India to sort the world out between them. I don't buy this argument: to me this is like saying that I don't scoop after my dog because only 1% of the mess in the park is down to him.

The 1% looks very different if you look at cumulative emissions. The UK has been belting CO₂ into the atmosphere since Newcomen invented his steam engine in 1712; the US didn't overtake us until 1910 or so and China until 1998 (for more on this see [this article](#) from Our World in Data). In fact, if you look at cumulative emissions from industry and fossil fuel use since 1750 the UK comes in fifth.

	Cumulative Emissions (MtCO ₂ e)
US	421.9
China	249.4
Russia	117.5
Germany	93.3
UK	78.5
India	57.1

Data here are from [Statista](#). Other sites present different numbers because they take account of deforestation and land use change; if you include these then Brazil and Indonesia move up the table and the UK falls to eighth place.

Remember though that the other countries in this list are all larger than the UK in terms of population. If you divide the cumulative emissions by the (2023) population then this is the picture:

	Cumulative Emissions (MtCO ₂ e)	Population (2023, M)	Emissions/Population
US	421.9	340.0	1.24
UK	78.5	67.7	1.16
Germany	93.3	83.3	1.12
Russia	117.5	144.4	0.81
China	249.4	1,425.7	0.17
India	57.1	1,428.6	0.04

And there we are, on the winners' podium, in silver medal position. The average Brit then enjoys a lifestyle paid for by the emission since 1750, of around 1.16 *million* tonnes of CO₂e: that's what it took to construct all of our buildings, infrastructure, cars and planes and ships, and to keep us (and our ancestors) warm and fed. It's our carbon legacy. Whether we help to clean up that legacy is a moral issue, but surely we can't argue that it is somebody else's problem.

China isn't doing nothing - it is making [huge strides in renewables](#). China now has 228 GW of utility-scale solar, more than the rest of the world combined, and another 379 GW under construction. It has 310 GW of wind power, more than the next seven countries combined. It hasn't lost its appetite for coal unfortunately, with more coal stations being approved in Q1 2023 than in the whole of 2021. (Thanks to Arun from Cambridgeshire for pointing me at the article). If you want to make a difference to these emissions, try not buying anything made in China (good luck with that).

The Role of the Individual

Another question you may be asked is about the role of the individual in achieving net zero - if it's all down to government and corporate effort, what can we do? In responding to that I often use these two quotes from the CCC's [Sixth Carbon Budget](#) in December 2020:

- 43% of the abatement in our scenarios to 2035 involves some degree of change from consumers (driving an electric car, or installing a heat pump instead of a gas boiler)
- 16% of the measures require consumer choices, both to reduce demand and improve efficiency. Shifting quickly towards healthier diets, reducing growth in aviation demand and choosing products that last longer and therefore improve resource efficiency are all key. **There are many reasons to think that these changes, and potentially much larger**

changes, are feasible given suitable policy leadership. [My emphasis].

Only 41% of the change we need then can be expected to come from 'invisible' technological changes that go on in the background; most require some societal or behavioural change; change in our behaviour.

In the press

Other things that caught my eye:

- [July has been confirmed as the hottest month on record](#) globally after several heatwaves in parts of Europe, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service.
- [A vegan diet has just 30% of the environmental impact of a high-meat diet](#); this is research from the University of Oxford. I'm not vegan (yet) but I'm certainly not high-meat any more.
- A relatively windy month in July meant that 52% of [UK electricity generation](#) was from zero-carbon sources (peaking at 86%). Only 0.4% came from coal.

Fun in Wales

A message on behalf of the Countdown to CoP Interest Group:

Our online group has booked a climate summer school at the Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales, from 11th-14th September. We have speakers on a range of issues, including Zero Carbon Britain, community energy projects, council scorecards, Warm this Winter, plus a visit to a wind farm and consumption and decarbonising "stuff"! This is interspersed with opportunities to share our own experiences, look at some EVs and have a tour of the amazing site we will be staying in.

There are a few spaces still available if anyone wants to join us, with or without their partner. Everyone coming must be a member of a u3a.

Full details and costings are available from eleanor.brooks1661@gmail.com.

Just One Green Thing

I've long been wary of getting into the hints-and-tips business where green is concerned because it's easy to inadvertently spread the idea that all we need to

do is recycle a bit more and everything will be OK. Lately however I've been reading Michael Mosley's book 'Just One Thing', a list of often small things that we can all do to improve our health and wellbeing, replacing bad habits with better ones, and I thought that here is a format that I can steal. So my Just One Green Thing this month is:

Take a good look at the single-use stuff that you buy

By 'single-use' I mean stuff that you buy today knowing that it will be in the bin by the end of the week. Some of this is unavoidable, but not all of it.

For example, a few years ago I took the decision not to buy wrapping paper, not just at Christmas but for birthdays, Valentine's Day and the rest. Wrapping paper in those days was tinselly and rarely recyclable - and quite expensive. Using something else instead would test my ingenuity, I thought. Here is a set of wrapped gifts waiting dispatch for Christmas 2019: You can see packaging from your favourite brand of toilet paper; Barnet Lib Dems may recognize some of their election literature.



It is important not to take this sort of thing too seriously: it is a game. A year or so later I discovered that Oxfam would sell me old maps three for £1, greener and cheaper than wrapping paper. You probably have drawer full, from all those tourist information offices you used to go to.



It is indeed a square world. Your miserliness will be a talking point.

(I know that some people will unwrap slowly and carefully with the intention of re-using the paper. My mother-in-law was one such: at Christmas she was the first to open presents, which was agony for her impatient grandchildren waiting their turn, so the next year we wrapped all her presents in newspaper and added two rolls of unused wrapping paper. She wasn't as pleased by this as I had expected her to be.)

We must remember of course that the carbon footprint of the thing that we are wrapping is likely to be a thousand times bigger than that of the paper we are wrapping it with. Buy carefully.

Feedback

In the previous Bulletin I linked to a Guardian piece on microplastics, which prompted this response from Alan from Medway u3a:

In reference to your editorial around the “avoiding exposure to microplastics”, I hold a contrary view concerning health impacts.

I attended a great lecture by Dr Ian Mudway on microplastics forming part of the PM2.5 air pollution (largely given off by car tyres and brake pads). The evidence [of] their part in many serious health conditions is pretty stark. There is already strong supporting evidence of their link to dementia (see <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/air-pollution-may-increase-risk-for-dementia/>) and particles have been found in brain autopsies.

I am an air quality campaigner and it's not just about exhaust fumes.

Somebody else (sorry I've lost your email, so you don't get a name check)

asked me not to make these Bulletins too long. I'll try not to. Did you read to the end?

(ends)



See also the [u3a Climate Change & Environment website](#).

A note on sources: I am a Guardianista (and indeed a Guardian Supporter) and I frequently forward links to content from that paper. This is for practical reasons, not political ones - unlike your favourite newspaper Guardian content is not behind a paywall (you may have to register, but you won't have to pay). I will from time to time link to content from The BBC, [The Conversation](#), [Ensia](#), Nature, and other sites that I consider credible.

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u3a Subject Adviser for Climate Change and Environment
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