



Cambridge Society for the Application of Research

Churchill College
Storeys Way
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Do We Really Need Pandas?

Dr Ken Thompson
Department of Animal and Plant Sciences
University of Sheffield

7.30 p.m., Monday 2nd December, 2013
Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Churchill College, Storey's Way, Cambridge

The Lecture:

'What has biodiversity ever done for us?'

How much do we really know about the species that make up the natural world and how they interrelate? In particular, how many species are there, and what (if anything) are they worth in purely economic terms?

There is a lot more biodiversity than most of us realise, most of it unknown and undescribed. We are losing species at an alarming rate, so how worried should we be?

I would argue that biodiversity loss should primarily be seen not as a problem in itself, but as a symptom of a deeper crisis; and, as any doctor will tell you, treating the symptoms rather than the underlying disease rarely leads to a lasting cure. We need to look at ecosystems rather than biodiversity *per se*.

If we lose iconic species – such as the giant panda, the Yangtze dolphin or the mountain gorilla – we are all the poorer, but not in any measurable material sense – for their loss would not lead to irreparable damage to ecosystems.

Our modern, highly fertile landscape created by intensive farming delivers cheap food, but unfortunately that's *all* it delivers. If we can devise multifunctional landscapes that also deliver better water quality, less soil erosion and more carbon storage, then plants, moths, butterflies, bumblebees and birds will all gain too, but these biodiversity benefits will only be welcome side-effects of fixing the fundamental controls on ecosystem functioning.

Assuming that if only we can fix the biodiversity crisis, all will be well with the world, is (literally, in many cases) to fail to see the wood for the trees.'

About the Speaker:

Ken took his BSc at Leicester University, a PhD in Sheffield and, after a short spell at Durham University, spent the 1980s at Plymouth Polytechnic (now University). He returned to Sheffield in 1990, and has been there ever since.

He is interested in most aspects of plant ecology, editor of two international journals: *Functional Ecology* and *Seed Science Research*, and the author (with Jan Bakker and Renée Bekker) of 'The Soil Seed Banks of North-West Europe: Methodology, Density and Longevity' (1997, Cambridge University Press) and (with Mike Fenner) of 'The Ecology of Seeds' (2005, Cambridge University Press).

Ken is increasingly interested in the science of gardening. He was one of the leaders of the 'Biodiversity in Urban Gardens in Sheffield (BUGS)' project, and has published four popular gardening books: 'An Ear to the Ground' (Eden Project Books, 2003), 'No Nettles Required' (Eden Project Books, 2006), 'Compost' (Dorling Kindersley, 2007) and 'The Book of Weeds' (Dorling Kindersley 2009). He writes an occasional gardening column for the Daily Telegraph and frequently speaks to gardening clubs and societies.

His most recent book is a popular book about biodiversity:

- **Do We Need Pandas? – the uncomfortable truth about biodiversity'** (Green Books 2010)

which is the theme of this lecture.

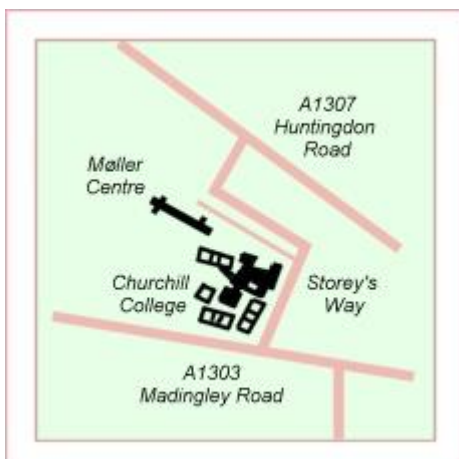
A new book on invasive species

- **Where do Camels Belong?** (Profile Books)

is out early next year.

Practical Matters

Those attending the CSAR lecture may park in the Senior Car Park, on Churchill Road, which is off Storey's Way. More parking is available on the road further down, and outside the Möller Centre.



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