The Sad Legacy of David Suzuki

by

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So David Suzuki’s next ‘Nature Challenge’ is apparently challenging students to determine if there isn’t some “legal way of throwing our so-called leaders into jail because what they’re doing [about climate change] is a criminal act”, to quote the National Post (Feb 7, 2008).

It appears that a religious fervor for protecting nature has transformed Canada’s leading environmentalist into an emotional bully intolerant of anyone, including other scientists, who don’t see things his way.

Over the years, I’ve heard and read statements by David Suzuki that are too often misleading or incorrect, especially about climate. He, and many like him, claims natural events are unnatural thus guaranteeing that they appear right. What he conveniently overlooks, and may have learned had he remained a scientist rather than becoming an activist, is that nature and climate frequently change dramatically and in very short time periods.

Suzuki gets away with this misinterpretation by fully exploiting the false authority of his claimed and cultivated position as a scientist and environmentalist. He does this despite the fact that he deliberately abandoned his university research position in the 1980s and has no more qualifications as an environmentalist than many of us.

Indeed, it is arrogant for people such as Suzuki to claim that they are environmentalists as if it were some sort of exclusive club, inferring they care and the rest of us don’t. It is more likely he, and those who work with him, are pushing a political agenda to create the world they want. H. L. Mencken, one of the most influential American writers of the early 20th century, said, “The urge to save humanity is almost always a false front for the urge to rule.”

Suzuki’s image is being increasingly tarnished as evidence accumulates against his positions and statements. This was bound to happen with climate because he ignores the standard scientific method, which tries to disprove hypotheses. As Richard Lindzen said about the hypothesis that human addition of CO2 would cause significant global warming; the consensus was reached before the research had even begun.
Despite personal attacks and a campaign of disinformation by alarmists, it is science that is destroying the human-caused climate change hypothesis. The disinformation of alarmists, Suzuki included, has gone through many phases—the now familiar ‘consensus’ argument, the ad hominem attacks (‘climate deniers’, ‘climate criminals’, ‘international outlaws’, etc.) to presenting misinformation to political leaders.

The latest position is that ‘the science is settled’.

In February of last year, Suzuki stormed out of an AM640 Toronto radio interview when interviewer, John Oakley, made the accurate observation that global warming science is not a “totally settled issue.” Besides Suzuki’s aggressive behavior, his promotion of certainty in a field scientists understand to be immature is counterproductive to climate research. If the science is settled then why is there literally a deluge of scientific papers coming out on the topic? If the science is settled, then this all must be an enormous waste of money.

Suzuki raised the spin to a professional level when he teamed up with James Hoggan of Hoggan and Associates, one of Canada’s largest public relations firms. According to Hoggan’s Web site, “Hoggan has provided strategic communications services to the DSF [David Suzuki Foundation] for more than 15 years, providing communications advice on salmon farming, climate change, forest preservation and international conservation projects.

Hoggan continues to provide ongoing support to the DSF Nature Challenge and its Capital Contribution campaign. Hoggan also recently prepared a report for the DSF Board based on extensive national research on how to guide the evolution of the DSF’s communications strategy to help become more effective in building broad-based support among decision makers, opinion leaders and other influential Canadians.”

It would be hard to imagine a closer relationship between supposedly distinct entities that that which exists between Hoggan and Suzuki. Hoggan and Associates list the David Suzuki Foundation as one of their “Research Sponsors” and Hoggan himself has served on the Board of the DSF for the past 11 years, now even replacing Suzuki as Chair of the Foundation.

According to the DSF 2006 annual report, Hoggan and Associates is a large financial donor to the Suzuki Foundation and Hoggan has personally arranged “a future gift” to the society.

Not surprisingly, Suzuki regularly boosts Hoggan’s global warming projects in the media and Hoggan is quick to use his project to attack those of us who dare disagree with Suzuki. That Hoggan’s project has been funded by an Alberta-based lawyer who has pleaded guilty to multi-million dollar money laundering charges seems to bother no one.

Suzuki’s ignorance of fundamental science is breathtaking. For example, he wrote an article on his website asserting and has often told audiences, “It’s been estimated that as many as three species go extinct every hour.” This would mean that he is claiming that 72 species a day, 504 a week and 26,208 a year are disappearing.

When Greenpeace founder Patrick Moore and I ask him to name these disappearing species, Suzuki is unable. He apparently chooses to ignore the new species being found all the time or that it is estimated we have only found and named about 35% of the world’s plant and animal species.

As National Geographic explains, “To date, taxonomists have identified less than two million distinct species, mostly mammals and birds. But it’s estimated that the number of undiscovered species—primarily fish, fungi, insects, and microbes—ranges from ten million to more than one hundred million. Even at the low estimate, it’s an enormous number.”

Suzuki must be held accountable for the social irresponsibility of his statements. If he knows his information is incorrect, then he deliberately misleads. If he doesn’t know, then he is not entitled to the credibility he claims. What he is doing is tantamount to shouting fire in a theatre—a crime in many jurisdictions.

Ironically, it is not as crowded a theatre as Suzuki asserts, but then he plays fast and loose with the facts about population issues as well.

Hints that he is aware of his culpability include an increasing unwillingness to answer questions, an avoidance of debates on issues and personal attacks against

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http://www.davidsuzuki.org/Conservation/Endangered_Species/

See appendix for text
his detractors either directly or through the Hoggan global warming project.

Slowly but surely, new segments of the public are becoming aware of Suzuki’s duplicity. After a presentation I delivered in Saskatoon, a farmer’s wife told me she idolized Suzuki until three months earlier. Then she watched a program on farming and instantly recognized his biases and inaccuracies. Wisely, she said she didn’t know enough about other topics he covered, but she now viewed them all with suspicion.

The more topics Suzuki covers, the more new groups are apprised of his bias and ignorance of the facts. As the old French political comment says, the higher up the tree the monkey goes, the more he shows his backside. Perhaps this is why there seems to now be a concerted PR effort to renew and refresh the Suzuki image.

Everyone is entitled to their opinions and everyone is entitled to be wrong. However, advocates should be held to a far higher standard when they have access to a powerful public platform, as do Suzuki and rock stars like Bono and Geldof, who also use their fame to push personal, usually uninformed, views. Sadly, these are the people who are granted direct access to politicians while credible scientists and experts are ignored. Of course, the hypocrisy of their lifestyles seriously undermines their credibility. John Travolta telling me to save energy from the cockpit of one of five personal jets needs no comment.

Similarly, Al Gore’s giant carbon footprint stomps on his credibility.

It’s fitting that the last millennium ended and the new one began in the wrong year and after wasting billions on the completely false Y2K ‘crisis’ (note: January 1, 2001 was the real start of the new millennium since counting started at 1, not 0, AD). Many profited financially and politically from this mistake, however and it is past time they were held accountable, even if we can’t recoup the money or offset the damage they have done. I would like to see a television documentary in which all those who scared the public with false threats of impending Y2K doom are held responsible.

Similarly, I would like to see history’s false prophets of environmental doom held to account, starting with David Suzuki. Over many years, he has presented one doomsday scenario after another, most, to my knowledge, far removed from reality and failing to materialize. For example, about 20 years ago he said we had 10 years left before environmental collapse. He needs to explain why his
warnings of doom proved baseless. He needs to explain why he frequently uses incomplete or inaccurate information and why he believes exploitation of fear, even with young children, improves anything or leads to sensible, scientifically based progress.

At the 1999 International Forum on Globalization in Seattle, Suzuki told the audience, “In the 1980s I deliberately left research. I gave up my government grant at the very time genetics was taking off. At the very time that biotechnology was emerging as not only an exciting area, but one that was very lucrative financially. I felt that there was a need for a group of people who could give credible, knowledgeable critiques of what the implications of this new area might be.” Suzuki apparently saw his new role as a crusader to counteract evil. What was the evil? How, and who, was he to sit in moral judgment of what other people are doing?

He then generalized about his fellow geneticists “I knew from personal experience what most geneticists either don’t acknowledge or don’t even know about. And that is the dark side of this very young science.” Of course his “personal experience” was the internment camps for Japanese Canadians—a shameful event in Canadian history to be sure. But if Suzuki was concerned that modern genetics could go astray, he could have had far more impact by remaining within the genetic community. Why not remain scientifically active, but also work to create audit and oversight committees to monitor and ensure your fears are not realized?

It is ironic that Suzuki, of all people, years ago advocated “the very way that science progresses” as being: “You get a set of observations: you try to make sense of them by constructing a hypothesis. You test the hypothesis and chances are, you go, “Oh man was that ever wrong. We better do something else” Or you modify it and change it around. That is how science progresses, but we forget that.”

Suzuki has apparently forgotten this approach in almost every issue he has pursued as an activist, most especially the global warming scare, and now ridicules those of us who try to practice the scientific method he once promoted so vigorously.

One must wonder how many billions have been misspent because of the exploitation of fear and lack of knowledge of David Suzuki and his fellow travelers. Consider the energy problems in Ontario, the $6 billion allocated to
climate change by the Federal government since 1997, the pressuring of Prime Minister Jean Chretien to sign Kyoto, the stress created in the salmon, forestry, farming and many other industries, not to mention the communities seriously compromised by the activities of David Suzuki, his Foundation and their allies.

Canada does have real environmental problems, but they are rarely the ones Suzuki identifies. Good environmental policy making in Canada is seriously compromised because of the hysteria his actions have engendered, and those who truly understand the issues are afraid to speak out because of fear of attack. While claiming to care about the environment, Suzuki has created a poisonous atmosphere in which politicians are forced by political correctness to make decisions that are clearly bad for Canada and the natural world. As a scientist who started his career with such promise, such a conclusion to his decades of work is sad indeed.


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APPENDIX: Global warming charlatan
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Witnesses in a legal trial are sometimes compelled to answer questions that have little or nothing to do with the subject they are testifying on in order to determine whether or not their word can be trusted in the absence of incontrovertible, corroborating evidence. If it can be shown that the witness is a liar, then the veracity of their testimony can, and should, be called into question.

Which brings me to the subject of David Suzuki.

It's hard to imagine any Canadian being unfamiliar with David Suzuki and his long career as an environmental activist. Indeed, Suzuki has, over the years, managed to parley worry about the environment into a multi-million dollar business, making him one of Canada's great contemporary capitalists.

On Thursday (February 15), Suzuki was a guest on the John Oakley show on AM 640 in Toronto as part of his cross-Canada tour drumming up support for the Kyoto Protocol, (or more accurately, stirring up opposition to the federal Conservative Government for its environmental transgressions, real and imagined, specifically its apparent reticence in implementing the provisions of the treaty).

During the course of that interview, Suzuki makes a number of claims that are, shall we say, dubious.

To begin with, he suggests that if Canada fails to meet its Kyoto targets, we will become "international outlaws". This assertion is stunningly ignorant. The Kyoto Protocol is not criminal law by any standard. It is an agreement – in other words, a contract, not unlike those that people enter into all the time. Parties to contracts sometimes find, for any number of reasons, that they are unable to meet their obligations, forcing them to re-negotiate the terms of the contract, abrogate the contract, or simply repudiate it. Sometimes the act of breaking a contract is accompanied by penalties as stipulated in the agreement, and sometimes penalties are imposed by courts – but when they are, it is always civil courts that impose penalties, never criminal courts. It seems that in David Suzuki's world, you would be branded an 'outlaw' if you lost your job and could no longer afford the mortgage payments you believed you could.
It gets worse.

Having demonstrated how little he knows about the workings of international treaties, Suzuki dismisses questions about the scientific integrity of Kyoto, characterizing as "a lot of baloney" Oakley’s observation that "a lot of scientists feel they're intimidated from speaking out…"

"2,500 scientists signed the IPCC (Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change) Report on February 2!" Suzuki exclaims.

My suspicion already aroused by his false allegation of ‘outlaw’ behaviour, I decided to check this out for myself – and discovered that, in fact, only 51 individuals signed the IPCC Report released on February 2. (Click here to download a copy of this report.)

It seems that the Great Suzuki got that one wrong too. Quelle surprise!

There’s more.

After Suzuki insinuates that scientists who disagree with him are "shilling" for big corporations, Oakley asks him where he gets his funding. Suzuki replies that his foundation takes no money from governments and complains that “corporations have not been interested in funding us.”

Corporations uninterested? Is it possible that the Great Suzuki has failed to attract a single corporate donation to his feel-good campaign to save the earth? Not one?


The David Suzuki Foundation also received donations from EnCana Corporation, a world leader in natural gas production and oil sands development, ATCO Gas, Alberta’s principle distributor of natural gas, and a number of pension funds including the OPG (Ontario Power Generation) Employees’ and Pensioners’ Charity Trust. OPG is one of the largest suppliers of electricity in the world operating 5 fossil fuel-burning generation plants and 3 nuclear plants… which begs the question – is Suzuki now pro-nuclear power?

If I were less generous I might be tempted to accuse Suzuki of hypocrisy for accepting donations from corporations that he must believe contribute significantly to the production of greenhouse gases, but that would miss the point entirely. The real issue is that, contrary to his clear assertion, the David Suzuki Foundation does receive funding from corporations.

The jury may still be out when it comes to assessing climate change and global warming; it’s not out when it comes to assessing David Suzuki and the reliability of his testimony though. Suzuki is a charlatan, a shameless self-promoter who foments fear in his audience before promising them salvation – but only if they buy his miracle cure. The only difference is that in his case, Suzuki’s miracle cure is deadly to those who take it.