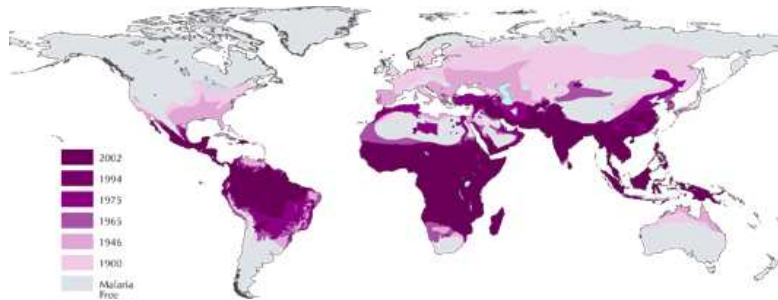


Watts Up With That?

Smacking Down Malaria Misconceptions

Posted on September 13, 2010 by Anthony Watts

Economist Indur Goklany, a frequent contributor to WUWT and occasional commenter has more than a few things to say about commenter Ed Darrell's views on Malaria posted on WUWT yesterday. There's so much in fact, that I've dedicated a whole guest post to it. -Anthony



Distribution of malaria from 1900 to 2002 This map shows the results of the international eradication programs during the 20th century. In 1900, malaria was found as far north as Boston and Moscow.

Today malaria is endemic in the tropical areas of Asia, the Americas, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Image: National Academy of Sciences

Guest Post by Indur Goklany

Ed Darrell has two sets of comments, one of which, I believe, is fundamentally flawed, and the other I would agree with, at the risk of being accused by Alexander Feht of being obsequious once again (See Alexander's comment on [September 11, 2010 at 11:28 am](#)).

A. [Ed Darrell](#) on [September 12, 2010 at 7:40 pm](#), responding to tarpon said:

In 1972, about two million people died from malaria, worldwide.

In 2008, about 880,000 people died from malaria, worldwide. That's fewer than half the mortality the year the U.S. stopped DDT spraying on cotton.

If it's cause-effect you were trying to establish, I think you missed.

RESPONSE: The flaws in Ed's analysis are aplenty.

First, although the US banned DDT in 1972, its use continued in much of the rest of the world. [If I remember correctly, the Swedes had banned it earlier.] In fact, US production of DDT for developing country use continued into the mid-1980s. Also, it took a few years for US environmentalists to ensure that the US domestic ban was — in the best traditions of cultural imperialism and bearing the white man's burden — exported to other countries [without their (informed) consent, mind you]. [Notably, the US ban was imposed only after malaria had been wiped out in the US for practical purposes. See [Figure 13, here](#).] In addition, countries had stockpiles which they

continued to use, and not all developed countries were initially on board with eliminating DDT use worldwide. Furthermore, by 2008 some developing countries that had stopped DDT use had resumed its use. So it is not meaningful to use either 1972 or 2008 as endpoints for developing global estimates for the efficacy (or lack of it) of DDT in dealing with malaria..

Second, while DDT is in many instances the cheapest and most cost-effective method of reducing malaria (where it works, because it doesn't always work) the death and disease rates are also sensitive to other factors, none of which have remained stationary between 1972 and 2008. These factors include general health status, adequate food and nutrition, public health services, and so on. So, it makes little sense, without adequately accounting for these factors, to compare deaths for malaria (or death rates, which would be more correct) between 1972 and 2008 to say anything about the effectiveness of DDT.

Fortunately, though, we have results of some "policy experiments" which were undertaken inadvertently — undertaken, I note, without the consent of the subjects of these experiments, something that would not be allowed in any hospital in the US, I suspect. These "experiments" allow us to evaluate the benefit of DDT (or lack thereof). As noted [here](#) (pp. 7-8) in a paper published a decade ago by [Africa Fighting Malaria](#), it was noted that:

"Given the higher costs and, possibly, the greater efficacy of DDT, it is not surprising that despite the theoretical availability of substitutes, malaria rebounded in many poor areas where (and when) DDT usage was discontinued (WHO 1999a; Roberts 1999, Roberts et al. 1997, Sharma 1996, Whelan 1992, Guarda et al. 1999, Bate 2000). For instance, malaria incidences in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) dropped from 2.8 million in the 1940s to less than 20 in 1963 (WHO 1999a, Whelan 1992). DDT spraying was stopped in 1964, and by 1969 the number of cases had grown to 2.5 million. Similarly, malaria was nearly eradicated in India in the early 1960s, and its resurgence coincided with shortages in DDT (Sharma 1996). The population at high- to medium risk of contracting malaria in Colombia and Peru doubled between 1996 and 1997 (Roberts et al. 2000b). Malaria has also reappeared in several other areas where it had previously been suppressed, if not eradicated (e.g., Madagascar, Swaziland, the two Koreas, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan; Roberts et al. 2000b, and references therein). Similarly, Roberts et al. (1997) showed that Latin American countries (e.g., Ecuador, Belize, Guyana, Bolivia, Paraguay, Brazil and Venezuela) which had discontinued or decreased spraying of DDT inside homes saw malaria rates increase. Guarda et al. (1999) also note that in 1988, when DDT use was discontinued, there were no cases of *Plasmodium falciparum* reported in Loreto, Peru. The number of cases increased to 140 in 1991. By 1997, there were over 54,000 cases and 85 deaths (see, also, Goklany 2000c).

"But the best argument for indoor-spraying of DDT is that in many areas where malaria experienced a resurgence, reinstating DDT use once again led to declines in malaria cases. For example, Ecuador, which had previously seen its malaria rates rebound once DDT spraying had been reduced, saw those rates decline once again by 61 percent since 1993, when DDT use was increased again (Roberts et al. 1997). The same cycle occurred in Madagascar where the malaria epidemic of 1984-86, which occurred after the suspension of DDT use, killed 100,000 people. After two annual cycles of DDT spraying, malaria incidence declined 90 percent (Roberts et al. 2000b)."

Since then, we have results of the on-again and off-again policy with regard to DDT from KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa:

"DDT spraying in that area started in 1946. By 1974, *Anopheles funestes*, the mosquito species associated with

year-round prevalence of malaria in that region, had been eradicated [see Figure below.]. In the 1991/1992 malaria season, the number of malaria cases was around 600 in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). However, in 1996, DDT was replaced by synthetic pyrethroids. In 1999 members of *A. funestus* were found in houses in KZN that had been sprayed. In 1999/2000, there were more than 40,000 cases in KZN. In 2000, DDT was brought back. By 2002, the number of cases had dropped to 3,500.” Source: Pre-edited version of [Goklany \(2007\), pp.79-180.](#)

See the Figure 1.

I have also provided additional references below, if one is interested in following up.

For a broader discussion, I recommend the chapter, “Applying the Precautionary Principle to DDT,” in [The Precautionary Principle: A Critical Appraisal of Environmental Risk Assessment](#) (Cato Institute, Washington, DC, 2001). A previous version of this chapter is available free at <http://goklany.org/library/DDT%20and%20PP.PDF>.

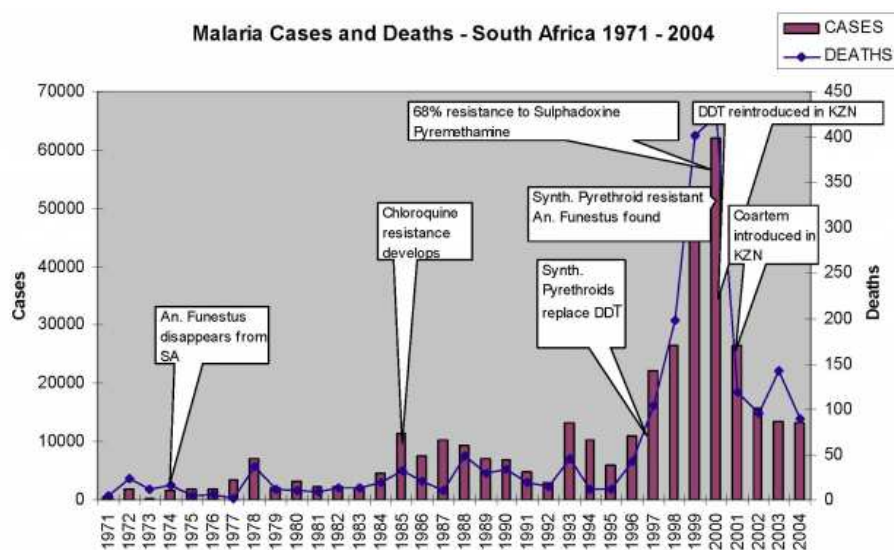


Figure 1: From Goklany (2007), based on R. Tren, “IRS & DDT in Africa — past and present successes,” 54th Annual Meeting, American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH), Washington, DC, December 11-15, 2005.

B. Ed Darrell on [September 13, 2010 at 2:19 pm](#) said, “We may not beat malaria by 2014, but it won’t be because the Gates Foundation is on the wrong path.”

RESPONSE: I agree. For a long time, malaria control was neglected. Even the World Health Organization would not recommend DDT use indoors. It was revived, and even became (almost) chic thanks to a number of very high profile individuals including [George Bush](#) and Bill Gates, as well as lesser known people such as Don Roberts, Amir Attaran, Roger Bate and Richard Tren (all associated with [Africa Fighting Malaria](#)) . I delude myself into thinking that I played a minor role in helping ensure that DDT did not get banned outright under the Stockholm Convention.

Whatever people may think of Bill Gates stance on global warming, there is little doubt that he exhibited

substantial political courage in [espousing malaria control with DDT](#). That's essentially why I was/am disappointed by his posting that set me off on this blog.

Perhaps I should have titled my piece, "Et tu Bill Gates!"

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

D. R. Roberts, et al. "DDT, global strategies, and a malaria control crisis in South America," *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 3 (1997): 295-301 (1997).

D.R. Roberts, et al., "A Probability Model of Vector Behavior: Effects of DDT Repellency, Irritancy, and Toxicity in Malaria Control," *Journal of Vector Control* 25 (2000): 48-61.

Karen I. Barnes et al., "Effect of Artemether Lumefantrine Policy and Improved Vector Control on Malaria Burden in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa," *Public Library of Science Medicine* (2005): DOI 10.1371/journal.pmed.0020330.

P. E. Duffy and T. K. Mutabingwa, "Rolling Back a Malaria Epidemic in South Africa," *Public Library of Science Medicine* (2005): DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.0020368.

R. Tren, "IRS & DDT in Africa — past and present successes," *54th Annual Meeting, American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (ASTMH)*, Washington, DC, December 11-15, 2005.

D. H. Roberts, "Policies to Stop/Prevent Indoor Residual Spraying for Malaria Control," *54th Annual Meeting, ASTMH*, Washington, DC, December 11-15, 2005.

I.M. Goklany, [The Precautionary Principle: A Critical Appraisal of Environmental Risk Assessment](#) (Cato Institute, Washington, DC, 2001). Chapter 2 deals with malaria and DDT.

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44 Responses to *Smacking Down Malaria Misconceptions*

James Bull says:

September 13, 2010 at 9:27 pm

I still meet people who think DDT is banned and is not used to control Malaria. There is a difference between covering the landscape in the stuff to using it where it does most good.

James.

Carl Chapman says:

September 13, 2010 at 9:34 pm

[snip] – we aren't going to have a Nazi discussion on this thread – Anthony

Alexander Feht says:

September 13, 2010 at 9:39 pm

Indur,

I am surprised that my humble opinion attracted your attention. Who am I, after all, compared with the rich and powerful addressee of your open letter?

Rest assured, please, that I find nothing obsequious in your new, matter-of-fact post.

However, Mr. Gates deserved much harsher treatment on your part, and I was not the only one to express this sentiment.

Re DDT: I can witness that in 1980s Russian (Soviet) students doing sub-Arctic railroad construction in summer months (it was a “required” hard labor, a part of the mandatory curriculum and a way of earning some additional money as well; government stipends were woefully insufficient) were protecting themselves from relentless clouds of mosquitoes (“*gnoos*” they call them in Russia; they are extremely annoying northern bloodsuckers, rather small but not as small as what Americans call “no-see-ems”) by literally dipping (shoulders, head, face, and all) into the big metal barrels filled with the strong DDT solution. It worked! Just for 20-30 minutes — then you had to “dip” again — but it worked. If this particular brigade of students can serve as a control group of individuals exposed to rather extreme and frequent doses of DDT, I can attest that these people have not suffered any special consequences of this exposure during the last 30 years. Some of them perished young in Afghanistan, but that's a different story.

James Sexton says:

September 13, 2010 at 9:57 pm

I guess I'm confused. I thought it fairly well established that the DDT ban was folly and has cost countless lives through our short-sighted “health” concerns. The fact that Bill Gates is touting an unproven vaccine and mosquito nets only serves to show that Bill is simply a software pirate tycoon. Some would say. I like Bill Gates. He is a success story. He tries to give back. But I'll take the tried and true methods over more costly unproven methods any day. Nets are good. Diesel is good. DDT is very effective. Combine all three. A vaccine for the few places DDT isn't effective and we just may kill the damned disease. But then the Malthusians would just throw a fit and find some other reason why we couldn't/ shouldn't destroy this disease.

John Blake says:

September 13, 2010 at 10:06 pm

This article is curiously passive. Like commentary regarding the 9/11 anniversary just passed, it reads like a weather report: Al Qaeda's Muslim terrorists remain conspicuous by their absence. Just so, from WWII to the mid-1960s DDT virtually eradicated malaria in vast swaths of the developing Third World, only to fall prey to ectopiasts' opening salvo broadcast by Rachel Carson in her luridly alarmist "Silent Spring."

Tens of millions of preventable deaths later, long after Mde. Carson's ill-informed contentions have been decisively debunked, a mentality akin to Climate Cultists' continues to obstruct simple meliorative efforts. As Indur Goklany notes, this occurred only after malaria was safely eradicated in the U.S. Like Warmist acolytes' decades-long sabotage of global energy economies, advocating ridiculously over-hyped "alternative sources" as save-the-planet substitutes for coal, oil, nuclear-power sources, anti-DDT forces make no secret of their Luddite sociopathic object: As Ehrlich, Holdren, Hansen, Peter Singer and others of their ilk proclaim, 80% fewer human beings aboard Spaceship Earth –not including themselves– would be a thing of beauty and a joy forever.

As with militant Islam, the nihilist element here is very strong. But we prefer to think of such homicidal death-eaters as Thanatists, those who (as Muslim history attests) "love death more than life." No wonder the two camps have drawn together, jihadists with increasingly violent eco-snarks of every stripe. Anyone who considers this analogy mere rhetoric had best look closely at Thanatists' depraved indifference to malaria casualties over nigh-on fifty years.

Richard Sharpe says:

September 13, 2010 at 10:11 pm

Alexander Feht said:

If this particular brigade of students can serve as a control group of individuals exposed to rather extreme and frequent doses of DDT, I can attest that these people have not suffered any special consequences of this exposure during the last 30 years. Some of them perished young in Afghanistan, but that's a different story.

In the 60's in Darwing, Australia, they used to send trucks around to spray DDT out in clouds during the wet season. They probably did that during the 50's as well. I don't know when this practice ceased. It was to keep the mosquitoes down. Didn't seem to have any effect on people or animals despite the amount of spraying.

I'm still alive more than 40 years after those events.

James Sexton says:

September 13, 2010 at 10:24 pm

John Blake says:

September 13, 2010 at 10:06 pm

Well stated. Perhaps the passive tone is a language thing? Again, I'm confused. I didn't think the DDT ban was in discussion because I thought it quite plain and obvious that anyone involved helping the ban literally has millions of deaths on their hands and conscious. But I also thought it obvious that they didn't care. Is their anyone out there that can rationally defend the ban on DDT? Call them what you will, Malthusians, Luddites, psychopaths, sadists, ect. In my mind, it was blatantly intentional and simply a prelude to what is being attempted today.

GM says:

September 13, 2010 at 11:38 pm

James Sexton says:

September 13, 2010 at 10:24 pm

Is there anyone out there that can rationally defend the ban on DDT?

Actually, you have to be insane to support it, and for reasons that have nothing to do with malaria or whatever effect DDT may have on humans. When you apply DDT, or any other indiscriminate insecticide to the environment, you kill not only the mosquitoes, but all other insects, other arthropods and invertebrates, etc. Which destroys food chains and completely messes up the whole ecosystem. So yes, you don't have as many mosquitoes as before, but that's not an ecosystem that is going to last long. Fortunately it was banned before we had the chance to see the worst effects of this, although some classic stories remain, google "Operation Cat Drop" if you're curious.

One has to always think about the whole system, not about the direct short-term benefit for certain much-less-smarter-than-they-think-they-are primates, short-term benefit that may turn out to be a much greater long-term disaster.

Noelene says:

September 13, 2010 at 11:59 pm

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/5759216/are_environmentalists_to_be_blamed.html?cat=70

Sure to spark outrage, Dr. Rutledge, a California physician specializing in preventative medicine, chronicles the effects of the world-wide ban on the pesticide DDT in 1972, a ban inspired by the first enviro-bestseller, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Rutledge's five-year-long effort is driven by his revulsion at millions of deaths, mostly of women and young children, in Africa and South East Asia, by the mosquito-borne disease, Malaria. According to a recent World Health Organization report, Malaria kills one million people annually, a disease, Rutledge confirms, that is wholly and immediately preventable.

Alexander Feht says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:13 am

GM:: "much-less-smarter-than-they-think-they-are primates"

GM, you are not a primate then, I presume? An image of God, perhaps?

There is nothing holy, sacred, or untouchable in any "natural ecosystem." Most "natural ecosystems" are hostile to man, and man is the measure of all things.

Best "natural ecosystem" is a man-managed ecosystem (most of the environmentalist fanatics never experienced any completely "natural" ecosystems, their view of our planet is as artificial as the view of marine life in an aquarium).

Yes, the widespread use of DDT can disrupt the initial food chain by depriving species feeding on mosquito larvae of their habitual snack. Is this any excuse for not saving millions of human lives? Only in a feverish imagination of a man-hating, self-loathing quasi-religious fanatic.

Ecosystem can (and does) adapt to man's needs. But there is only one life for every human being, and a short one at that. If you wish to exchange your life for a frog's, go ahead and do it. But in no way or form you can demand the same from others, and any attempts in this direction shall be ruthlessly restrained.

Tom says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:16 am

GM:

I just did a tour of Google looking at some of the hits for "Operation Cat Drop" and found most sites to consider it more myth than fact. A web site called catdrop.com has an interesting write up on it. It's a great story, but in this case, I think perception and fact are strangers in the night. I agree with your salient point about eco-systems being disrupted, but the cause of

eradicating malaria is noble and DDT is both effective and safe.

Volt Aire says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:29 am

DDT concentrates going up the foodchain and causes serious problems for many species, especially birds. We almost annihilated *Haliaeetus albicilla*, a type of eagle, because DDT accumulated and concentrated in the foodchain finally making the eggs so fragile that the eagles broke them accidentally while nurturing them (whatever the birds do when they sit on them to make them warm:). The situation was really bad and there were only about 30 birds left when ddt was banned and the species made a good recovery. Now I see them weekly or daily when I take my boat out to sea. My point is the stuff affects the whole foodchain and needs to be regulated pretty tightly.

Malaria has not reappeared by the way :)

GM says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:36 am

*Tom said on Smacking Down Malaria Misconceptions
September 14, 2010 at 12:16 am*

- 1. I agree with your salient point about eco-systems being disrupted,*
- 2. DDT is both effective and safe*

These are absolutely contradictory statements

GM says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:41 am

*Alexander Feht said on Smacking Down Malaria Misconceptions
September 14, 2010 at 12:13 am*

There is nothing holy, sacred, or untouchable in any "natural ecosystem." Most "natural ecosystems" are hostile to man, and man is the measure of all things.

Man is a measure to all things only in the deluded antropocentrically brainwashed minds of some (OK, the majority) of the members of the species.

The ecological reality of human existence is quite different.

Best "natural ecosystem" is a man-managed ecosystem (most of the environmentalist fanatics never experienced any completely "natural" ecosystems, their view of our planet is as artificial as the view of marine life in an aquarium).

LOL

Yes, the widespread use of DDT can disrupt the initial food chain by depriving species feeding on mosquito larvae of their habitual snack. Is this any excuse for not saving millions of human lives? Only in a feverish imagination of a man-hating, self-loathing quasi-religious fanatic.

You seem to be another one of the many here that suffers from severe reading comprehension problems. I specifically

stressed the point that DDT is not specific to mosquitoes, it kills all insects, plus most other arthropods, and a lot of other invertebrates. Accordingly, the consequences are much greater than those of just eliminating mosquitoes.

Ecosystem can (and does) adapt to man's needs. But there is only one life for every human being, and a short one at that. If you wish to exchange your life for a frog's, go ahead and do it. But in no way or form you can demand the same from others, and any attempts in this directions shall be ruthlessly restrained.

Whatever doubts I had that you lack any ecological and general scientific literacy whatsoever were dispelled by that passage.

Keith Battye says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:49 am

We all know those kids who are perpetually in need of attention. They run around waving their arms and shouting “look at me, look at me”. They want to participate in the grown up conversations but don’t add much just noise and a limited but annoying distraction.

The best way to deal with these children is usually to ignore them till they lose interest and go off and do other things. Deny them the oxygen of attention until they can contribute in a useful and meaningful way. If you do this your day will be much better spent.

Alexander Feht says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:53 am

Volt Aire,

The story about that eagle species is a myth.
And malaria reappeared in force, in Africa.

riskaverse says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:55 am

Anyway GM we’re not discussing widespread spraying for malaria prevention – we’re discussing indoor applications to walls etc. This would not impact the “environment” you so worship. It was the “total” ban on DDT that was so inhuman, although you might argue it wasn’t a total ban according to the small print, effectively it was for small easily influenced small nations who needed DDT the most.

Alexander Feht says:

September 14, 2010 at 1:19 am

G: “Man is a measure [of] all things only in the deluded ant[h]ropocentrically brainwashed minds of some (OK, the majority) of the members of the species.”

I rest my case.

StuartR says:

September 14, 2010 at 1:21 am

I find this Malcolm Gladwell article discussing Malaria and DDT to be the best account of where we stand today.

http://www.gladwell.com/2001/2001_07_02_a_ddt.htm

riskaverse says:

September 14, 2010 at 1:23 am

Further to my last comment. No one has mentioned that DDT was very cheap and long lasting which meant that there was little profit for manufacturers, unlike the very dangerous replacements. Follow the money.

Brendan H says:

September 14, 2010 at 1:29 am

“First, although the US banned DDT in 1972...”

The ban was for agricultural and similar uses, but not for public health purposes.

“For instance, malaria incidences in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) dropped from 2.8 million in the 1940s to less than 20 in 1963 (WHO 1999a, Whelan 1992). DDT spraying was stopped in 1964, and by 1969 the number of cases had grown to 2.5 million.”

The 1969 figure I have seen is half a million, but leaving that aside, in the years after 1969 years DDT spraying was resumed in Sri Lanka, but the number of cases remained in the hundreds of thousands.

Clearly, there were other factors at work. One was the development of resistance by mosquitos to DDT.

For all pesticides, some organisms within a population will possess a natural resistance to the chemical, presumably as a result of genetic mutation. This allows them to survive the pesticide, and the destruction of the susceptible organisms enables the resistant ones to multiply freely without competition. In short order, you have developed a resistant strain.

Resistance to pesticides is a common — indeed ubiquitous — phenomenon, and pesticide manufacturers and users need to develop strategies to combat it. However, in the early days of DDT use, these strategies would not have been widely used, if at all, in many places where agricultural and other uses were widespread.

John Marshall says:

September 14, 2010 at 1:32 am

The largest outbreak of malaria, in terms of deaths, was in Siberia over 100 years ago. The Thames marshes were not the place to live in the 1700-1800's due to the Ague, which was malaria by another name. Use of any chemical must be where it does most good and in the case of malaria and DDT that seems to be in the home rather than country wide broadcast regardless of effectiveness.

Diego Cruz says:

September 14, 2010 at 1:54 am

When I was a child in Havana, Cuba in the early fifties, I couldn't wait for the noisy jeep. It would move slowly spewing a thick yellowish-white cloud. Me and my friends would follow the jeep, hiding inside the cloud and couldn't see each other or even our own hands in front of our noses. It was fun and it didn't smell too bad. It was DDT.

It is hard to imagine people defending the ban on DDT after learning it has cost tens of millions of deaths. That defines the word “fanatic”.

Alan the Brit says:

September 14, 2010 at 2:09 am

Thought provoking post, well done.

Volt Aire says:

September 14, 2010 at 12:29 am

DDT concentrates going up the foodchain and causes serious problems for many species, especially birds. We almost annihilated *Haliaeetus albicilla*, a type of eagle, because DDT accumulated and concentrated in the foodchain finally making the eggs so fragile that the eagles broke them accidentally while nurturing them (whatever the birds do when they sit on them to make them warm:).

As I understand it, there is in fact no SCIENTIFIC evidence that DDT caused, or causes, thinning of egg shells of birds or any other creature – try Steve Milloy’s Junkscience for info. Eagles, & many other birds of prey were under pressure from changes in agricultural practices (NOT the use of DDT) & hunting & habitat destruction as they were considered pests & vermin, long before DDT was commercially available as a pesticide. As pointed out by Prof John Brignall on Numberwatch regarding DDT, there are ALWAYS “abuses” regardless of benefit, (Does not James Hanson abuse his privileged position?). Can anyone out there point to anything that is not abused at some stage or other? I also understand that Rachel Carson, (I am no fan) although prone like so many politically motivated activists to pick & choose her data & arguments to achieve her own ends, (thinning of eggshells etc) was indeed in favour of some “controlled” use of DDT for malaria eradication.

Prof Paul Rieter, a leading expert on vector borne diseases & IPCC contributor, has pointed out that malaria is more related to socio-economic conditions, rather than temperature (heat) related, as the UK HoP & Washington Senate/HoR buildings are built on former malarial swamps! The inference is that wealth = health! That wonderful yet blinkered/eco-infested institution, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, has recently started a programme of coastal swamp creation for bird habitats, ideal environments for the malarial mosquito no less! Who says stupidity is the privilege of the poor?

Alexander K says:

September 14, 2010 at 2:27 am

I am surprised that the excellent Rotary International programme to eradicate Malaria never gets mentioned in the blogosphere or in the MSM. All the research I have seen indicates that Rachel Carson and her book ‘Silent Spring’ were indirectly responsible for literally millions of infant deaths in the undeveloped world.

And the MSM is STILL holding up the dear old Polar Bear as an endangered species, now joined by the Arctic Fox. This is possibly where GM gets some of his attention-seeking nonsense.

Latimer Alder says:

September 14, 2010 at 2:39 am

@GM

Forgive my asking – I’m a newbie to this whole subject, but you say

‘Fortunately it was banned before we had the chance to see the worst effects of this’

So the obvious question is ‘How do you know what the worst effects would have been?’

And it seems to me that preventing millions of human deaths vs saving a few little known eagles would have been a very good deal (unless you happen to be an unborn eagle...but of they never got born, who cares anyway?)

Vince Causey says:

September 14, 2010 at 2:41 am

GM,

“Whatever doubts I had that you lack any ecological and general scientific literacy whatsoever were dispelled by that passage.”

So, you no longer doubt that he lacks ecological and scientific literacy?

Mary Hinge says:

September 14, 2010 at 3:38 am

Oh dear, you are losing the ‘argument’ that the global temperatures are rising due to AGW so it’s back to the old chestnut about DDT (which was being progressively withdrawn from use due to resistance before the environmental reasons anyway). What next now we don’t have the much heralded by WUWT ‘Great Arctic Ice recovery’, how about CFC’s, always a good one!

Ed Fix says:

September 14, 2010 at 3:51 am

Here in Ohio, (and other places) there’s a lot of moaning and wailing about the resurgence of bedbugs. You hear more and more people saying we need to bring back DDT to get rid of the pests.

Bedbugs are a nuisance, but they don’t kill people. How ironic would it be if we refuse to produce DDT to reduce a deadly disease in the third world, but bring it back to combat an inconvenience at home?

Ed

Dave Springer says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:05 am

@anthony

“The flaws in Ed’s analysis are aplenty”

That’s what Ed is all about. I’ve run into him several times over the years. He’s a fixture, like a post turtle, in Texas public education controversy with regard to evolution. A high school history teacher as I recall with a penchant for saying some pretty dumb things about science. I remember one time he was blathering about how important it was for Texas children to understand evolution so that they’d understand agriculture in the state and he used Texas’ famous Ruby Red grapefruit as an example. Then when I tried to explain to him how the citrus industry relies on grafting not breeding and even if the Ruby Red were the result of breeding (which they are not) evolutionary biology gives no aid in understanding what’s happening. Just plain old reproductive biology, Mendelian genetics and recombination, explains what goes on in selective breeding i.e. you can change allele frequencies through selective breeding but you can’t get novel new traits to show up unless the genes for the trait were already there in the first place.

Patrick Hadley says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:09 am

Alexander K – Despite the claims of some of her defenders, nobody has ever found a quote or comment by Rachel Carson which advocated the use of any DDT in any circumstances. Her book “Silent Spring” was vehemently against all use of DDT because she believed that as well as damage to wildlife such as eagles, any contact with humans must be avoided since it causes many diseases such as cancer. Carson did not like any chemical pesticides, but you can find in her book a grudging admission that some less dangerous pesticides could be used in controlled areas.

However since Carson died in 1964, long before the campaign against DDT got fully under way, it is silly to blame her for all the problems caused by her book. It is not her fault that mistakes in *Silent Spring* about the harmful effects of DDT continued to be used against it, long after they had been debunked.

The use of the word “ban” is also a bit problematic. In most developing countries DDT was never legally banned – but the all international agencies made their own decisions not to use to DDT, and persuaded the governments not to buy it. In theory a parent would not have been banned from buying his own tin of DDT for use in his home, but that was impossible in reality.

Archonix says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:11 am

Mary Hing, are you kidding? One article about DDT sandwiched between two about the environment and suddenly we’re “losing the argument”? Did you not read the strapline for WUWT? It’s right there at the top of the page...

Indur M. Goklany says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:13 am

Far be it from me to correct Anthony Watts, but I am an engineer by training — not an economist!

Chris Edwards says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:19 am

How about the current bed bug epidemic in north america? that is a direct result of the ignorant knee-jerk reaction to a fairy story about DDT, I wonder how much DDT is on the black market today?

Volt Aire says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:34 am

@Alan the Brit, DDT and the food chain

The eagles were an example because I happen to live in the exact area where the last few were trying to breed, the problem is of course global. I just figured writing something I know about rather than read about is the thing to do if there is an option :)

About this issue being junk science, that is pretty cheap. The bird in question was in the extremely endangered -list and had no natural enemies. It had no affect on human livelihoods either and the fine for killing one was in the thousands... And all known examples were being watched. The eggs were found to be broken on almost all the nests and measured to be much thinner than normally. The problem was remedied by setting up feeding areas with food that wouldn’t have biologically enriched DDT, in other words changing their diet from fish to rabbits etc. The results quickly started to show on the following years and now there are over 1500 eagles in the area, no more feeding, no more ddt, no more failed breedings due to thin eggshells. Makes sense to me :) And like I already said, there are places where DDT:s pros outweigh the cons, here it wasn’t so.

Metryq says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:41 am

@Mary Hinge, I see a lot of ad hominem in reply forums on the Web, including here. Although most respondents on WUWT appear well informed and have good debating skills. Then someone like you shows up. Anyone who has read and researched the articles on this site would not be claiming that Anthony and the guest bloggers are “losing” the AGW argument. Repeating your views does not make them true. WUWT is about facts. Do you have any?

E.M.Smith says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:43 am

I see GM and unHinged Mary are buzzing around this thread too...

OK, GM: We used tons of DDT around my home town (up near Chico where Anthony lives) when I was kid. We used to go play in the 'fog' behind the jeeps that sprayed it around town when the 'skeeters got too thick. Strangely, never seemed to do anything to the cockroaches in the bad neighborhoods nor the flies on the farms around town ("town" was about 2 miles wide on the long axis...). It would seem that the "range" of DDT is far smaller than you expect.

Further, nearby was a "State Waterfowl Area" and hunters would come hundreds of miles to hunt the ducks and geese in the area. We had LOADS of birds, including raptors. No, not a scientific study, but a 'reality check'. In one of the places most soaked in DDT, we had little visible impact from it on non-target species.

Why all the spraying? Because California is a Malaria Zone. It is largely gone from here thanks to the Mosquito Abatement Districts and their spray and educate plans. Dumping standing water, putting mosquito fish in water tanks and ponds, and spraying. The native mosquito is just dandy at hosting malaria and is found up to nearly 7000 ft elevation. That's about 1/2 way up Squaw Valley skii slopes...

The '49ers had severe Malaria outbreaks. Even up into Alaska. Malaria has little to do with average heat and a lot to do with killing mosquitos. That map at the top of the page, had it begun in 1800, would have shown a lot more malaria in California...

Oh, and Mary, the only "losing" that's gone on lately is the complete loss of credibility of the "climate science" brigade post ClimateGate. I remind you that when Obama raised the issue in his SOTU address it was greeted with a murmur of laughter.... CRU has by it's own email been shown to be biasing the journals and cooking the books.

GIStemp is, well, I'll be polite: a data fabricator that contributes nearly nothing of value to the data. And GHCN Adjusted is shown to be dramatically out of touch with actual historical records. We had NASA announcing the 115 year record heat in California and the West with nearly no record temperatures here. Kind of stands out a mite... They are riddled with 'splice artifacts' and they do not even do proper 'anomaly' calculations (comparing a given instrument to itself) but instead compare a box of thermometers in one time period to a different box in another time period. Like comparing my old VW to my present Mercedes sports car and finding that cars are going faster over time.

Then there is that small mater of adjustments that make the temperature data look like hockey stick... Oh, and a clean 'self to self' anomaly comparison finds a nice 'hockey blade' on the data starting about 1987-1990. Right when new "QA" processes started and the thermometers were largely kept at airports and tossed elsewhere; grievously polluting the data. So given that the data we have are crap, it's not really possible to say with certainty what is happening to the temperatures.

What we have is a load of lousy "climate science" coming to light and a bunch of folks trying to put lipstick on the pig and call it "peer reviewed". Among them the claim that malaria will increase from added warmth. Like, maybe it will only be 10 F instead of 8F on the slopes of Squaw Valley next year?

Somehow I'm not worried...

amabo says:

September 14, 2010 at 4:48 am

Mary Hinge is a one trick pony. The rest of us are not.

Max Hugoson says:

September 14, 2010 at 5:12 am

The old saw about, “DDT persists in the environment and never goes away..” was destroyed when samples of soil were found (I believe U. of Michigan agronomy dept.) about 20 years ago. Sealed in glass. Analysis showed 10 PPM DDT...which is the “typical” found in soil everywhere. Fortunately the samples were sealed in 1910, well before DDT was produced.

Therefore there is some natural agency which produces DDT.

And it doesn't just disperse and stay residual.

File under: One more claim about DDT which is nonsense (note: 10 PPM or 10 PPB of DDT in all top soil world wide, works out to more DDT than was EVER produced!)

Jimbo says:

September 14, 2010 at 5:40 am

I have a sneaking suspicion that extreme greenies want **DDT to stay banned** as a **method of population control**. That's just my view, or is it?

*Dr. Charles Wurster, former chief scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund, was once asked if he thought a ban on **DDT** might result in the use of more dangerous chemicals and more malaria cases in Sri Lanka. He replied, “Probably—so what? People are the cause of all the problems. We have too many of them. **We need to get rid of some of them, and this is as good a way as any.**”*

[more...](#)

and we have some other excellent quotes:

“My three main goals would be to reduce human population to about 100 million worldwide, destroy the industrial infrastructure and see wilderness, with it's full complement of species, returning throughout the world.”

*-Dave Foreman,
co-founder of Earth First!*

*“A cancer is an uncontrolled multiplication of cells;
the population explosion is an uncontrolled multiplication of people.
We must shift our efforts from the treatment of the symptoms to the cutting out of the cancer. The operation will demand many apparently brutal and heartless decisions.”*

*- Prof Paul Ehrlich,
The Population Bomb*

*“I don't claim to have any special interest in natural history,
but as a boy I was made aware of the annual fluctuations in
the number of game animals and the need to adjust
the cull to the size of the surplus population.”*

*- Prince Philip,
preface of Down to Earth*

“A total population of 250-300 million people, a 95% decline from present levels, would be ideal.”

*- Ted Turner,
founder of CNN and major UN donor*

“... the resultant ideal sustainable population is hence more than 500 million but less than one billion.”

*- Club of Rome,
Goals for Mankind*

“One America burdens the earth much more than twenty Bangladeshes. This is a terrible thing to say. In order to stabilize world population, we must eliminate 350,000 people per day. It is a horrible thing to say, but it's just as bad not to say it.”

*- Jacques Cousteau,
UNESCO Courier*

“If I were reincarnated I would wish to be returned to earth as a killer virus to lower human population levels.”

*- Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh,
patron of the World Wildlife Fund*

and finally

*“I suspect that **eradicating small pox was wrong**. It played an important part in balancing ecosystems.”*

- John Davis, editor of Earth First! Journal

[source](#)

I bet there were some who were rooting for the [Ebola virus](#). :o)

Steve from Rockwood says:

September 14, 2010 at 5:49 am

Alexander Feht says “The best “natural ecosystem” is a man-managed ecosystem.”

I'm unconvinced that man has warmed the planet with fossil fuels, but don't under-estimate our ability to screw up the planet. The best natural ecosystem is one that is left alone to evolve naturally. There probably aren't too many of those left.

GM was pointing out the problem of focusing only on one thing, such as killing mosquitoes, without regard for what the poison is doing to the rest of the ecosystem.

Treating malaria is a trade-off. In this case the benefit (human life) is well worth the risk (ecosystem disruption). But we shouldn't be so quick to adapt this policy to everything we do.

In British Columbia forestry gurus have been planting pine trees for years after they cut down the spruce trees (apparently

pine grows faster than spruce I'm told). Now they have a serious pine beetle problem (pine beetles are natural to the area). This man-managed ecosystem isn't doing very well as the pine trees are dying in record numbers. Luckily the real cause of the pine beetle infestation is global warming and not poor forestry management so we're OK. Just one example.

Enneagram says:

September 14, 2010 at 5:52 am

The obvious intention of those who banned DDT was "eugenic": To avoid the reproduction of those "inferior" third worlders. However, those nasty and despicable sub-humans lend every day money for the US to survive, while they are dedicated to more developed activities as aborting their pregnant women, getting married among same sex individuals, chopping new born babies to make "stem cells' research", etc,etc. and if some have the chance to survive, they teach them to kill among themselves with "computer games", a method which kid serious apply and follow when going to school, and, if still surviving from these delicacies of the culture prevailing in their country, they are sent to wherever there is the possibility of that mutual killing called "war" to make possible they get killed before reaching adulthood; and, if some succeed in being still alive after all this eugenic methods devised by their hidden elites, then, and only then, they are allowed to be "free" slaves of their elites with the sole condition of paying a contribution called "taxation" and which amounts to more than 60% of what their masters agree to give them as fair "payment" for their unstoppable work.

Red Jeff says:

September 14, 2010 at 6:01 am

What is being missed is that DDT is relatively non-toxic in comparison to other insect fighting chemicals. It doesn't kill mosquitoes, it repels them... to OUTSIDE the home living environment. This is why intelligent application, spraying indoors, is the wisest method. DDT is not as toxic, nor as irritating, as other solutions... it acts by REPELLING the mossies.

Here is an actual study, including mosquito death rates for various anti-mosquito chemicals. Clearly (under Discussion heading) DDT is not the hazzard we all assume it is. <http://www.plosone.org/article/lookup?articleURI=info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0000716#s3>

Ultimately this is what the authors say... "To date, a truly efficacious DDT replacement has not been found and one may never be found because of the true nature in which DDT functions. Success through the mechanism of spatial repellency means that DDT functions as a form of chemical screening, which stops mosquitoes from entering houses and thus breaks the man/vector contact at its most critical point: when people are sleeping in their homes. DDT's secondary action stimulates those mosquitoes that do enter to prematurely exit, potentially without biting and transmitting disease. Toxicity is only a third order action of DDT and it is considered to be a very poor killing agent.

If sprayed indoors, no eagles will be harmed!

All the best..... Jeff

Vince Causey says:

September 14, 2010 at 6:39 am

Jimbo says:

September 14, 2010 at 5:40 am

"I have a sneaking suspicion that extreme greenies want DDT to stay banned as a method of population control. That's just my view, or is it?"

Great list. You could also have added the following:

"The humans species is distinct from all others in the following way: all other species achieve a balance with their

environment. But the human species has the attribute that it will multiply unchecked, and continue to consume until every resource is exhausted, leaving only a wasteland behind. It then moves on to repeat the cycle. I have tried to find another species that has the same attributes, and have found one other – that other species is the virus.” (Agent Smith, The Matrix).

Watts Up With That?

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