

# Happy Birthday, Earth Day!

What didn't happen in 50 years. By Larry Angier

After crying “The sky is falling! The sky is falling!” for five decades the Chicken Littles of the world should, long ago, have fallen into the abyss of irrelevancy. But today their descendants still cackle loudly with new alarmism about the impending “global warming,” “climate crisis” or one of the other half-dozen or so terms that have morphed in the 50 years since the outcry of the end of humanity back during that first Earth Day on April 22, 1970.

The real crisis we face is a credibility problem with today's many doomsayers and their prognostications. Every time I hear the latest prediction of disaster, I can usually foresee that time will prove them wrong. These “experts” have informed us about the end of snow, highest temperatures ever recorded (since 1970), unprecedented wildfires, permanent droughts, the melting Arctic, drowning of polar bears—endless tipping points with no time to spare, all our fault, so we'd better act now before thinking (which means send them money and they'll fix it, guaranteed). The end of the world is nigh!

But reality is quite different. Life is better. More people have access to the things most Americans take for granted—including education, clean water, electricity and housing—than at any time in the history of mankind. Democracy is on the increase. And agricultural production is at an all-time high as land use for farming stabilizes.

It's starting to be clear that as CO<sub>2</sub> increases and life gets better for the world, our “climate emergency” is really just politically misleading, highly dangerous and reckless.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, what follows are some of the failures. Many prophets who made these predictions survived all their own prognostications and are still on the payroll, although now they are changing the end-time dates to 50, 70, or 100 years away. Here are my favorites:

(1) In his 1968 book, “The Population Bomb,” Stanford University biology professor Dr. Paul Ehrlich wrote, “100-200 million people per year will be starving to death during the next 10 years.”

(2) Ehrlich went on to assure us that between 1980 and 1989, four billion people, including 65 million Americans, would perish

in the “Great Die-Off.”

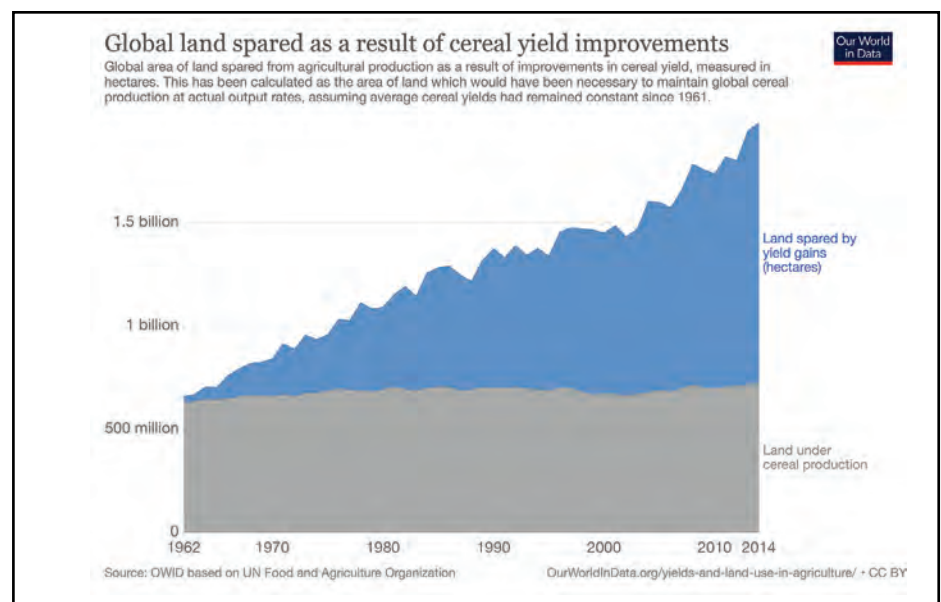
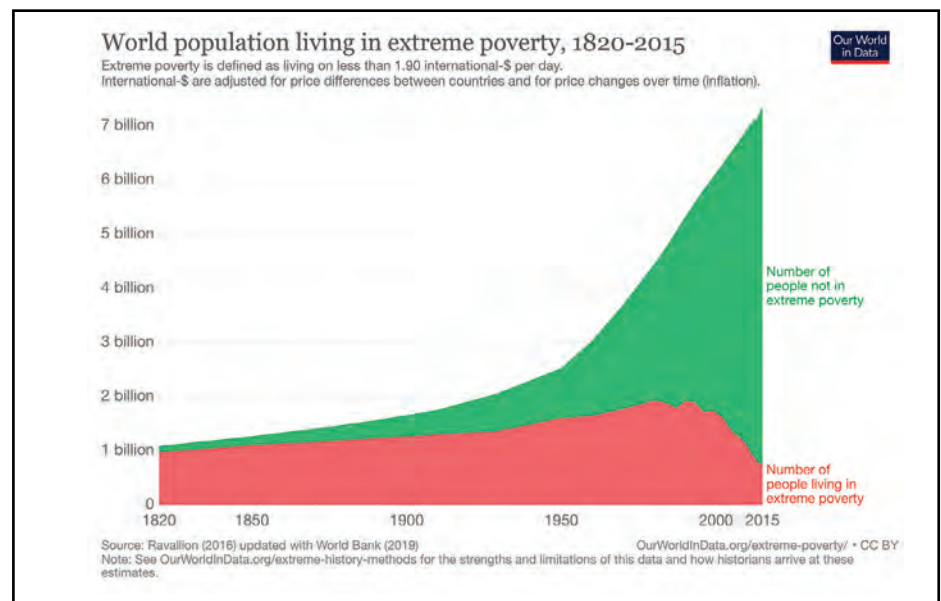
(3) Continuing, Ehrlich warned that chlorinated hydrocarbons such as DDT “may have substantially reduced the life expectancy of people born since 1945,” stating that mankind's lifespan was only 49 years, declining to 42 by 1980, when it might level out. Fifty years later Dr. Ehrlich hasn't changed his tune, just the dates of his apocalyptic catastrophes.

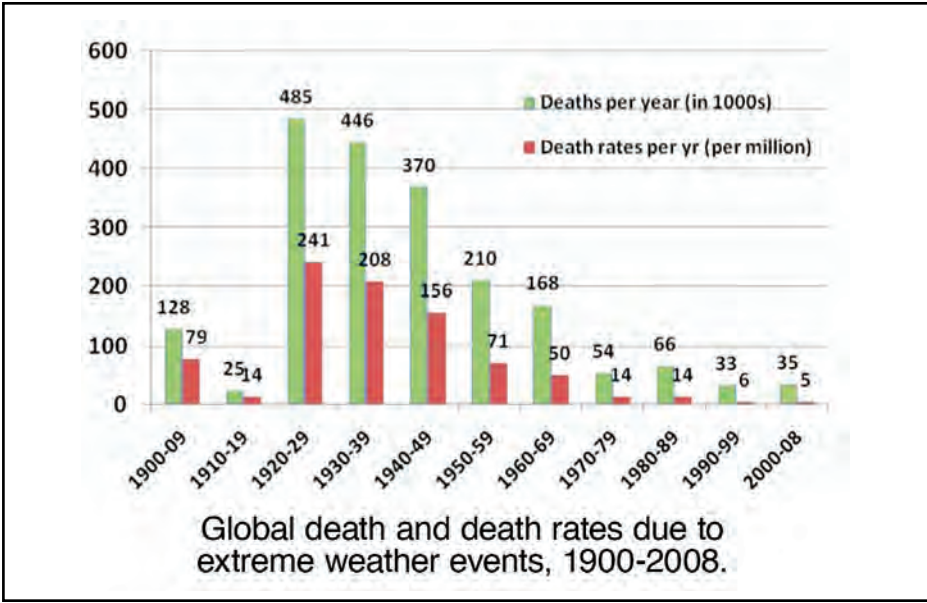
(4) In January 1970, *LIFE* reported, “Scientists have solid experimental and theoretical evidence to support [that] in a decade, urban

dwellers will have to wear gas masks to survive air pollution.” Today *LIFE* gathers dust after its last issue was published in 2000.

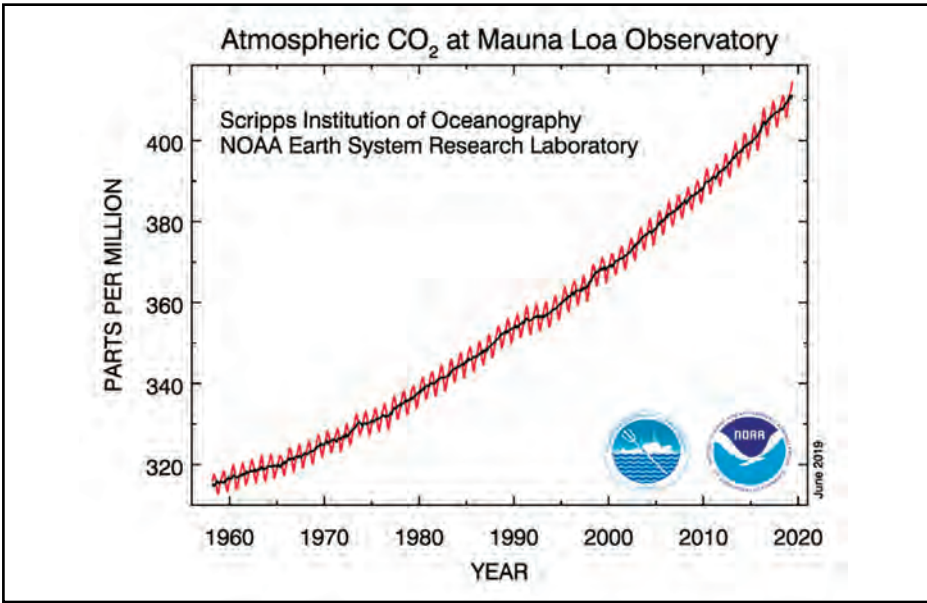
(5) Ecologist Kenneth Watt stated: “The world has been chilling sharply for about 20 years. If present trends continue, the world will be about four degrees colder...in 1990, but 11...in the year 2000. This is about twice what it would take to put us into an ice age.”

(6) Watt also predicted, “At the present rate of nitrogen buildup, it's only a matter of time before light will be filtered out of the atmosphere and none of our land will be





Global death and death rates due to extreme weather events, 1900-2008.



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**1960's — Oil gone in 10 years**  
**1970's — Another ice age in 10 years**  
**1980's — Acid rain will destroy all crops in 10 years**  
**1990's — The ozone layer will be destroyed in 10 years**  
**2000's — The icecaps will be gone in 10 years**

**None happened, but all resulted in more taxes.**

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useable.”

(7) Continuing, Watt wrote: “By the year 2000...we will be using up crude oil at such a rate...that there won't be any more.... You'll drive up to the pump and say 'Fill 'er up, Buddy,' and he'll say, 'I am very sorry, there isn't any.'” Watt didn't perish from his predictions and is now retired in his early 90s.

(8) In 1970, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Dr. S. Dillon Ripley, Ph.D., related to U.S. Sen. Gaylord Nelson that he believed in 25 years “somewhere between 75 and 80 percent of all the species of living animals will be extinct.”

(9) In 1970, one-time presidential candidate and Washington University biology professor Barry Commoner predicted that decaying organic pollutants would use up all the oxygen in America's rivers, causing fish to suffocate and die. He went further, stating in the journal *Environment*, “We are in an environmental crisis which threatens the survival of this nation, and of the world as a suitable place of human habitation.”

(10) Even one of the founding fathers of Earth Day Network, Denis Hayes, an eco-activist and president of the Bullitt Foundation, thought we crossed the point of no return in 1970, declaring, “It's already too late to avoid mass starvation.”

Today the claims of those who tell us of the end of snow, an ice-free Arctic, drowning polar bears, the permanent California drought, Manhattan under several feet of water, and the like should be ignored and placed in the dustbin of history. With just a little research it's clear that they come from 21st century descendants of Chicken Little and that little has changed in their panic.

President Donald Trump summed it up at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Jan. 21, 2020. “To embrace the possibilities of tomorrow,” he said, “we must reject the perennial prophets of doom and their predictions of the apocalypse. They are the heirs of yesterday's foolish fortune tellers and they want to see us do badly, but we won't let that happen. They predicted an overpopulation crisis in the 1960s, mass starvation in the 1970s, and an end of oil in the 1990s. These alarmists always demand the same thing—absolute power to dominate, transform and control every aspect of our lives.” ■

*Larry Angier, RANGE's webmaster, grew up believing many of the doom-and-gloom predictions from that first Earth Day, “only to survive at least 50 pronouncements of the end of the world since then.”*