



Risks Of Ecosystem Crash-Landings

Riesgos de los aterrizajes forzados en los ecosistemas

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Robert Hunziker

Robert Hunziker, MA, economic history DePaul University, awarded membership in Pi Gamma Mu International Academic Honor Society in Social Sciences is a freelance writer and environmental journalist who has over 200 published articles appearing in over 50 journals, magazines, and sites worldwide.

Robert Hunziker lives in Los Angeles and can be reached at: rlhunziker@gmail.com

Resumen

El escritor independiente Robert Hunziker nos autoriza para publicar sus artículos. Sus trabajos se han incluido en más de 50 periódicos, revistas y sitios web de todo el mundo. Nos advierte sobre la sexta extinción provocada por el ser humano. Las cinco anteriores se desarrollaron en los últimos 450 millones de años debido a los meteoritos y las erupciones volcánicas. Nos acercamos a una extinción en la que sólo por un milagro habrá sobrevivientes, como ocurrió con el vuelo 232 de United Airlines que se estrelló en 1989 en Sioux City, Iowa. En el percance murieron 110 de los 285 pasajeros y uno de los 11 miembros de la tripulación. Gracias a la pericia de la tripulación y del piloto sobrevivieron 174 pasajeros y 10 miembros de la tripulación. De manera similar, si los seres humanos hemos sido capaces de producir un cambio tan profundo, también debemos tener el poder de enfrentar la catástrofe medioambiental. Robert Hunziker nos ha alertado en muchas publicaciones que la lucha contra el cambio climático exige apostar por la descarbonización de la economía reduciendo la emisión de gases de efecto invernadero. Para ello, necesitamos métodos más inteligentes y eficientes de producción energética, practicar un consumo responsable y crear sistemas de financiación equitativos entre todas las energías, que no encarezcan a las energías limpias.

Palabras clave:

Sexta extinción, cambio climático, descarbonizar la economía, consumo responsable, energías limpias.

Abstract

Freelance writer Robert Hunziker authorizes us to publish his articles. His work has appeared in more than 50 newspapers, magazines and websites worldwide. We publish with the permission of freelance writer Robert Hunziker, whose articles have been published in more than 50 newspapers, magazines and websites around the world. He warns us about the sixth man-made extinction. The previous five occurred in the last 450 million years due to meteorites and volcanic eruptions. We are approaching an extinction in which only by a miracle will there be survivors, as happened with United Airlines Flight 232 that crashed in 1989 in Sioux City, Iowa. The accident killed 110 of the 285 passengers and one of the 11 crew members. Thanks to the expertise of the crew and pilot, 174 passengers and 10 crew members survived. Similarly, if we humans have been able to bring about such profound change, we must also have the power to cope with an environmental catastrophe. Robert Hunziker has warned us in numerous publications that the fight against climate change requires a commitment to decarbonizing the economy by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. To achieve this, we need smarter and more efficient energy production methods, responsible consumption and the creation of equitable financing systems for all energy sources that do not make clean energy more expensive.

Keywords:

sixth extinction, climate change, decarbonizing the economy, responsible consumption, clean energy.

Biomes as well as individual ecosystems throughout the globe are experiencing considerable stress. As a researcher/writer since 2010 of more than 400 scientific-based articles, I am aware of what science says about the status of the planet's ecosystems. Since reading hundreds of peer-reviewed papers, it's not a pretty picture. Yet this is not obvious to the general public inasmuch as damaged ecosystems in large part due to excessive levels of greenhouse gases like CO₂ initially show up where almost nobody lives, for example: (1) Antarctica (2) tropical rainforest (3) the oceans (4) Arctic permafrost, covering 25% of Northern Hemisphere landmass. Who lives there?

People who live in NYC or LA or Des Moines do not see the genesis of a chaotic climate system. But they do see the aftereffects, such as: (1) Unprecedented flooding – 2024 global record for most floods ever. (2) Unprecedented drought, especially the Amazon, which is partially dying. (3) Unprecedented heat – exceeded the IPCC line-in-the-sand at +1.5C pre-industrial worldwide, much, much earlier than expected. (4) Unprecedented wildfires – twice the loss of the forest tree cover of 20 years ago. (5) Unprecedented storms/fires – home insurance rates skyrocket or dropped altogether on both coasts. (6) Unprecedented sea level rise -doubled since satellite recordings started.

Nothing is normal any longer. There are no more one-in-100-year events, which statistically means a 1% chance of happening in any given year. Nowadays, it is all current, no more 1% chances.

Interestingly, emails from readers of my articles address these unprecedented climate events and occasionally somebody with an advanced degree in science or engineering who works for a high-profile institution. One such email recently crossed my desk in response to the article Net Zero/2050, Fantasy or Reality d/d Jan. 10, 2025. That email, in particular, struck a chord because it comes from a senior person at one of the world's most prestigious, and widely recognized, institutions, and as a bonus, it is a superb summation of where things stand and where civilization is headed.

It is published herein in its entirety, no edits, no changes, the original email, as follows:

Your latest article (from the weekend edition of CP)—as always—is excellent! I did notice an assumed subtext and one that permeates all discussions of 'net-carbon-zero,'—which of course you know and have discussed before, but a fact that often stops people in their tracks during discussions of climate change and 'mitigating actions', the 1000 Giga-ton elephant in the room:

Even if we were to achieve net-zero, that would be barely the beginning of our mitigation efforts, as the entire 200-year past atmospheric over-loading is still present, and will remain present for generations, wreaking havoc. And we are no-where near approaching a path toward 'net-zero.'

Removing already released atmospheric carbon is 1000's times more difficult than removing it at the source (or eliminating the source), as you have extensively and excellently discussed, despite what the Fossil Fuel cartels would have us believe—as you have discussed.

When is it time to say 'game-over?' and admit that neo-liberal political systems that have metastatically over-taken most governments of the planet have no impetus to, nor intention of, stopping the 'growth-forever' economic model that has doomed us? I believe the time is now to admit the obvious. We have destroyed the climate in which we as a species (and most other species) have evolved, and have sent the atmosphere hurtling someplace else – most likely something resembling the Paleocene–Eocene Thermal Maximum, of 55 million years ago, where no terrestrial creature bigger than a poodle survived, and the only habitable continent was Antarctica. And that was with the ease of transition of several million years – a luxury current Earth biosystems won't have. Apparently, our rate of CO₂ contamination outstrips the lead-up to the PETM by several orders of magnitude. Humanity's efforts

seem to be effectively tripping all the Greenhouse Earth tipping points simultaneously and with breathtaking speed.

It has been said (and I don't have the attribution) that the greatest intellectual failing of mankind is to not be able to comprehend the mathematical implications of the exponential function. It is my own corollary aphorism that the second scariest place to live is to the left of an exponential knee. The scariest place to be situated is to the right of the exponential knee. And here we are at the former, staring blankly at our soon-to-be living-place in the latter.

There probably was a point in the 80's, soon after Jim Hansen made his famous plea to Congress when – with dramatic action – we could have turned the ocean liner around. No action (aside from grossly exacerbating action) has been taken. From any rational engineering perspective, it's 'game over'. The current CO2 loading is sending us to a bad place. There is nothing even remotely on the political/economic horizon that will mitigate the trends. And

there is really nothing within our power to stop it in any case, we can't pull the CO2 and methane back, the Earth herself is refusing to extract any more for us (or absorb any more heat either, for that matter) and is beginning to vomit it all back to us – with considerable interest on the principal to boot. It's game over.

I see a couple of benefits to making this admission. First, it's probably true. Second, there's a certain fairness to encouraging people to ponder the (likely) future. There is a famous airliner disaster (true) story, of United Airlines Flight 232, in 1989, which crashed on emergency landing in Sioux City Iowa, killing roughly a third of the 300 passengers aboard (it being nearly miraculous that anyone survived).



We are approaching an extinction in which only by a miracle will there be survivors, as happened with United Airlines Flight 232 that crashed in 1989 in Sioux City, Iowa. Photography: Iowa Department of Public Safety.

Flight 232 works as a parable on a number of levels, from the standpoint of an undetected (at least admittedly) manufacturing defect in the blades of the GE fanjet engine to the absolute bone-head engineering mistake in the design of the DC-10's air-surface control-line routings. But mostly it is a parable in how Captain Al Haynes let the passengers know what they were about to experience. In short, the fan-blade in the tail engine failed, sending shrapnel throughout the tail section, and in particular, one shard traced through the primary, secondary and even tertiary back-up hydraulic lines (which were bundled adjacent to one another). All control-surface hydraulic fluid promptly drained from all lines, leaving Cpt. Haynes with no control of his wing or tail air-surface controls. Through some of the most magnificent flying art in the history of aviation, Cpt. Haynes, using only throttle controls on the two remaining engines managed to maintain a tiny measure of control of the aircraft, and bring it to within fighting-distance of a landing at Sioux City. As he approached the runway, at just below cruising speed (about 500 mph, because it was only at this speed that he could keep the nose up) he announced to the passengers that they were going to attempt something that had never been attempted before – a landing at nearly cruising speed. With about a minute to go before the event, he told them that “this is not going to be a landing, this is going to be a crash. This is going to be the very worst thing you have ever experienced. I want you to prepare yourself.”

It's 'game over:' this is going to be a crash. This is going to be the very worst thing that mankind has ever experienced, and we need to prepare ourselves. Many, perhaps most will not survive, quite possibly there will be no human survivors. Our high-level technical civilization, with all of its delicately intertwined technical, economic, material, sociological channels and meta-stable intricacies will almost certainly not survive. And we're going to take much of the biosphere with us – it's already happening, the sixth great extinction is underway and happening before our eyes. People need to be able to make critical life decisions with clear-eyed focus on what is likely to happen within many of

our lifetimes. About bringing more humans into the world. About selecting careers that serve their own interest vs. that of the destroying powers-that-be, or that builds upon the human intellectual edifice that seems doomed to be a moot (and mute) monument to an extinct species and/or civilization in a very few years. It is in the interests of the powers that be, who will continue and accelerate their raping and pillaging of the rest of us and the biosphere for their own narrow self-interest, to demand perpetual and accelerating 'growth', perpetual war, more human flesh for cannon fodder and slave-wage-minions, and most of all perpetual obscene profits. It is in their interest to make us believe that they have the power to save us all, but they do not, they only have the power to make things much, much worse, as you well know and have well discussed. They will continue to bask in obese luxury until the very end, unless the rest of us rise up to stop them and try desperately to create conditions for some sort of survival (which will be impossible with them continuing to be in charge). But in order to know that such uprising is necessary, it has to become part of the public consciousness that humanity is about to crash in a hard and grisly fashion. Technology and its mavens won't save us, technology and its mavens have likely mortally wounded humanity, and people must become aware, and morally (and mortally) outraged about that fact.