

Global warming threatens to kill off a million species

Level 2 | Intermediate

Scientists express shock at scale of disaster facing planet as Pacific islanders plan exodus to New Zealand.

1 Key vocabulary

Match the words with their meanings.

1. species
 2. extinct
 3. terrifying
 4. irreversible
 5. assessment
 6. underestimate (noun)
 7. conservation
 8. to migrate
-
- a. very, very frightening
 - b. a wrong idea that something is smaller or less important than it really is
 - c. a plant or animal group
 - d. the management of land and water to prevent it from being damaged or destroyed
 - e. to move to another part of the world
 - f. no longer existing
 - g. impossible to change or bring back
 - h. a judgement or opinion

2 Correct the information

Look in the text and correct the information in these sentences.

1. Over the next 50 years about 20% of land animals will become extinct.
2. More than 1 million species will be lost by 2020.
3. This loss represents less than 10% of all plants and animals.
4. The research took three years to complete.
5. More than half of 300 South African plant species studied were expected to die out.
6. The Cerrado region of Brazil covers one sixth of the country.
7. 1,780 species of tree were studied in Mexico.
8. The greenhouse effect takes 20 years to have its full effect.

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Recently a group of scientists published the first comprehensive study into the effect of higher temperatures on the natural world. The scientists involved in the research were shocked by what they found. Over the next 50 years about 25% of land animals and plants will become extinct. More than 1 million species will be lost by 2050.

The head of the research team, Chris Thomas, who is professor of conservation biology at Leeds University, described the results of the research as "terrifying". The loss represents more than 10% of all plants and animals and a large part of this is already irreversible because of the extra global warming gases that are already in the atmosphere. But the scientists say that immediate action to control greenhouse gases now could save many more plants and animals from extinction.

The research took two years to complete and provides an

assessment of the effect of climate change on six biologically rich regions of the world taking in 20% of the land surface. The research in Europe, Australia, Central and South America, and South Africa, showed that species living in mountainous areas had a better chance of survival because they could move uphill to get cooler.

Professor Thomas said: "When scientists start a research project they hope to produce definite results, but we wish we had not found what we found. It was much, much worse than we expected, and what we have discovered may even be an underestimate."

One of the more shocking findings of the scientists was that half of the 24 species of butterfly they studied in Australia would become extinct. In South Africa, major conservation areas such as the Kruger National Park could lose up to 60% of the species under their protection, while more than one third of 300 South African plant species studied were expected to die out, including the national flower, the King Protea.

A study of 163 tree species in the Cerrado region of Brazil which covers one fifth of the country,

showed that up to 70 would become extinct. Many of the plants and trees that exist in this savannah occur nowhere else in the world. In Europe, the continent least affected by climate change, survival rates were better.

Studies in Mexico's Chihuahuan desert confirmed that extinction was more probable on flatter land because a small change in climate would mean that plants and animals would have to migrate for huge distances in order to survive. One third of the 1,870 species that were studied would be in trouble.

Many species are already certain to become extinct because it takes at least 25 years for the greenhouse effect - or the trapping of the sun's rays by the carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide - to have its full effect on the planet. The continuing production of more greenhouse gases, particularly by the United States and European nations, is making matters worse. The research says that, if mankind continues to burn oil, coal and gas at the current rate, up to one third of all life forms will be become extinct by 2050.

The Guardian Weekly, page 3

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3 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings with the endings. There is one sentence for each paragraph.

1. The scientists who were involved in the research ...
 2. Many plants and animals could be saved from extinction ...
 3. Species in mountainous areas have a better chance of survival ...
 4. The results of the research ...
 5. The national flower of South Africa ...
 6. Survival rates in Europe are better ...
 7. Species in flatter areas have less chance of survival ...
 8. Most greenhouse gases ...
-
- a. ... because it is least affected by climate change.
 - b. ... were worse than the scientists expected.
 - c. ... because they will have to travel huge distances in order to survive.
 - d. ... were shocked by what they found.
 - e. ... are produced by the USA and European nations.
 - f. ... will probably become extinct.
 - g. ... because they can move uphill to get cooler.
 - h. ... if immediate action was taken to control greenhouse gases.

4 Word building

Complete the table.

Noun	Adjective
1. mountain	_____
2. globe	_____
3. shock	_____
4. extinction	_____

Verb	Noun
5. publish	_____
6. protect	_____
7. assess	_____
8. survive	_____

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5 Vocabulary collocations

Match the words in the left-hand column with the words they collocate with in the right-hand column.

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|-----------------|------------|
| 1. become | a. out |
| 2. die | b. change |
| 3. global | c. team |
| 4. greenhouse | d. extinct |
| 5. conservation | e. effect |
| 6. climate | f. forms |
| 7. life | g. area |
| 8. research | h. warming |

5 Discussion

What are the main causes of global warming?

How can greenhouse gases be controlled?