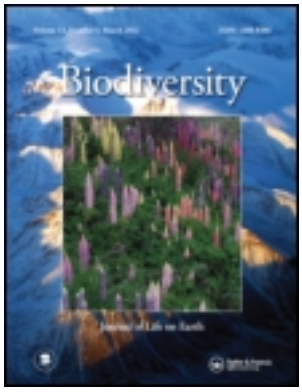

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Polar biodiversity: on the front lines of climate change

Glennis Lewis & Stephen Aitken

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Polar biodiversity: on the front lines of climate change

Recent data from the US National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC) shows that this year's Arctic sea ice shrank 18% more than the previous record set in 2007, an exclamation point on the penetrating research that appears in this special edition and a chilling reminder of the rapid rate of change impacting circumpolar regions. It is well known that reflective snow and ice have a powerful influence on global climate, thus making climatologists' predictions of the collapse of Arctic sea ice within 4–5 years all the more worrisome and the call to action more urgent. The NSIDC reports that the warming of Arctic areas is increasing at a rate of 10% per decade. Antarctica, due to its vast size, has not been affected uniformly but the West Antarctic Peninsula is one of the fastest warming areas on Earth.

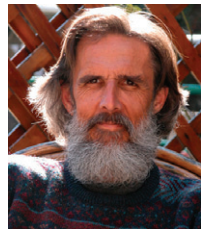
The papers in this special edition serve to further our understanding of the adaptations of life forms in extreme environments and provide baseline data from which the impacts of climate change may be measured. From bryophytes to cephalopods, from marine algae to large vertebrates, research on the impacts of rapidly changing polar environments on these organisms creates a baseline for improved monitoring and the strengthening of science-based management of Arctic and Antarctic ecosystems.

But the front line of biodiversity science increasingly depends upon the public and political arenas as well. Too often political leaders fail to respond to the growing body of climate change science, choosing instead to ignore the subject and ignore the science. Political candidates may even openly pander to those constituents who deny the existence of climate change. In Canada, the federal government is increasingly seen as being openly hostile to environmental science; deliberately weakening environmental impact assessments of resource developments while steaming full-throttle ahead to export those resources to international markets. If ever there was a time for governments to incorporate science into a sober response to the climate change crisis, it is now; we cannot ignore the severe and inevitable consequences of failing to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

We would like to thank our Special Board of Editors, listed on p. iii, who generously devoted their time and expertise at all stages of production of this edition. Not the least of their many contributions is the keynote paper, *The impacts of climate change on circumpolar biodiversity* on pp. 134–143, that provides context and background to the papers in this special issue.

As you may know, this journal has been the flagship publication of the Tropical Conservancy for more than a decade. We are pleased to announce our official name change to *Biodiversity Conservancy*, a change that better reflects the mandate of our organisation. Please visit our new glossy green website at www.biodiversityconservancy.org for more information on our programmes and conservation activities.

Glennis Lewis
Editor-in-Chief



Stephen Aitken
Managing Editor

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