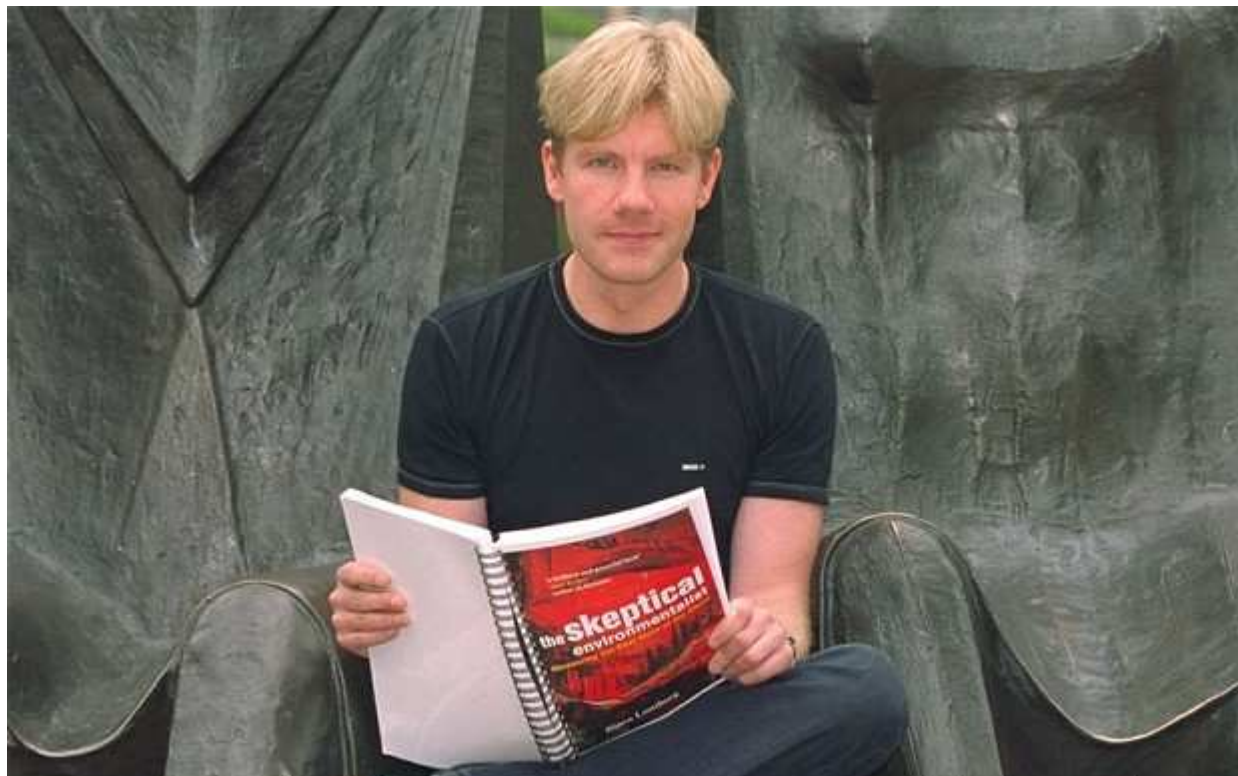


Sir David Attenborough "wrong" on human plague

Sir David Attenborough was “wrong” to describe humans as a “plague on the Earth”, according to a leading environmentalist, who insists that the planet can sustain a much bigger population whilst protecting animals thanks to new technology like genetically modified crops.



Dr Lomborg said it was a 'human hating' point of view to think reducing the population is the only way to save species Photo: Abbie Trayler Smith

By Louise Gray, Environment Correspondent

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Sir David said that the planet is running out of resources.

“We are a plague on the Earth. It’s coming home to roost over the next 50 years or so. It’s not just climate change; it’s sheer space, places to grow food for this enormous horde. Either we limit our population growth or the natural world will do it for us, and the natural world is doing it for us right now,” he told the Radio Times.

But Bjorn Lomborg, the author of "The Skeptical Environmentalist" and an adjunct professor at Copenhagen Business School, said that this “Malthusian” view is outdated.

He argued that new technologies mean that humans need less land to produce food. Therefore the population can grow without harming wildlife and as people become richer it may even be possible to return degraded land to wildlife.

This has already happened over the last two centuries and will continue with precision farming, genetically modified crops and other technologies.

“I love David Attenborough’s programmes but the idea we cannot support the population is entirely neglecting the advance of technology we have found to utilise land and resources much more effectively.

“We have dramatically more people but also ways to make agriculture more productive on less land.”

Dr Lomborg also said improving standards of living meant people had less impact on the planet.

He said as people become richer they live in cities and do not impinge on nature so much.

“If you have unrestricted poverty then people will slash and burn to feed their kids but if you are rich you go and become a web designer in the city.

“The reality is that modern industrial production is one of the main ways of reducing our footprint.”

Dr Lomborg said it was a “human hating” point of view to think reducing the population is the only way to save species.

“Humans are part of nature and also have a space here - even if you look at it only from biodiversity point of view.

“The smart thing is to stop them being poor and get the technology so they are less of a danger to the biodiversity David Attenborough loves.”

Vanessa Baird, the author of the No Nonsense Guide to Population, also said Sir David was wrong.

She said it was not a question of how many people there are on the planet but how much they are consuming.

“Fixating on human numbers is perhaps easier than dealing with the tough political issues. Like, how are we going to make the fast and concerted shift away from fossil fuels to renewable energy when there is so little political will to do so and there is such a powerful vested interest in the business-as-usual model of assured destruction.”

She said fixating on population could also lead to dangerous extremist views.

“There have been many population panics before the current one - and it's best not to forget that they led to some pretty twisted and socially divisive thinking and actions. Somehow 'too many people' has a way of meaning 'too many of them'. It's rarely, genuinely, 'too many people like us.’”

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