From: **john baxter** u3asecondnature@194137518.mailchimpapp.com
Subject: u3a Second Nature 061 (May 2026)
Date: 9 May 2026 at 11:59
To: u3asecondnature@gmail.com

JB

u3a Climate Change & Environment

Second Nature 061 (May 2026)

*Second Nature (SN) is a newsletter from the u3a Subject Adviser on Climate Change & Environment. To **subscribe** click here (you don't need to be a u3a member); to **unsubscribe** use the link in the email footer.*

All past issues are available here.

If you know someone who might like this newsletter please forward it to them. This issues welcomes new subscribers Margie from Hampstead Garden Suburb, Christopher from Malmesbury, Peter from Stroud, Wiki from Test Valley, Brian from Halesworth, and Mark from an undisclosed location.

In this issue: correction to my comment on the FoE SMR report, treat Earth like a spaceship, Amsterdam bans public ads for burgers and airlines, climate threat to New Orleans, plug-in solar, subscriber comment about railways and living frugally, decoupling GDP growth and emissions growth, impulse buying, CO2 levels in the atmosphere. SN061 draws on or links to material from BBC News, the Guardian, The Conversation, Friends of the Earth, Nature Sustainability, Our World in Data, and subscribers Alan, Barney, Chris, David, Martin, and Sarah. All of it is gratefully acknowledged. I use sources that I believe to be credible and, in most cases, not behind paywalls. For some you may have to register.

Know your audience

The most used link in SN060 was These 'buy less' tricks helped me save hundreds: more comment on this in Feedback. In second place was £500 plug-in solar panels are about to go on sale: here's what you need to know.There is more unplug-in solar in Some UK homes not ready for plug-in solar I Joseph Mullane for Homebuilding UK, 5 May.

Correction

In Second Nature 060 I mentioned this report:

Are small modular nuclear reactors needed? I Chris Gordon-Smith for FoE, 27 April

and I wrote *it is perhaps unsurprising that the report concludes that we don't need SMRs in our energy mix.* Chris responded:

One point I'll emphasise: the report doesn't conclude in an unqualified way that we don't need SMRs in our energy mix. It focuses specifically on the question of whether SMRs are needed during periods of low renewable generation and high demand.

It is the variability of renewable energy that is often mentioned when the case for SMRs is discussed. The conclusion of the report on this specific topic is: No, we don't need SMRs to deal with the variability of renewables.

The report acknowledges that there are broader considerations beyond this specific question. If there are any such considerations that lead to the conclusion that we do need SMRs, I would be interested to hear about them.

I am glad to set the record straight. You can send comments to Chris using this contact page.

In the press (and on the web)

Chris Rapley, a professor of climate science at UCL, writes in The Conversation that We need to treat Earth like a spaceship. Our planet is a closed system – not an open frontier.

Amsterdam has become the first capital city to **ban public advertisements for both meat and fossil fuel products**. Ads for burgers, petrol cars and airlines have been stripped from billboards, tram shelters, and metro stations. The Dutch Meat Association and the Dutch Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators are unhappy. Discuss.

Amsterdam bans public adverts for meat and fossil fuels I Anna Holligan for BBC News, 4 May

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Sea-level rise and the erosion of wetlands will swallow up New Orleans within a few generations, and relocation of people should start immediately, according to a paper in *Nature Sustainability*

Nature Sustainability.

New Orleans relocation must start now due to sea level [rise] I Oliver Milman in the Guardian, 4 May
Climate-driven depopulation and adaptation realities in America's coastal ground zero I Törnqvist et al, Nature Sustainability, 4 May

Milman writes *Louisiana has lost 2,000 sq miles of land to coastal erosion since the 1930s, with a further 3,000 sq miles expected to vanish over the next 50 years. On average a football pitch-sized area goes every 100 minutes. Levees and other works have constrained the naturally meandering Mississippi and pushed the sediment it carries into the Gulf of Mexico. The Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion project was intended to help restore a more natural flow in the Delta and allow sediment to build up in coastal areas where it has been lost. However, Louisiana's Republican governor, scrapped the project last year.* [Edited]

Feedback and Groups News

All feedback is welcome as long as it is constructive (or instructive). Emails sent to u3asecondnature@gmail.com may be used here or on the website, unless you make it clear when you email that you don't want me to use your content. I may edit the material to save space, but I take care not to change its meaning. I won't share your contact details. I keep your emails in a Gmail folder to which only I have access, and delete them when I don't need them any more.

Barney emails to say *great work, I really appreciate your effort in putting SN together! Always interesting and not always depressing.* Thank you Barney: I think *not always depressing* is the best I can expect for a climate newsletter.

Martin said this about Hannah Ritchie's piece on rail electrification:

I would strongly agree that our UK, or at least English, approach of having a hugely variable electrification construction output each year is extremely costly and counter productive. It means projects keep reinventing the processes and I know that it doesn't work.

I would however like to challenge the statement that "almost no freight is transported on electrified tracks" with a reported 2%. I note it is exactly what Ritchie states, but I would say that she misreports her own figures. The graph that is included and from which this percentage is drawn is for "Share of freight services that are electrified". I suggest that this means that they are 'electrically hauled' not that they are on 'electrified tracks'. Major spines for freight tonnage are the main lines radiating from London. The West Coast for example

for freight tonnage are the main lines radiating from London. The West Coast for example carries many Intermodal freights; the Great Eastern line from Ipswich to London carries half of all rail freight coming out of Felixstowe. All of these lines are fully electrified.

This may of course be worse because it means diesel haulage whilst transported "on electrified tracks". However this is being addressed by the addition of more bi-modal locomotives which will help with the diverse nature of freight routes.

The other thing that I find strange is the author's argument that's it's understandable the US has virtually no electric haulage because it "built a large diesel-powered network before the arrival of electrified overhead lines". Firstly of course it built a steam-powered network. Secondly I would suggest, but without evidence, that the likes of India or Russia didn't build many 'electric-powered routes'. They were probably often steam, or possibly diesel, and were then converted. So the author's argument excusing the US falls flat.

Retired energy consultant **David** also commented on the Ritchie piece:*Around 40% of UK railway lines are not electrified because they have a low volume of traffic, especially in remote areas such as the Highlands. These lines have diesel-electric powered trains which Network Rail set a target to replace with electric power by 2040; this does need to be by expensive electrification but could be by simply replacing the diesel engine with a hydrogen-fuel cell-electric power. This was demonstrated years ago in the Hydroflex conversion by Porterbrook and the Breeze conversion by Alstom that have both completed passenger trials. The problem is the electrolytic grade hydrogen needed (cleaner than 99.99%) when produced by the very expensive grid electricity makes the hydrogen far too expensive. The UK has the highest priced electricity of all of Europe to encourage the building of wind and solar farms. Low cost hydrogen produced directly by off-grid electricity would be a possible solution. I had a ride in Hydroflex many years ago at the Rail Research depot.*

Train enthusiasts may also like A battery-powered train on the West Ealing to Greenford branch line (from January 2026).

Sarah writes:

It is a really nice newsletter. Much appreciated.

Thank you.

I particularly liked the quote from Alan:

"As long as the zeitgeist - the growth of consumer capitalism remains - humanity's denouement is certain. It's the elephant in the room.

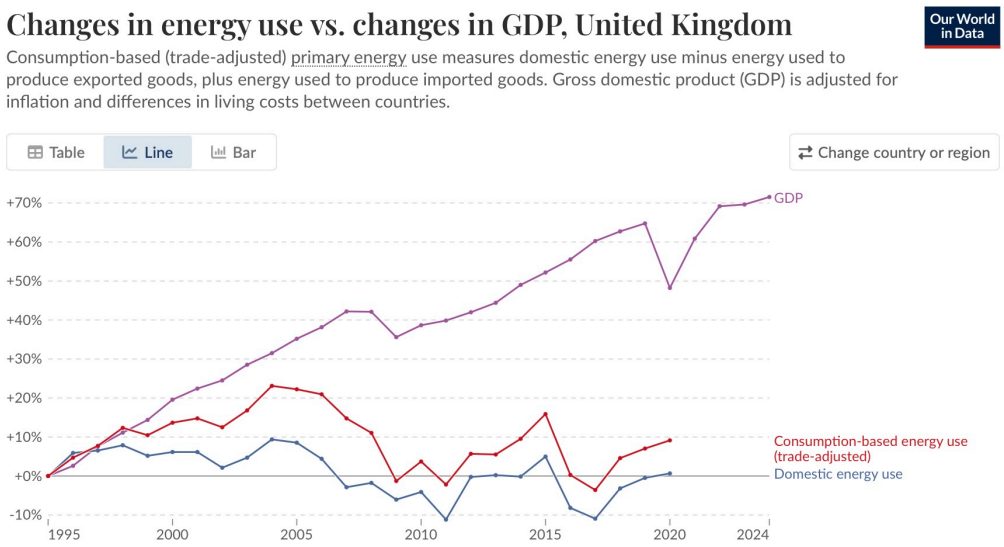
People will talk endlessly about transitioning, renewables, greening etc, but almost no one talks about the real culprit - our western lifestyle and its reach across the world.

Science won't solve this very, very urgent problem, only honesty about its true cause will save our skins."

I think this is about the most basic issue facing the planet. Sadly, there seems to be no means to reverse it, and no will to do so. With the mantra of wanting ever more economic growth, that depends on ever more consumer spending, in one form or another. There appears to be no actual evidence of real decoupling of energy or resource use, from economic growth. Endlessly aiming for "lower energy costs" only means people (and everything else) can just use more of it. And there is wilful blindness to the fact that globally at least 75% of all energy consumed is from fossil fuels, with just 25% or so from electricity. From the way people are so excited about renewables, one might be led to believe that the figure was the other way round. But, as you say, people really want to believe that things are going well, and we are on the right path. Optimism has to take precedence over reality. If people are told the truth, they do not like it. Organisations that tell their members too plainly the truth, lose members. Mindless optimism is the general policy.

Sorry to bang on !

There certainly is evidence that GDP growth can happen without emissions growth; but nature doesn't care about GDP, it only cares about the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere and cceans.



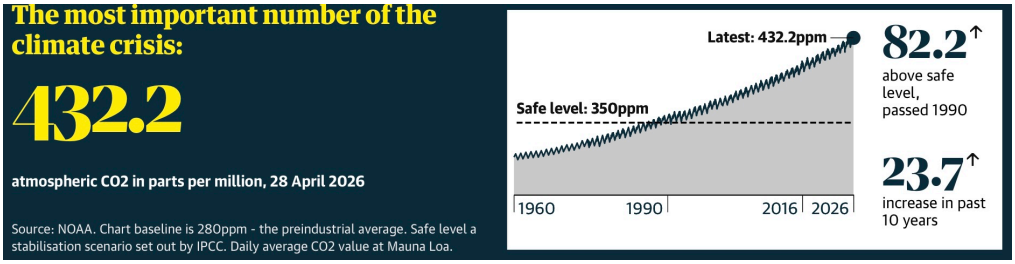
Click on the chart for source data.

The problem I have blaming 'consumers' is that I so rarely meet them. Most of my generation (and my children's generation) have reached 'peak stuff'. There must be consumers out there else Amazon, Temu, Shein and the rest would go out of business, but they are not the sort of people that read this newsletter.

I was gobsmacked by the Jane Hoskyn piece on impulse buying linked in SN060. The savings from her various 'anti-consumption strategies' total £1170 a month. Hoskyn is a freelance journalist who makes her living from consumerism. In a very similar article last year she wrote *it's about targeting your spending on things you genuinely want*. Spending on things you don't genuinely want or need is one definition of consumerism, and as I write this there are thousands of skilled marketeers trying to get us to do exactly that. Sarah says *I glanced at her article, and gave up as it seemed so completely stupid. I buy the absolute minimum - other than food, books, occasional shoes, occasional gardening tools ... grandkids get only toys from charity shops. I think my daughter has, in the past, ordered several sizes etc of a dress, in order to choose one and then return the others. I believe the returned items are rarely re-sold. Criminal!*

Alan emails:

Should you regularly post this graph on your bulletins John, so that your readers can see the reality of the problem?

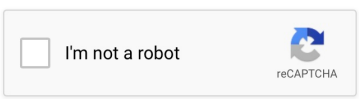


Guardian graphic.

The next time someone tells you "CO2 isn't a pollutant, it's a plant food", show them this diagram. The little wiggles show where, every Northern hemisphere spring, plants coming into leaf pull down millions of tonnes of CO2 and barely make any difference to the amount that is in the atmosphere.

One part per million of CO2 is equivalent to 7.82 billion tonnes of the stuff - so even if we stopped all emissions tomorrow we have to remove around 647.5 billion tonnes of CO2 from the atmosphere to get to the safe level. I find that a sobering number.

Use of AI



No AI tools are used to compile Second Nature; any mistakes should be attributed to the human editor.

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