

Is the 24 hour day killing off Life On Earth?

by
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It is time that we should be focusing attention on the harm done by the 24 hour day. Perhaps we should be concerned about how sustainable is our collective future? Medical evidence for this harm, which is being caused to human health, by light at night (LAN), is mounting. We are seeing melatonin suppression, caused by LAN, reducing our ability to fight cancer.

Children, sleep deprived, are hypertensive, hyperactive and likely to succumb to obesity. (1) Emergency workers like doctors and nurses, who work overly long shifts, risk making poor decisions. Danish women have already been awarded compensation for shift work “causing” breast cancer (2009). The WHO (World Health Organisation, December 2007) has already declared that shift work is a “possible” carcinogen. And shift work is only possible with light at night, LAN.

The harm to both flora and fauna in the 24 hour day is also increasing. (2) It denies life its natural circadian rhythm, which apparently regulates ALL life forms on Earth. It is not just nocturnal creatures like bats which are suffering a decline. So too are sparrows! Light at night sucks insects to their deaths. (2) Sparrow chicks need insects (just like bats) – without them the chicks just die.

So then, we have light at night, insect decline, potential widespread species decline - all of which go hand in hand with the 24 hour day of the last 50 years! We have lived on the Earth with many other species for millennia. We have only had the 24 hour day for a few decades. Our own survival instinct, honed over (the same) millennia, is now killing us. (1) Light pollution, making it impossible for anyone to see the Milky Way, may well be the least of our problems. (3)

More importantly, now that we face the last week of the climate change summit, we face a “just too late” scenario. The hidden harm of the modern 24 hour day has created that harm for over 112 years (at least according to the LA Times, 14 September, 1897). It is tempting to draw parallels with other harms drawn from the 20th century, particularly those of ionizing radiation, radioactivity, heavy metals, hydrocarbon carcinogens, smoking and asbestos. Once the harm has been done it cannot be fixed. I fear that the politicians this week will talk the talk but that they are too scared to walk the walk. The harm has been done and cannot be undone: we face a purely palliative future now - on “good old” planet Earth?

References: -

(1) “Lights Out”, Wiley and Formby, Pocket Press, Simon and Schuster, 2001 (354 pages) – http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/offer-listing/0671038680/ref=ed_oe_p_olp

(2) “Ecological Consequences of Artificial Night Lighting”, eds, Catherine Rich and Travis Longcore, Island Press, 2006 (458 pages) – http://www.islandpress.org/bookstore/details.php?prod_id=213

(3) “Blinded by the Light?”, CfDS handbook, 2009 (40 pages) - <http://www.britastro.org/dark-skies/handbook.html>