

Can panic motivate us to understand each other?

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I started writing a disheartening column on birds and bees but ended up panicking. It started with hearing that we have 2.9 billion fewer birds in North America than we did in 1970. I grew up enjoying the cooing of barnyard pigeons, watching red winged blackbirds diving, and hearing the unique call of bob-o-links. The thought of fewer birds was disheartening.

Add to this the fact that last year U.S. beekeepers lost over 40% of their colonies. As a beekeeper, I was ready to rant about extreme weather and limited forage killing bees. I was ready to rant about EPA lifting the limited ban on neonicotinoids, which harm bees, and is believed to delay the migrations of songbirds, thus harming their mating chances.

Ranting about birds, bees and neonicotinoids, was interrupted by Greta Thunberg's UN speech. Birds and bees became overshadowed with concern for our children and grandchildren.

Her message was strong. "You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. ... People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

She went on to say, "For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight."

Is she right in urging panic? Are birds, bees and humans doomed?

Discrediting and demeaning of Thunberg was quick. Climate-change deniers turned up their volume. A second panic hit. How can we do anything about what may be happening if we can't have a sane conversation between those worried about global climate change and those who think it's a hoax?

Did Thunberg making us feel bad backfire? None of us like to feel guilty about our choices, our choices of cars, food, travel, jobs or fuel consumption.

Why is climate change so divisive? Is part of the negative reaction to climate change related to scientists coming across as arrogant? Is part of the negative reaction connected with climate change being tied to a liberal agenda? Is part of the negative reaction connected with not wanting government to interfere even if it is for our own good and the well-being of humanity?

Would it help to ask ourselves who is funding the denial movement? Among those claiming there is no climate emergency are people from Cato Institute, Competitive Enterprise Institute, and Heartland Institute. "All three of these... are members of the Atlas Network, a Koch-funded international umbrella body." Koch money is derived from oil refineries and pipeline operations. In the late '90s, Exxon created a task force that works for the American Petroleum Institute. A

memo from the group said: “Victory will be achieved when average citizens understand (recognize) uncertainties in climate science” and when public “recognition of uncertainty becomes part of ’conventional wisdom.’” Do we want to trust fossil fuel industrialists over scientists?

We all depend on the same planet for survival. We all want a good future for the next generation. Can panic motivate us to understand each other?

We may not have a crystal ball that clearly spells out the future but birds, bees, and maybe even humans need us to stop arguing and start looking squarely at our future. Is it asking too much for us to move together toward less energy consumption and CO2 emitting? What do we have to lose? Stubbornness and failing to act may turn out to be too dangerous.