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1. In the news

Environment or economy?

As world leaders met last week in Durban for the latest round of international climate negotiations at the COP17 you might be excused if you missed it. Within the UK one of the most revealing articles focused on the lack of visibility. The article in the [Independent on Sunday](#) 4.12.11 also commented on how politicians are less concerned about halting climate change because of the economic crisis. This became particularly evident on the world stage as Canada withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol arguing that the financial cost was too high ([Telegraph](#) 12.12.2011).

Durban did highlight the need for forest preservation to combat climate – it was a key theme of President Obama's contribution – but it also highlighted the controversies especially around REDD where there is so much potential, but also so much concern particularly around indigenous communities and their rights to the traditional land they have been the custodians of for generations ([Guardian](#) 7.12.12).

The arguments around the choice between environmental protection, and economy and growth is seen by environmental scientists as being false because a failure to address the

issues of the environment, including biodiversity loss, will undermine economic growth. However this argument is having difficulty being heard in the political circumstances of the downturn. Here in the UK the [Observer](#) 4.12.11 reported on the increasing amount of high-level criticism of the coalition government, some branding it as being on track to becoming the most environmentally destructive government to hold power in the UK. Meanwhile the [Guardian](#) 7.12.12 also pointed to how the costs of maintaining environmental quality will be increasingly passed on to consumers as their ecosystem service use becomes more evident. The tone of this article also points to this false dichotomy, its focus being on how customers will pay to preserve wildlife. In fact they will pay to preserve essential water supplies, and doing this through preserving the environment will be cheaper than technical treatment solutions; whether the funding approach is fair and equitable is a different question.

While some will claim success at Durban in so much as the world's governments, including India, China and the US, have signed up to an agreement to be implemented in 2020 so that everyone is engaged for the first time, others will point out that the agreement is weak, the commitments very unclear and the horizon possibly too late. [The Telegraph](#) (11 12 2011) tries to overview what happened in Durban but it is really too early to tell. While the international discussions are still just about in place the article points out that this weak agreement still leaves a massive six gigatonnes of carbon emissions that scientists estimate will enter the atmosphere between now and 2020 to exceed the current emission agreements so that we are far from being confident that temperature rises will be contained within the manageable order of 2°C.

While politicians are moving from just cutting national debt to looking at stimulus measures to invest in infrastructure to prepare the way from recession, however there has been little significant talk about how this links into taking forward an agenda for green growth. More focused thinking around investment in green infrastructure and in particular in making our ecosystem services more robust and resilient given the undoubted environmental challenges ahead would be a far more effective way of considering both the short-term issues of recovery and creating a path towards a more sustainable future.

Badgers in our landscapes

Confirmation that Defra will proceed with badger cull trials while being welcomed by some dairy farmers has been greeted with dismay by groups protecting nature. It has also been criticised by several key scientists involved in previous badger and bovine TB studies. The issue is explored in articles in both the [Guardian](#) 14.12.2011 and the [Telegraph](#) 15.11.2011.

Over and above the immediate concerns around the rights, wrongs and urgency of the response is a wider question. The England Natural Environment White Paper [The Natural Choice](#) is noticeably thin on legislative intentions to help enforce better practice; instead its focus is on larger societal engagement responses. This presents a significant dilemma for Defra which on the one hand is committed to improving and managing landscapes for their wider biodiversity and ecosystem benefits and at the same time has to address specific issues such as the how and why of protecting milk production and addressing health risks to people and livestock.

The dilemma of course is that controversial responses in one area will make it that much more difficult to engage with the many groups who would otherwise be keen to support wider joined-up-thinking around landscape and ecosystem enhancement. The articles point out that this issue, as with the way forest sales were presented, will be significantly opposed and so has the potential to distract from and undermine the many positive

intentions in the environment policy. What this particularly highlights is the need for the much more rigorous engagement of groups across society that *The Natural Choice* identifies as being key for better consensus and action in protecting biodiversity and building ecosystem resilience.

2. On carbon, REDD+ and forests

While developments around climate and the controversy around REDD has come to the fore in Durban, two insightful documents on the carbon markets were published by Ecosystem Market Place. One is the second report on the [State of the Forest Carbon Markets 2011: From Canopy to Currency](#). This looks at the continued development of the markets, tracking growth and barriers to faster development. It records a change in emphasis from tree planting towards projects that improve forest management and which protect endangered forests including a significant increase in REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) projects. It also records an increase in support for projects from the private sector with many investors being more confident and wanting to see these projects emerge. There is also a clear trend in investors wanting more than just carbon markets – they are seeking projects with strong community and wider environmental benefits, particularly protecting biodiversity and ecosystem services. It highlights an emerging standard of investment, called the Verified Carbon Standard (VCS), as the current leading standard but also recognises that the standards for Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) were increasing in appeal.

Which brings us to the second report. One of the main concerns about getting markets involved in protecting forests is whether the benefits actually do meet the needs of local people – this is the issue of concern so apparent at Durban – as well as ensuring that the biodiversity within these programmes is actually protected. Establishing standards if they are right is a good thing, but projects still have to be delivered to meet these aspirations. The second publication, [Social and Biodiversity Impact Assessment \(SBIA\) Manual for REDD+ Projects](#) is an ethical guideline developed to help ensure investments have credible social and biodiversity assessment measures in place.

3. Biodiversity and indigenous peoples

One of the key interest groups that lobby on behalf of indigenous people has reported the latest meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity on their plans for the sustainable use of biological resources. The [Forest Peoples Programme report](#) highlights the efforts of the CBD to acknowledge and value the importance of indigenous peoples both for their customary sustainable use of their lands and for their traditional knowledge. As with the discussions in Durban this meeting also highlighted other issues which pose more significant challenges, mainly focused around ensuring continued land rights alongside concerns that monitoring approaches to natural resources will undermine traditional ownership and result in more inequity for indigenous peoples rather than less.



4. Nominations for the Octavia Hill Awards

Do you know someone who's campaigned tirelessly to protect a patch of green space? A favourite teacher who inspired you to do something for nature or a famous person you admire for challenging the system? If so, you could help acknowledge their contribution by nominating them for a National Trust Octavia Hill award.

The National Trust has created these awards after the Victorian reformer who was a National Trust Founder and campaigner for green spaces. The [Octavia Hill Awards](#) are grouped in six categories designed to recognise those who pass their enthusiasm for nature onto the new generation. Nominations need to be made by **Monday 16 January 2012** so you have little time to lose.

5. Are we an outdoor nation?

The National Trust is currently running a project called [Outdoor Nation](#) which is aimed at getting ordinary people involved with the vast array of opportunities provided by the outdoors. It follows recent research which showed the decreasing trend among young people in getting out and about in the natural world – and missing out on the health and wellbeing benefits. The project aims to gather more evidence on how people are responding to nature in today's society and to help the National Trust assess its policy on land use. It's well recognised that the cultural and recreational values of nature are boosted when people are exposed to nature and making nature more available for all builds the case for protecting and enhancing the natural environment.

6. Valuing ecosystems: policy, economic and management interactions

[SAC-SEPA Conference](#) Edinburgh 3-4 April 2012

The integrated management of our agricultural and forestry landscapes is essential to deliver multiple ecosystem service benefits. However, current understanding of the links between different ecosystems and the services they provide is incomplete and the management needs to be flexible enough to adapt to the uncertainties. The need for implementation at the landscape scale also means integrating management practices across different land managers.

This conference will seek to present not only the best possible scientific understanding of the complexities associated with the delivery of multiple ecosystem services but also provide a forum to discuss how the ecosystem approach can be best recognised and supported by land managers, researchers and policy makers.

7. Road to Rio +20 – Earth debate news

Two of the four contributors to first [Earth Debate](#) have been announced. The debate which will be webcast live on the evening of on 25Jan 2012 will be chaired by BBC environment correspondent Richard Black and is on the theme of *Ecosystem economics – Can we Put a Price on Nature?* The debate will include Will Evison from PwC a key contributor to the [TEEB for Business Report](#) and Ian Dickie from the Aldersgate group of businesses who prepared the [Pricing the priceless](#) report, Ian was previously head of economics for the RSPB. Joining them will be senior politicians and science experts who will shortly be announced.

Season's Greetings

Dear friends and colleagues, best wishes from Katie and me in the UNDB Friends UK team here at the NHM. Our thanks for your help and advice, your stories over the past months, and your referrals to others – the UNDB newsletter distribution list is growing and we hope to take steps forward in the new year to expand our reach. We look forward to working together in the New Year.

Bob Bloomfield

For UK Friends of the UN Decade on Biodiversity

www.decadeonbiodiversity.net

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