

Let U.N. Climate Report Be Our Wake-up Call

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By now, many of us understand the enormous impacts humans have on the environment. The time to reverse those impacts is long overdue, and we should lead the way here in Southern California.

The August release of the [United Nations IPCC report](#) documenting the greatest threat to our planet, climate change, demands immediate action. We can stop activities that threaten our planet by eliminating fossil fuels and ending clear cutting of forests, and we can double down on activities that improve our planet by switching to cleaner energy, restoring native ecosystems and planting native trees in appropriate microclimates.

Understanding which activities harm wildlife empowers us to stop and adopt beneficial actions in our daily lives. An important aspect of preventing species collapse is removing poisons that unintentionally kill wildlife. Getting rid of neonicotinoid insecticides may be the single most effective way to save monarch butterflies.

California's western monarchs numbered in the millions in the 1980s, and now their population has dwindled to fewer than 2,000. We need to eliminate insecticides that broadly target all types of insects, including native bees. We also must stop the destruction of monarch habitat. To bring back these treasured butterflies from the brink, we can all do our part by planting pesticide-free native milkweed and preserving tree groves in coastal areas where monarchs overwinter.

Another poison commonly used is anticoagulant rodenticide, which may be intended for pests but end up passing through the food chain and killing raptors, bobcats, coyotes and mountain lions. The passage of the California Ecosystems Protection Act (Assembly Bill 1788) was an important step toward reducing anticoagulant use.

A 2017 [pilot study](#) by Ventura County's Watershed Protection District found that introducing rodent predators to farmland is more effective at controlling rodents than anticoagulant poisons. Hawks and owls were found to be as much as 66% more effective at controlling rodent damage. By eliminating anticoagulant rodenticides, we also stop the unintended poisoning of the very raptors that keep rodents in check.

Rodenticide poisoning and habitat loss is a dangerous mix for California wildlife. Researchers in the Santa Cruz Mountains found more rodenticide poisoning among bobcats in areas where their habitat is constrained. Vehicle strikes and rodenticide poisoning were the main causes of death, with 94% of the bobcats [in this study](#) showing evidence of rodenticide exposure.

While curbing rodenticide use can help wildlife, improving and building connectivity features on roadways can help both wildlife and drivers. There were over 25,000 vehicle collisions with large

mammals in the United States between 2015 and 2018, and these incidents caused loss of human lives, injuries and property damage at an estimated cost of more than [\\$1 billion](#).

We know [wildlife crossings work](#) as evidenced by some thrilling footage from a new overpass of the I-90 in Washington showing a herd of elk safely crossing, and pronghorn and other large mammals successfully crossing Wyoming's Highway 191. In fact, Utah saw a [98.5% reduction](#) and Colorado saw an [89% reduction](#) in wildlife-vehicle strikes on stretches of highways with crossings.

One of the most exciting projects in our region is the planned wildlife bridge over Highway 101 at Liberty Canyon. It will span 10 lanes of freeway as well as Agoura Road, linking core areas of open space where wildlife is regularly killed trying to cross the freeway. In addition to reducing collisions, the overpass will go a long way toward helping the dwindling mountain lion population in the Santa Monica Mountains to reconnect to the wild places that were fragmented by roadways.

But this crossing and all the measures adopted so far to protect wildlife and wild places are not enough. At a time when we are hearing the clarion call of the IPCC report and seeing the likely extinction of iconic species, we know we must do more.

From bold leadership to individual actions, having a greater understanding of the unintended consequences of our actions and learning how to correct them can make the difference for the survival of species in our area and in our world. Indeed, it is the only thing that can.

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