

WHOSE WORLD IS IT, ANYWAY?

CASE STUDIES

(Meeting the needs of today, without harming the needs of tomorrow)

START WITH Number 1. TRY & COME UP WITH CLEAR, AGREED SUGGESTIONS. After that, read through all the other case studies, choose one, and give yourself ten minutes to reach up to three ideas / conclusions. If you've time, move on to others. In each case, try and ask what relevance, if any, our beliefs play in these practical issues.

[1] HOW BIG IS YOUR FOOTPRINT?

Our "ecological footprint" is an estimate of how our lifestyles affect the planet we live on – including our use of energy, our consumption of natural resources, how we travel, the waste we produce ... and so on. In forty years, the "footprint" of British people has grown by 80% - so that if everybody in the world lived like we do, it would take 3.1 planet earths to support us!

Some examples:



- **Fancy a swim?** A staggering 3.8 billion litres of sewage is produced every day in the UK, of which 24%, 912 million litres, is discharged untreated into the sea.
- **What a waste!** The average Briton throws away nearly a tonne of domestic waste each year –the amount grows by 4% a year. Many places are running out of landfill sites.
- **Feeling congested?** Every day, 250,000 cars drive into London. Parked end to end, this would make a 189 mile traffic jam – all the way from London to Hull. Many of these cars carry no passengers – just a driver.
- **Food Miles** Each year, we have been exporting to the Netherlands 33,000 tonnes of poultry, but importing 61,000, and also exporting 102,000 tonnes of lamb, but importing 125,000.
- **Watch the birdie ... or not** There are ten million fewer House Sparrows in Britain than 25 years ago. Nobody yet knows why.

Discuss as a group:

What can we do to live more sustainably, as individuals, locally and as a country? Can we get people to change their lifestyles for the sake of the environment? How would you go about it? Can politicians achieve this, or does it require something else – and if so, what? Do some of the facts above show that there is something sick in our society – and if so, where should we turn for help?

[2] ALASKA

To whom does it really belong? It contains enormous reserves of oil and gas, yet is one of the world's last remaining true wilderness areas. It was part of Russia for centuries before the USA bought it for \$1,000,000 just over 100 years ago. Its human inhabitants, the Inuit, have lived sustainably there for many thousand years, at least until recently. To whom does Alaska belong? To the American Government, with enormous support from petro-dollars? To local people who have lived there for millennia? Or does Alaska belong to the Caribou, the Kodiak Bears, the seals and the Bald Eagles, for whom it is their only home? Can decisions about such a vast area, which will affect ecosystems far more widely, safely be taken by one nation alone or does the rest of the world have a say?

[3] GM (Genetic Modification) TECHNOLOGY – Who owns the patent on life itself? Can a multinational corporation, when it isolates a naturally occurring gene, claim ownership rights over it? Do companies have the right to create crops that are resistant to their own brand of pesticide, but also that are modified not to be self-seeding, so that farmers in the developing world have to come to that corporation every year to buy seed? Who should control research into the safety of GM crops – Companies, Governments, scientists, environmentalists, or international agencies? Some argue that GM crops have the potential to feed the world's hungry millions, by implanting

genes that are resistant to drought and disease. Others argue that this is propaganda spread by huge global companies whose real interest is profit not poor people, and that once they have made people dependent on their product, they will simply raise the price. Are GM foods “frankenstein foods” that could affect our health – or is this simply scaremongering? Did you know supermarkets are allowed to advertise products as “GM free” even if they are up to 1% genetically modified.

[4] AFRICA – REAL LIFE CASE STUDY

On the coast of Kenya lies a 30 square mile forest, the largest remaining piece of an ancient forest that stretched for hundreds of miles. It contains 6 endemic species of bird (found nowhere else on earth), a unique subspecies of Elephant, and many still unrecorded butterflies and plants. Around the forest is a growing but poor human population, some of whom chop down trees for firewood, and hunt animals to sell. Many locals say they don't want to destroy the forest, but have no way of paying for their children's education. Nearby are several hotels specialising in wildlife tourism, but these hotels are all owned by western companies, with few profits staying locally.

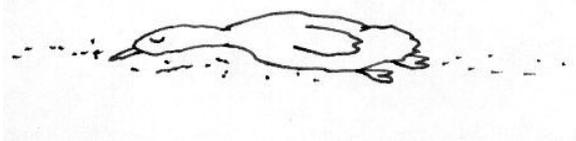
If you were setting up a project to protect the forest and its wildlife, where would you begin and how would you go about it? How would you try and get funding? Are there ways you could stop the local community from destroying the forest, or find alternative sources of income?

[5] FARMING & WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Experts from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the British Trust for Ornithology, and Oxford University estimate that loss of biodiversity has meant the disappearance of 10 million breeding individuals of 10 farmland bird species in Britain in the past 20 years.

They identify key changes in British farming over the last 30 years:

- land drainage
- hedgerow removal
- introduction of new crop types
- increased use of chemicals in farming
- a change from spring to autumn sowing
- a reduction in the traditional rotation of crops.



For every £ spent on food and drink in the UK:

- In 1952, 50-60p went to the farmer
- In 2002, 9p gets back to the farmer

Who should be making decisions about the future of farming – Government, farmers, supermarkets, scientists, environmental groups, or the European Community (with its massive farming subsidy schemes)? Do people in towns and cities deserve an equal say, compared with those in rural communities? What do you think is the future for the British farming industry: more organic farms? More large-scale farms (perhaps including GM crops)? Farms being turned into nature reserves? Farms becoming mainly tourist attractions? Any other ideas?

[6] ALL A FUSS ABOUT NOTHING?

A statement from an American website: “Earth does not need a Saviour. ... Face it, we are not destroying the planet; the earth has withstood billions of years of devastation ... We are just a minor annoyance; the planet will survive long after we finally find the way to annihilate the life that inhabits it. We need to save ourselves.”

What do you think of this? Is this guy too complacent, or are environmentalists simply scare-mongering? How significant a species are human beings, in terms of the history of the planet?