



Opinion... Consumers can drive major change

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I wrote my first opinion column 10 years ago. After all that time, I would love to report trees are flourishing and the environment is thriving, but I can't. As BBC naturalist Chris Packham highlights in his UK Bioblitz initiative: *"Our generation is presiding over an ecological apocalypse and we're somehow normalising it."*

The evidence is everywhere — street trees being unnecessarily felled in thousands, bird populations plummeting by millions, and insects chemically exterminated in the billions. Big agriculture tells us that food matters more and the price is worth it, but is that really right?

Historic farming policy, paying for quantity instead of quality, has devastated our countryside and its wildlife, but is it all lost? There are isolated but meaningful examples of farmers working with nature, demonstrating that food production and ecological diversity can sit comfortably together, and local rewilding initiatives are transforming landscapes for the better. But neither are mainstream and we need more.

Adjacent to our highways and in our gardens, incessant mowing destroys plant diversity and with it goes the web of insects, birds, and mammals relying on that habitat. An obsession with tidiness and resistance to change is not intelligent, and causes great environmental harm.

Arboriculture is also stagnating, with facile and purist ideals dominating practical tree management. Mature tree trunks are a valuable ecological resource, yet they are routinely felled, with arborists often driving the removals. Severe crown reduction of mature trees is frowned on as "bad practice" and "unprofessional", when the evidence shows it often prolongs life, not shortens it.

Our human onslaught against nature is relentless. Creeping familiarity with a gradually degrading environment makes the ecological desert seem normal. Deep down, everyone must know something is badly wrong and it cannot end well. But what can small people do to drive big change?

As consumers, our buying preferences shape change, so support green initiatives where you can. Favouring recyclable packaging, local produce, and organic production is a good start. In the garden, leave wild areas and mow less often. Only mow roadsides where necessary for safety, and let ecology develop.

Most importantly, professionals and politicians must acknowledge the evidence that nature is essential infrastructure, and close the increasing disconnect between people and what remains of the natural world.

