

Turn Down the Heat!

What You Can Do About Global Warming

Here at the Eastern Shore Sanctuary, the roosters are very loud. All day long, they keep in touch with each other by crowing, just as their wild relatives in the forests of Asia still do. The sentinels of the flock, roosters use alarm cries to alert the other birds when they sense danger. The alarm cry for an aerial predator actually sounds a lot like the word “HAWK!”



When a rooster shouts, “Hawk!” all the other birds run for cover. Many repeat the alarm cry to make sure that everybody knows. The resulting cacophony makes it clear to anybody with ears to hear: “This is an emergency!”

If only people were as smart! Every day seems to bring more news that climate change is an escalating emergency. “Hawk!” shout the scientists, “Hawk! Hawk! Hawk!”

And we do — what? Maybe make some minor changes in our lifestyles? This is an emergency! Why don’t we act accordingly?

What does global warming do with animals? Everything! As the climate changes, habitats become less inhabitable and animals die. Meanwhile, the methane released into the atmosphere by the millions of cows and other animals crowded into feedlots and factory farms is one of the chief causes of global warming.

Climate change is the number one challenge facing all animals today. Normally, we at the Eastern Shore Sanctuary don’t believe in ranking problems. The exploitation of hens in egg factories is neither more nor less important than the exploitation of ducks in foie gras factories. The enslavement of girl children in brothels is neither more nor less of an emergency than the impressment of boy children as expendable soldiers.

But the fact remains that none of our work to liberate animals or achieve social justice will make much of a difference if climate change makes the world uninhabitable for those we are hoping to help. Many who survive also will suffer. As we saw with hurricane Katrina, the most powerless people and animals are hurt the worst when weather emergencies alter ecosystems.

Whatever else you are doing or not doing, you can’t afford to ignore this. Polar bears are drowning because ice floes are gone and many other animals are at risk because of the destruction or distortion of their habitats. Islands are disappearing in the Pacific. Half of all species of plants and animals are likely to become extinct unless the course of climate change is arrested within the next 10 years.

What can you do? First, learn about the causes and effects of climate change. Then, share what you know with everybody in your life. Change your own behavior and encourage everyone you know to do the same. Finally, include work on climate change in your activism for the animals or find an extra hour or two each week to devote to just that.

Global warming is caused by increased concentrations of greenhouse gasses like carbon dioxide (also called CO₂) and methane in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide comes from power plants, cars and trucks, airplanes, and deforestation. Methane comes from the flatulence of millions of beef cattle and dairy cows as well as from the manure lagoons used by hog installations and other factory farms.

Whatever else you do, do these three things:

1. Reduce your own CO₂ and methane emissions. To reduce your CO₂ emissions: Turn down the heat and turn off the lights; drive and fly less; walk, bike, or take public transportation more; buy fewer items that have been trucked or flown from far away; and buy, borrow, or dumpster-dive used goods instead of new items made at energy-guzzling manufacturing plants. If you can afford to do it, buy a hybrid vehicle or install wind or solar energy in your home. To reduce the amount of methane that ends up in the atmosphere thanks to you: Go vegan!

2. Talk to everybody you know. Start by saying, “I’m really worried about global warming. What about you?” Then, listen and respond with empathy. (Don’t skip this step!) After that, you can share your own feelings and tell what you have done and are going to do.

3. Devote a set amount of time each month to working for local, national, or international policies and practices that will do something to mitigate climate change. If you can, go further and donate funds to organizations working for such policies or practices.

For more information, visit the online version of this handout at www.bravebirds.org/heat.html

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