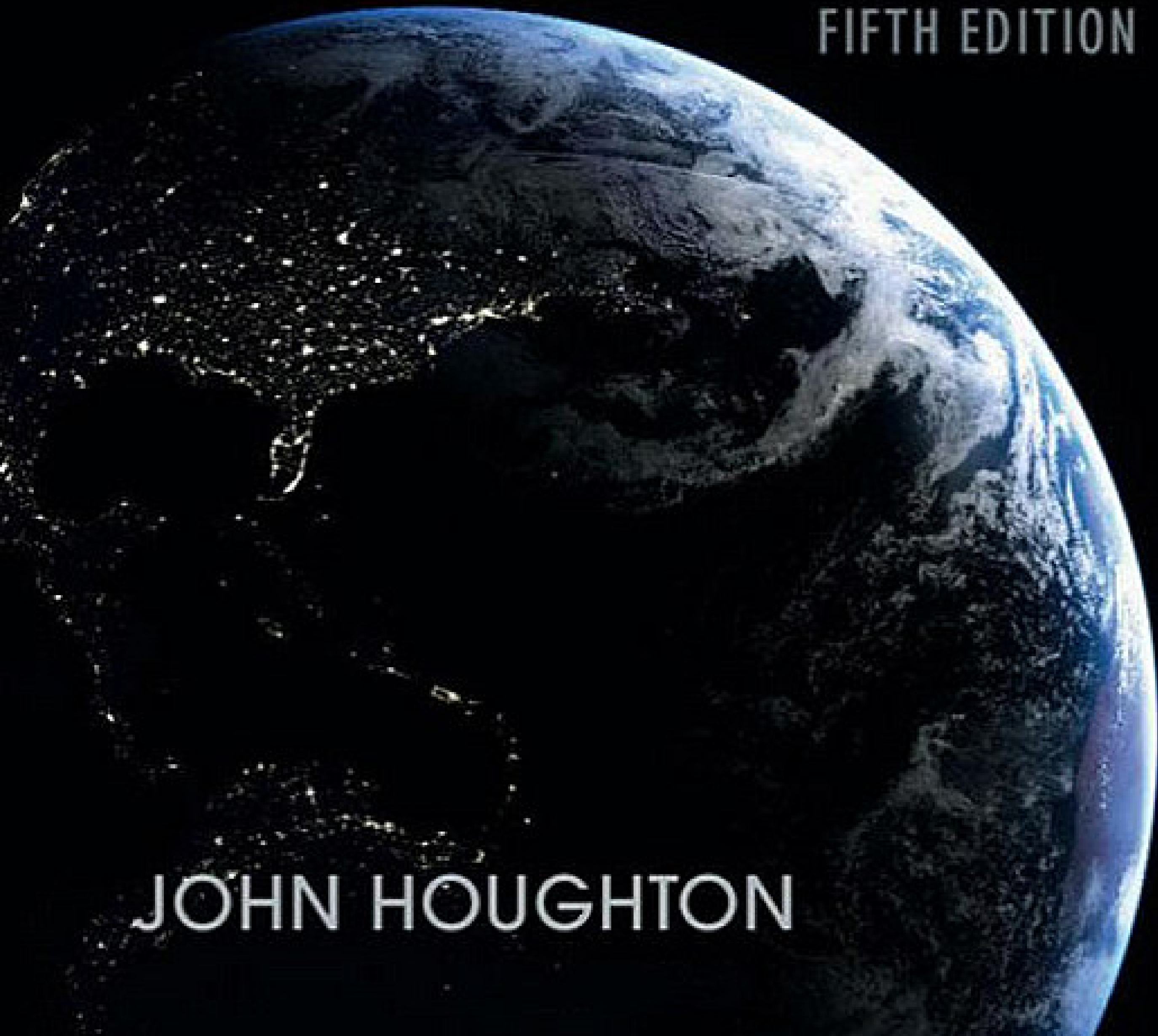
GLOBAL WARMING

THE COMPLETE BRIEFING

FIFTH EDITION



JOHN HOUGHTON

Global Warming

The Complete Briefing | Fifth Edition

Praise for the Fifth Edition:

'Still the best undergraduate textbook on climate change. I will definitely be using it on my course.'

Professor Eric M. Kramer, Bard College at Simon's Rock

'If you're looking for an authoritative, comprehensive – and yet highly accessible – treatment of climate change science, impacts, and solutions, look no further than Sir John Houghton's *Global Warming*. The former co-chair of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change brings the problem down to Earth, making it both understandable and engaging. As a man of both faith and science, Sir John makes a compelling case that we must act now if we are to preserve Earth's habitability for future generations.'

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Distinguished Professor, Pennsylvania State University;
author of *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars*

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Co-Chair of Working Group III of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

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When Houghton discusses the need for action, we can all see the eyes of our children and grandchildren through his prose.'

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'The fifth edition builds on the successful fourth edition. The text starts with an accessible introduction to the scientific processes that control our planet's climate, and builds towards developing technical and political solutions to anthropogenic climate change. Throughout, appealing graphics and visuals keep the reader engaged. . . . the section on 'Some global economics' (Chapter 9) is, of all the climate change texts I have used, the best introduction for students to the question of whether mitigation or adaptation is likely to be more expensive in the future.'

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John Perry, *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*

'I can recommend [this book] to anyone who wants to get a better perspective on the topic of global warming . . . a very readable and comprehensive guide to the changes that are occurring now, and could occur in the future, as a result of human action . . . brings the global warming debate right up to date . . . Read Houghton's book if you really want to understand both the scientific and political issues involved.'

William Harston, *The Independent*

'. . . precise account of the science, accompanied by figures, graphs, boxes on specific points, and summaries at the end of each chapter, with questions for students . . . ranges beyond the science into the diplomacy, politics, economics and ethics of the problem, which together present a formidable challenge to human understanding and capacity for action.'

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'. . . a widely praised book on global warming and its consequences.'

The Economist

'. . . very thorough and presents a balanced, impartial picture.'

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'I would thoroughly recommend this book to anyone concerned about global warming. It provides an excellent essentially non-technical guide on scientific and political aspects of the subject. It is an essential briefing for students and science teachers.'

Tony Waters, *The Observatory*

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‘This is a remarkable book . . . It is a model of clear exposition and comprehensible writing . . . Quite apart from its value as a background reader for science teachers and students, it would make a splendid basis for a college general course.’

Andrew Bishop, Association for Science Education

‘This very readable and informative book is valuable for anyone wanting a broad overview of what we know about climate change, its potential impacts on society and the natural world, and what could be done to mitigate or adapt to global warming. To this end, discussion questions are included at the end of each chapter. The paperback edition is an especially good value . . . Houghton’s compact book is an accessible, well-researched, and broadly based introduction to the immensely complicated global warming problem.’

Professor Dennis L. Hartmann,
Department of Atmospheric Sciences, University of Washington

‘. . . a useful book for students and laymen to understand some of the complexities of the global warming issue. Questions and essay topics at the end of each chapter provide useful follow-up work and the range of material provided under one cover is impressive. At a student-friendly price, this is a book to buy for yourself and not rely on the library copy.’

Allen Perry, *Holocene*

‘This book is one of the best I have encountered, that deal with climate change and some of its anthropogenic causes. Well written, well organised, richly illustrated and referenced, it should be required reading for anybody concerned with the fate of our planet.’

Elmar R. Reiter, *Meteorology and Atmospheric Physics*

‘Sir John Houghton is one of the few people who can legitimately use the phrase ‘the complete briefing’ as a subtitle for a book on global warming . . . Sir John has done us all a great favour in presenting such a wealth of material so clearly and accessibly and in drawing attention to the ethical underpinnings of our interpretation of this area of environmental science.’

Progress in Physical Geography

‘. . . this complete briefing on global warming is remarkably factual and inclusive. Houghton’s concern about planet Earth and its people blends well with his hopes for global cooperation in concert with the spirit of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.’

Choice

‘. . . this book is the most comprehensive guide available. Ignore it at your peril.’

The Canadian Field-Naturalist

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The Complete Briefing | Fifth Edition

Sir John Houghton

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107091672

First published 1994 by Lion Publishing plc
Second edition published 1997 by Cambridge University Press
Third edition published 2004
Fourth edition published 2009
Fifth edition published 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by Bell and Bain Ltd

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Houghton, J. T. (John Theodore), 1931–
Global warming : the complete briefing / Sir John Houghton. – Fifth edition.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-09167-2 (Hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-46379-0 (Paperback)
1. Global warming. 2. Climatic changes. I. Title.
QC981.8.G56H68 2015
363.738′74–dc23 2014050241

ISBN 978-1-107-09167-2 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-46379-0 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at www.cambridge.org/GW5

To my grandchildren,
Daniel, Hannah, Esther, Max,
Jonathan, Jemima and Sam
and their generation

Contents

Preface

Global Warming is a topic that increasingly occupies the attention of the world. Is it really happening? If so, how much of it is due to human activities? How far will it be possible to adapt to changes of climate? What action to combat it can or should we take? How much will it cost? Or is it already too late for useful action? This book sets out to provide answers to all these questions by providing the best and latest information available.

I was privileged to chair or co-chair the Scientific Assessments for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) from its inception in 1988 until 2002. During this period the IPCC published three major comprehensive reports – in 1990, 1995 and 2001 – that have influenced and informed those involved in climate change research and those concerned with the impacts of climate change. In 2007, a fourth assessment report was produced, and in 2014 the fifth assessment report was published. It is the extensive new material in this latest report that has provided the basis for the substantial revision necessary to update this fifth edition.

The IPCC reports have been widely recognised as the most authoritative and comprehensive assessments on a complex scientific subject ever produced by the world's scientific community. On the completion of the first assessment in 1990, I was asked to present it to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's cabinet – the first time an overhead projector had been used in the Cabinet Room in Number 10 Downing Street. In 2005, the work of the IPCC was cited in a joint statement urging action on climate change presented to the G8 meeting in that year by the Academies of Science of all G8 countries plus China, India and Brazil. The world's top scientists could not have provided stronger approval of the IPCC's work. An even wider endorsement came in 2007 when the IPCC was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.

Many books have been published on global warming. My choice of material has been much influenced by the many lectures I have given in recent years to professional, student and general audiences.

The strengths of this book are that it is:

- **up-to-date with the latest reliable, accurate and understandable information** about all aspects of the global warming problem for students, professionals and interested or concerned citizens.
- **accessible** to both scientists and non-scientists. Although there are many numbers in the book – I believe quantification to be essential – there are no mathematical equations. Some important technical material is included in boxes.
- **comprehensive**, as it moves through the basic science of global warming, impacts on human communities and ecosystems, economic, technological and ethical considerations and policy options for action both national and international.

- appropriate as a **general text for students**, from high-school level up to university graduate. Questions and problems for students to consider and to test their understanding of the material are included in each chapter.
- Its **simple and effective visual presentation of the vast quantities of data** available on climate change ensures that readers can see how conclusions are made, without being overwhelmed. Illustrations are available online.

Over the 25 years since the inception of the IPCC, our understanding of climate change has much increased and significant changes in climate due to human activities have been experienced. Further, studies of the feedbacks that determine the climate response have shown an increasing likelihood of enhanced response, so leading over these years to greater concern about the future impact of climate change on both human populations and ecosystems. Can much be done to alleviate the impact or mitigate future climate change? Later chapters of the book address this question and demonstrate that the technology is largely available to support urgent and affordable action. They also point to the many other benefits that will accrue to all sectors of society as the necessary action is taken. However, what seems lacking as yet is the will to take that action with sufficient urgency and commitment.

As I complete this revised edition I want to express my gratitude, first to those who inspired me and helped with the preparation of the earlier editions, with many of whom I was also involved in the work of the IPCC or of the Hadley Centre. I also acknowledge those who have assisted with the material for this edition or who have read and helpfully commented on my drafts, in particular, Averil Macdonald, Myles Allen, Kathy Maskell, Stephen Belcher, Jason Lowe, David Parker, Peter Stott, Rachel McCarthy, Fraser Lott, Michael Sanderson, Nicola Golding, Fiona O'Connor, Fiona Carroll, Richard Betts, Philip Bett, Mick Carter, Ben Booth, and Sue Whitehouse. My thanks are also due to Catherine Flack, Matt Lloyd, Anna-Marie Lovett and Jo Endell-Cooper of Cambridge University Press for their competence and courtesy as they steered the book through its gestation and production.

Finally, I owe an especial debt to my wife, Sheila, who gave me strong encouragement to write the book in the first place, and who has continued her encouragement and support through the long hours of its production.

Global warming and climate change

1

A destroyed home in Union Beach, New Jersey, following Hurricane Sandy hitting the coast of New Jersey and New York in November 2012.

THE PHRASE 'global warming' has become familiar to many people as one of the most important issues of our day. Many opinions have been expressed concerning it, from the doom-laden to the dismissive. A more accurate but longer phrase to use is 'human induced climate change'. This book aims to state the current scientific position on global warming clearly, so that we can make informed decisions on the facts.

Is the climate changing?

In the year 2060 my grandchildren will be approaching 70 years old; what will their world be like? Indeed, what will it be like during the 70 years or so of their normal lifespan? Many new things have happened in the last 70 years that could not have been predicted in the 1940s. The pace of change is such that even more novelty can be expected in the next 70. It seems certain that the world will be even more crowded and more connected. A particularly important question is how the environment will be affected by the increasing scale of human activities. How much warmer will the world be? How is its climate likely to change?

Before addressing future climate changes, what can be said about climate changes in the past? In the more distant past there have been very large changes. The last million years has seen a succession of major ice ages interspersed with warmer periods. The last of these ice ages began to come to an end about 20 000 years ago and we are now in what is called an interglacial period. Chapter 4 will focus on these times far back in the past. But have there been significant changes in the very much shorter period of living memory – over the past few decades?

Variations in day-to-day weather are occurring all the time; they are very much part of our lives. The climate of a region is its average weather over a period that may be a few months, or from a season to a few years. Variations in climate are also very familiar to us. We describe summers as wet or dry, winters as mild, cold or stormy. In the British Isles, as in many parts of the world, no season is the same as the last or indeed the same as any previous season, nor will it be repeated in detail next time round. Most of these variations we take for granted; they add a lot of interest to our lives. Those we particularly notice are the extreme situations and the climate disasters (for instance, Figure 1.1 shows the significant climate events and disasters during the year 1998 – one of the warmest years on record). Most of the worst disasters in the world are, in fact, weather- or climate-related. Our news media are constantly bringing them to our notice as they occur in different parts of the world – tropical cyclones (called hurricanes or typhoons), windstorms, floods, tornadoes, also heatwaves and droughts whose effects occur more slowly, but which are possibly the most damaging disasters of all.

The last 40 years

Globally speaking, the last 40 years have been the warmest since accurate records began somewhat over 100 years ago (see Figure 4.1). The period has also been remarkable (just how remarkable will be considered later) for the frequency and intensity of extremes of weather and climate. Let me give a few examples, first from mid latitudes. In central Europe in the summer of 2003, there was an extremely unusual heatwave that led to the premature deaths of over 20 000 people (see Chapter 7). In central Russia in 2010 a persistent heatwave combined with extensive wildfires led to an estimated 55 000 premature deaths. Periods of unusually strong winds have also been experienced in western Europe. During the early hours of the

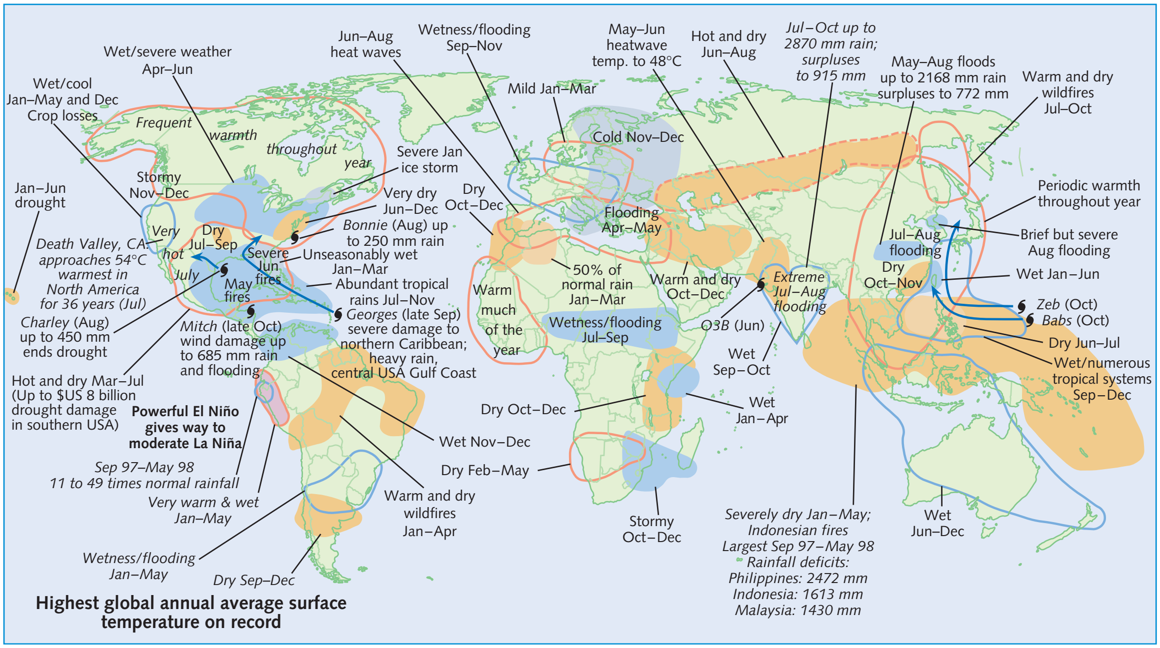
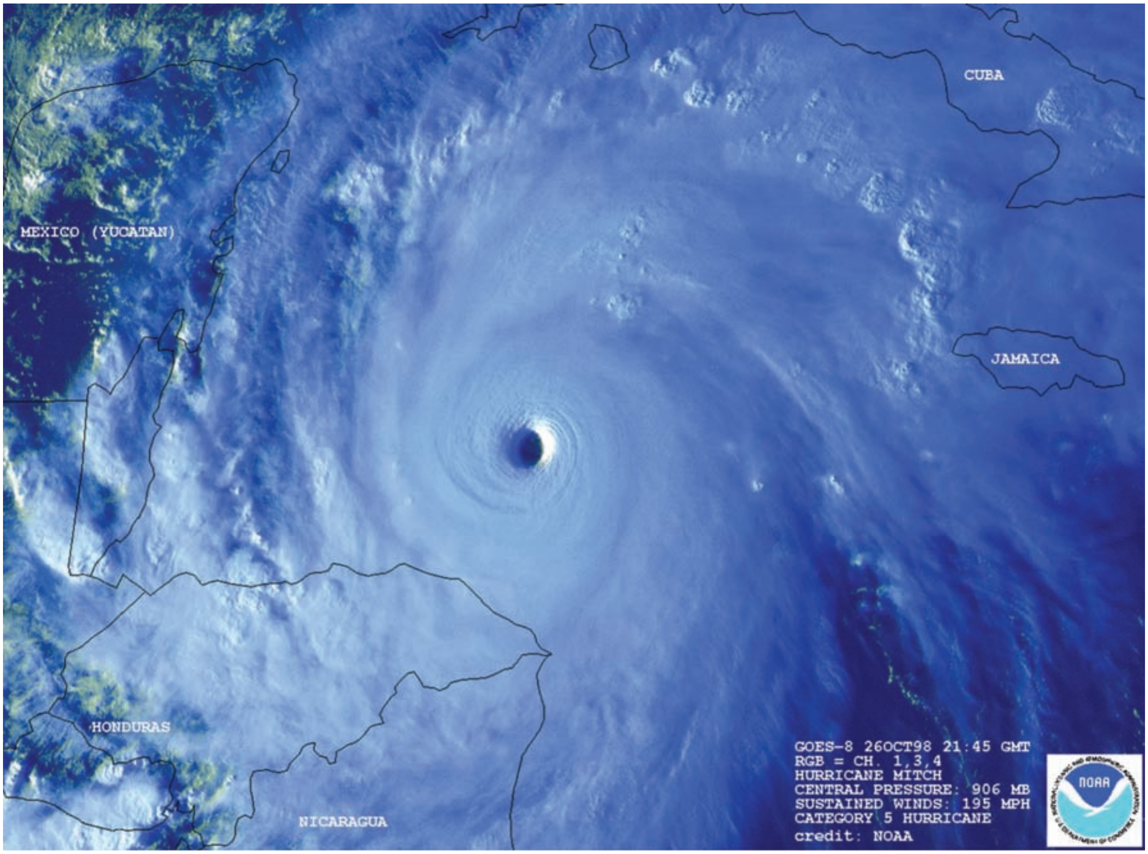


Figure 1.1 Significant climate anomalies and events during 1998 as recorded by the Climate Prediction Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States.

morning of 16 October 1987, over 15 million trees were blown down in southeast England and the London area. The storm also hit northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands with ferocious intensity; it turned out to be the worst storm experienced in the area since 1703. In the USA in 2013, superstorm Sandy devastated parts of New Jersey and New York city causing around $US50 billion worth of damage.

But those storms were mild by comparison with the much more intense and damaging storms tropical regions have experienced during these years. About 80 hurricanes and typhoons – other names for tropical cyclones – occur around the tropical oceans each year, familiar enough to be given names: Hurricane Gilbert caused devastation on the island of Jamaica and the coast of Mexico in 1988, Typhoon Mireille hit Japan in 1991, Hurricane Andrew caused a great deal of damage in Florida and other regions of the southern United States in 1992, Hurricane Katrina caused record damages as it hit the Gulf Coast of the United States in 2005 and Typhoon Haiyan, probably the most intense ever to make landfall, caused enormous devastation in the Philippines in 2013 and left about 2 million homeless.

Low-lying areas such as Bangladesh are particularly vulnerable to the storm surges associated with tropical cyclones; the combined effect of intensely low atmospheric pressure, extremely strong winds and high tides causes a surge of water which can reach far inland. In one of the worst such disasters in the twentieth century over 250 000 people were drowned in



Hurricane Mitch was one of the deadliest and most powerful hurricanes on record in the Atlantic basin, with maximum sustained winds of 180 mph (290 km h^{-1}). The storm was the thirteenth tropical storm, ninth hurricane and third major hurricane of the 1998 Atlantic hurricane season.

Bangladesh in 1970. The people of that country experienced another storm of similar proportions in 1999 as did the neighbouring Indian state of Orissa also in 1999, and smaller surges are a regular occurrence in that region.

The increase in storm intensity during recent years has been tracked by the insurance industry, which has been hit hard by recent disasters. Until the mid 1980s, it was widely thought that windstorms or hurricanes with insured losses exceeding $US1 billion (thousand million) were only possible, if at all, in the United States. But the gales that hit western Europe in October 1987 heralded a series of windstorm disasters that make losses of $US10 billion seem commonplace. Hurricane Andrew, for instance, left in its wake insured losses estimated at nearly $US21 billion (1999 prices) with estimated total economic losses of nearly $US37 billion. Figure 1.2 shows the costs of weather-related disasters[1] over the past 30 years as calculated by

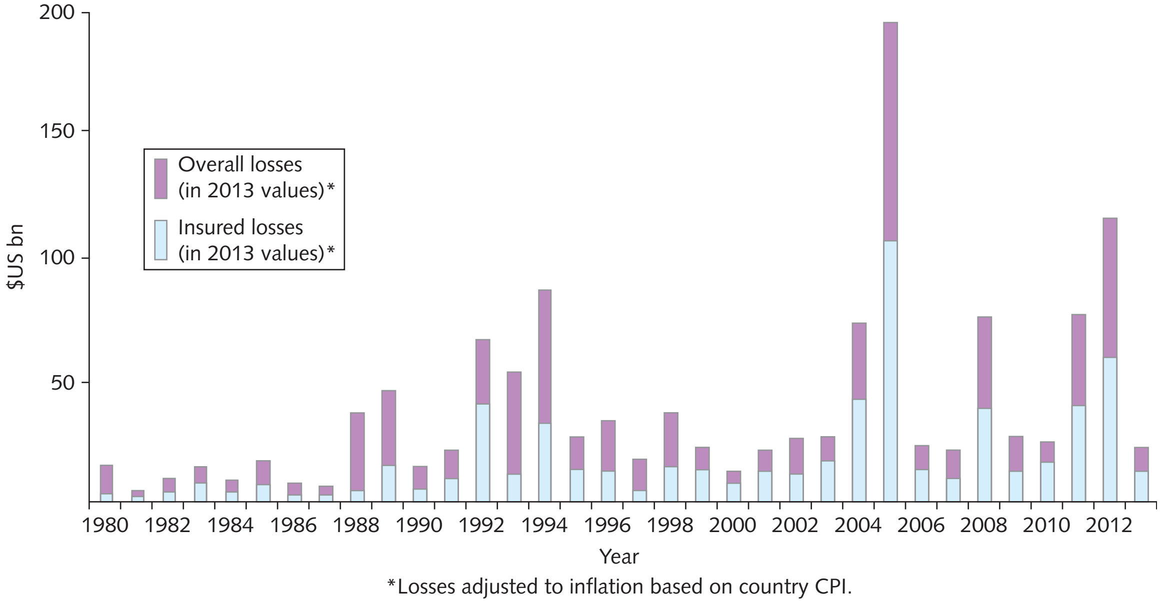
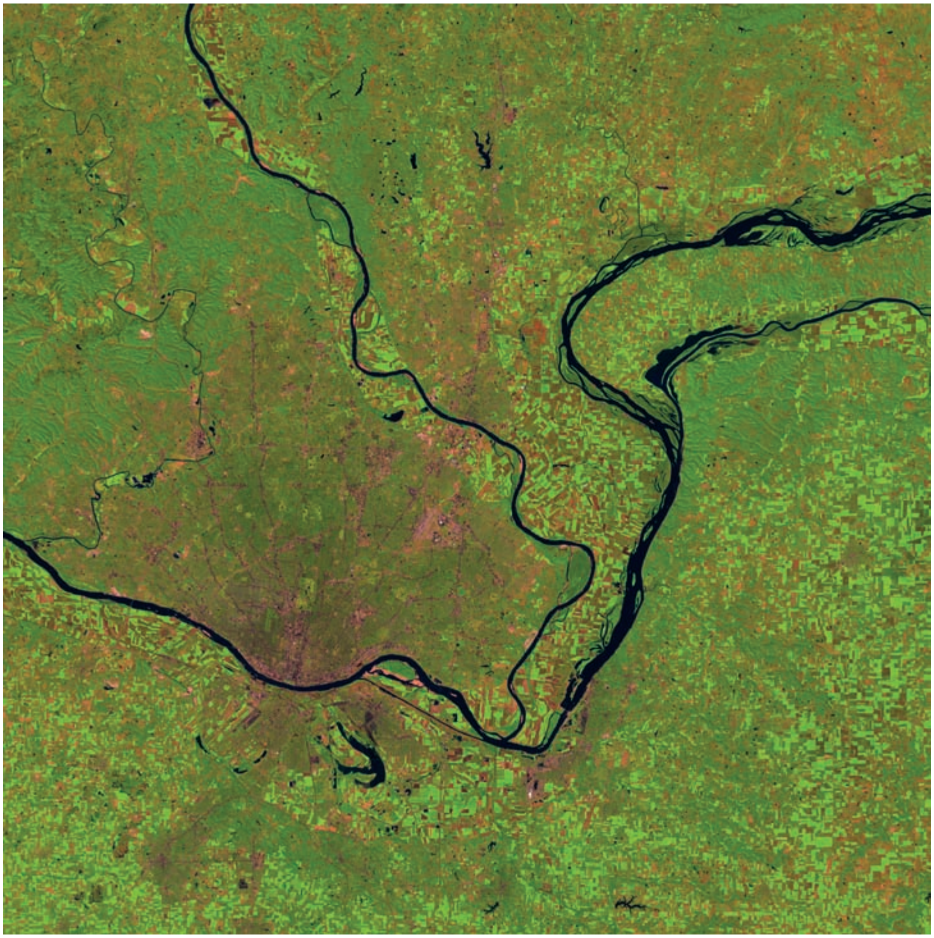


Figure 1.2 The total economic costs and the insured costs of catastrophic weather events for the period 1980 to 2013 as recorded by the Munich Re insurance company. The figures for 2005 – about $US200 billion for economic losses and over $US80 billion for insured losses – show the financial impact of Hurricane Katrina in the USA. Both economic and insured costs show a rapid upward trend in recent decades.

the insurance industry. It shows a very substantial increase in economic losses in real terms in such events between the 1980s and the present day. Some of this increase can be attributed to the growth in population in particularly vulnerable areas and to other social or economic factors; the world community has undoubtedly become more vulnerable to disasters. However, a significant part of it has also arisen from the increased storminess in the recent years compared with the 1980s.

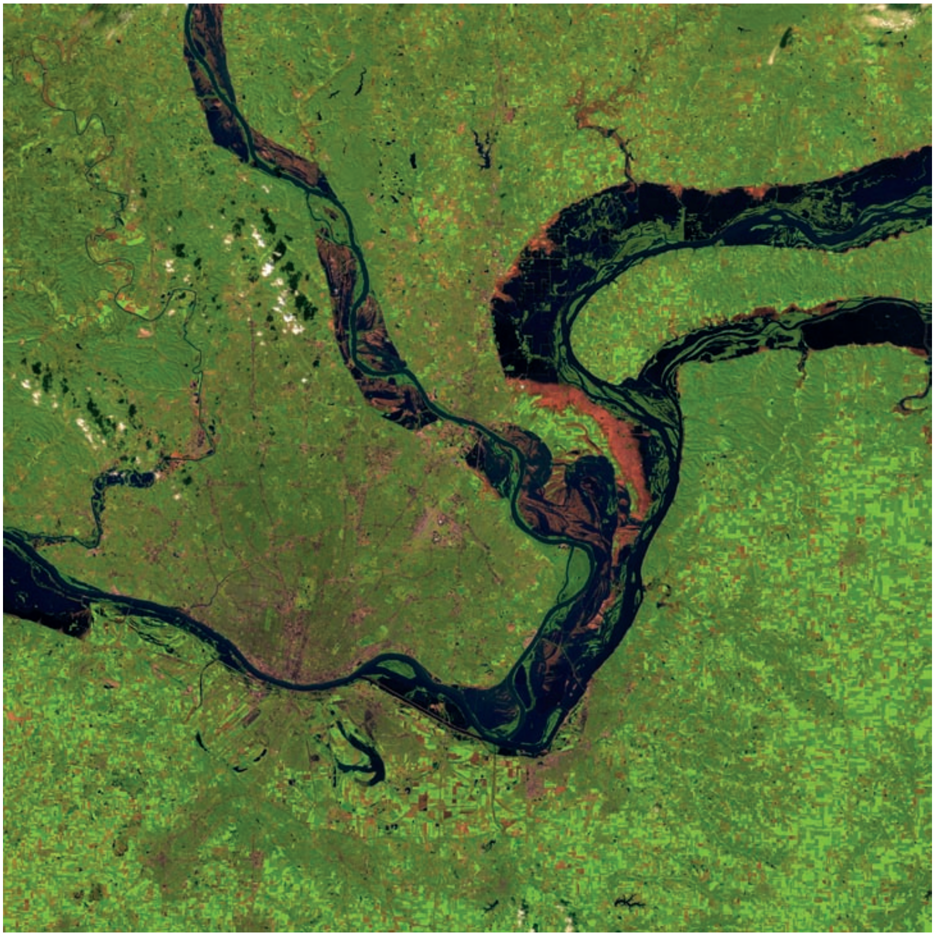
Windstorms or hurricanes are by no means the only weather and climate extremes that cause disasters. Floods due to unusually intense or prolonged rainfall or droughts because of long periods of reduced rainfall (or its complete absence) can be even more devastating to human life and property. These events occur frequently in many parts of the world especially in the tropics and sub-tropics. There have been notable examples during the last two decades. Let me mention a few of the floods. In 1988, the highest flood levels ever recorded occurred in Bangladesh, and 80% of the entire country was affected; China experienced devastating floods affecting many millions of people in 1991, 1994–5 and 1998; in 1993, flood waters rose to levels higher than ever recorded in the region of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers in the United States, flooding an area equivalent in size to one of the Great Lakes; major floods in Venezuela in 1999 led to a large landslide and left 30 000 people dead; two widespread floods in Mozambique occurred within a year in 2000–1 leaving over half a million homeless; and in

Flooded McDonald's, Festus, Missouri in 1993. The spot where this photo was taken is nearly 1.5 miles (2.5 km) and 30 feet (9 m) above the river.



The Great Flood of 1993 occurred in the American Midwest, along the Mississippi and Missouri rivers from April to October 1993. The flood was among the most costly and devastating to ever occur in the United States, with $US15 billion in damages, and a flooded area of around 30 000 square miles (80 000 km^2). The images on this page and page 8 from Landsat-5 Thematic Mapper show the Mississippi near St Louis before and during the flood.

2010 Pakistan experienced the worst floods in its history, when exceptional monsoon rains left one-fifth of Pakistan's total land area under water, affecting 20 million people. Droughts during these years have been particularly intense and prolonged in areas of Africa, both north and south. It is in Africa especially that they bear on the most vulnerable in the world, who have little resilience to major disasters. Figure 1.3 shows that in the 1980s droughts accounted for more deaths in Africa than all other disasters added together and illustrates the scale of the problem.



We have seen significant warming and an increase in storminess and climate extremes over the past few decades. But do we know how exceptional are such events in the context of much longer periods and do we have the evidence that this is linked with the development of human activities and industry over the last 200 years? What is important is that careful comparisons are made between observations of the climate and its changes and what scientific knowledge leads us to expect. It was during the 1980s that the possibility that human activities might be seriously affecting the climate began to be widely realised. It was then also that the scientific tools became available for climate scientists to be able to study in depth what this might mean. Later chapters will look in detail at the science of global warming and at the changes in climate that have already occurred and those that can be expected in the future. First, however, I present a brief outline of our current scientific understanding.

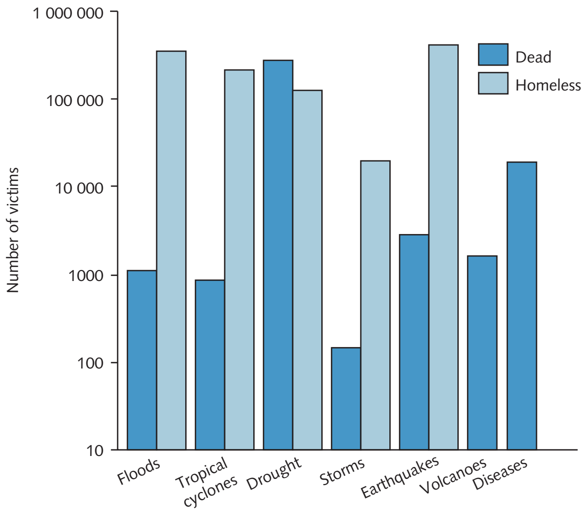


Figure 1.3 Recorded disasters in Africa, 1980–9, estimated by the Organization for African Unity. Note the logarithmic scale.

What is global warming?

We know for sure that because of human activities, especially the burning of fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas, together with widespread deforestation, the gas carbon dioxide has been emitted into the atmosphere in increasing amounts over the past 200 years and more substantially over the past 50 years. Every year these emissions currently add to the carbon already present in the atmosphere at least a further 8000 million tonnes, much of which will remain there for a period of 100 years or more. Because carbon dioxide is a good absorber of heat radiation coming from the Earth's surface, increased carbon dioxide acts like a blanket over the surface, keeping it warmer than it would otherwise be – see Figure 4.1, Chapter 4 and Chapter 2 for further explanation. With the increased temperature the amount of water vapour in the atmosphere also increases, providing more blanketing and causing it to be even warmer. The gas methane is also increasing because of different human activities, for instance mining and agriculture, and adding to the problem.

Being kept warmer may sound appealing to those of us who live in cool climates. However, an increase in global temperature will lead to global climate change. If the change were small and occurred slowly enough we would almost certainly be able to adapt to it. However, with rapid expansion taking place in the world's industry the change is unlikely to be either small or slow. The estimate presented in later chapters is that, in the absence of more substantial efforts to curb the rise in the emissions of carbon dioxide, the global average temperature will rise by a third of a degree Celsius or more every ten years – or three or more degrees in a century.

This may not sound very much, especially when it is compared with normal temperature variations from day to night or between one day and the next. But when we talk of global warming, it is not the temperature at one place but the temperature averaged over the whole globe that will rise. It does not mean that there will be uniform or even similar warming everywhere; there will continue to be large variations in temperature over different areas of the Earth's surface that will continuously vary from day to day and from year to year.

The predicted rate of change of 3°C a century is probably faster than the global average temperature has changed at any time over the past 10 000 years. And as there is a difference in global average temperature of only about five or six degrees between the coldest part of an ice age and the warm periods in between ice ages (see Figure 4.9), we can see that a few degrees in this global average can represent a big change in climate. It is to this change and especially to the very rapid rate of change that many ecosystems and human communities (especially those in developing countries) will find it difficult to adapt.

Scientists are confident about the fact of global warming and climate change due to human activities. Although there are still uncertainties concerning the detail regarding the pattern of change in different parts of the world, it is clear that the most noticeable adverse impacts will concern sea level rise (water expands as it becomes warmer), more heatwaves and because of increased energy in the atmospheric circulation, more intense rainfall and more extreme events such as we have already mentioned. As described in later chapters, intensive research is needed to improve confidence in the detail of scientific predictions being pursued.

Adaptation and mitigation

An integrated view of anthropogenic climate change (climate change resulting from human activities) is presented in Figure 1.4 where a complete cycle of cause and effect is shown. Begin in the box at the bottom where economic activity, both large and small scale, whether in developed or developing countries, results in emissions of greenhouse gases (of which carbon dioxide is the most important) and aerosols. Moving in a clockwise direction around the diagram, these emissions lead to changes in atmospheric concentrations of important constituents that alter the energy input and output of the climate system and hence cause changes in the climate. These climate changes impact both humans and natural ecosystems altering patterns of resource availability and affecting human livelihood and health. These impacts in their turn affect human development in all its aspects. Anticlockwise arrows illustrate possible development pathways and global emission constraints that would reduce the risk of future impacts that society may wish to avoid.

Figure 1.4 also shows how both causes and effects can be changed through *adaptation* and *mitigation*. In general adaptation is aimed at reducing the effects and mitigation is aimed at reducing the causes of climate change, in particular the emissions of the gases that give rise to it. Both adaptation actions and mitigation actions are urgently required in response to human-induced climate change.

International cooperation in climate science

A particularly important day for climate science was 4 October 1957 when The Soviet Union launched the first Sputnik that circled in space around the Earth with 15 orbits per day. Most of the Earth's surface was seen by Sputnik twice per day, demonstrating the possibility of observations from space of the atmosphere and the oceans with a coverage in space and time

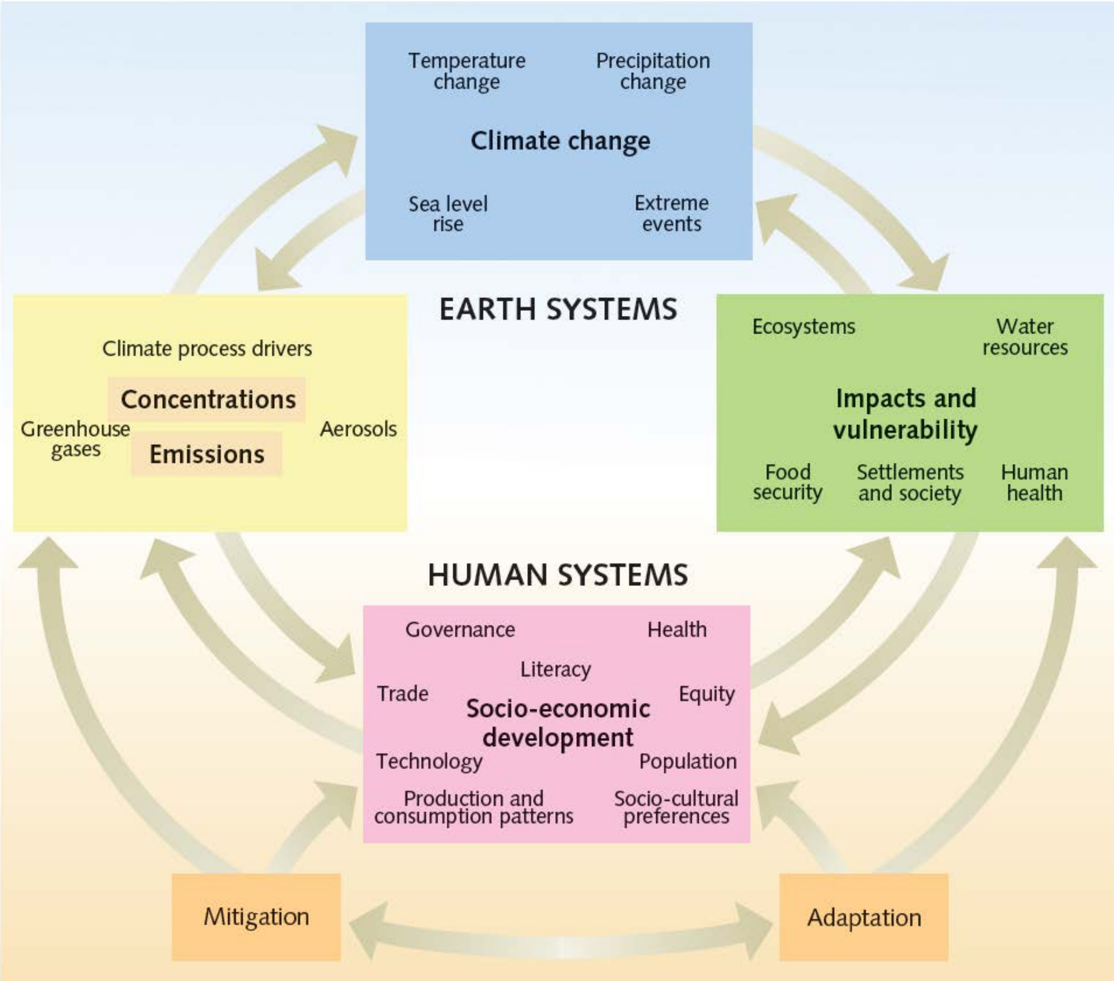
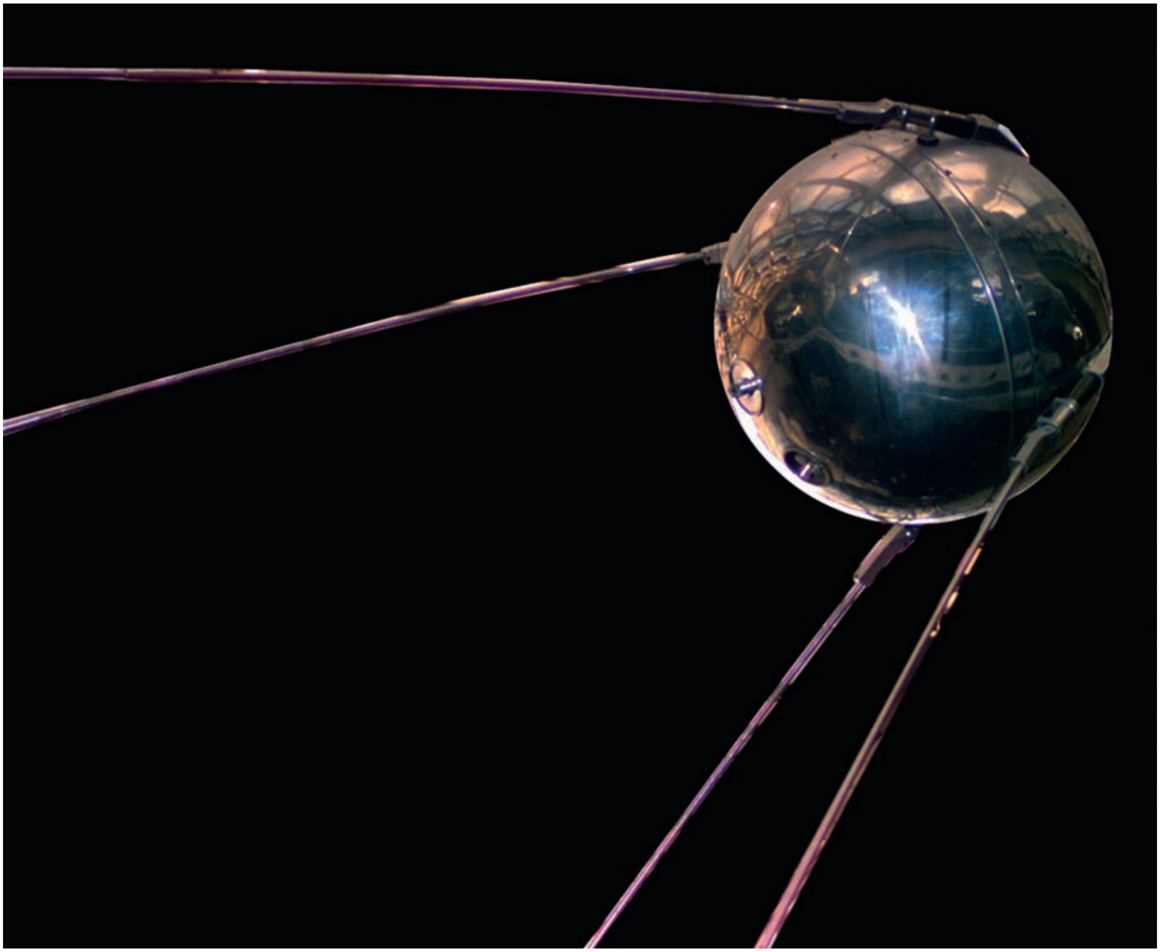


Figure 1.4 Climate change – an integrated framework (see text for explanation).

beyond our dreams. I remember that event well and became involved with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in the United States and their programme of atmospheric temperature measurements from space that began in the 1960s. At around the same time computers were beginning to become powerful enough for crude numerical models of the global atmospheric circulation to be developed and forecasts using them to be tried out on computers. Since then these two technical developments – observations from space coupled with computer data analysis and modelling – have transformed the progress of atmospheric and climate science.

It was early in the 1960s that atmospheric and climate scientists around the world got together with the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) to form the Global Atmospheric Research Programme (GARP),



In 1957 The Soviet Union launched the basketball-sized Sputnik (Russian for 'fellow traveller'). It was the first satellite to circle the Earth and demonstrated the potential for observing the Earth's atmosphere from space.

which took advantage of the new possibilities provided by space and computer technology and arranged for large programmes of global scale data gathering and interpretation.

By 1980 international activity was beginning to concentrate on the global climate and the World Climate Research Programme (WCRP) was set up. I was the second chair of the WCRP steering committee and with Pierre Morel, the programme's director, we set up two main experiments dealing respectively with World Ocean Circulation (WOCE) and the Tropical Oceans Global Atmosphere (TOGA).

During the 1960s and later the amount of carbon dioxide being emitted into the atmosphere by the world's energy industries was increasing very substantially. The development of these large international programmes made it possible to begin to estimate how this increase could affect atmospheric temperature. An important international scientific meeting in

1985 organised by the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE) of ICSU[2] led by Professor Bert Bolin from Stockholm concluded that, although not enough was known for definite statements to be made, the emissions of greenhouse gases leading to possible changes in climate was a most important long term environmental problem needing urgent consideration.

During 1987–8 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was set up jointly by the WMO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). It held its first meeting in November 1988. I became the first chairman of its scientific working group that published its first detailed report in 1990. Subsequent reports have been published in 1995, 2001, 2007 and 2014. During this period the impacts of human activities have been increasingly recognised in the changes in climate that have been occurring.

A great strength of the IPCC is that it is an intergovernmental body set up by the world's governments. The summaries of its reports are approved sentence by sentence at intergovernmental meetings (strictly scientific not political meetings) typically with delegates present from about 100 governments. The reports have steadily become more certain over these years and have increasingly recognised the need for rapid reductions in carbon emissions by all nations if unacceptable damages to human communities are to be avoided. More detailed information about the IPCC and its work is included in Chapter 9 (page 240–4).

Following the first IPCC Report in 1990, the United Nations at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 set up the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a treaty whose objective is:

> to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system . . . within a time frame to allow ecosystems to adapt . . . to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.

The treaty came into force in 1994, since when 'Conferences of the Parties' have been held annually. More details are given in Chapter 9 (beginning on page 264). The most significant conclusion from the UNFCCC was at Copenhagen in 2009, when consideration of the likely damage due to human-induced climate change led to a target being set that future global warming should be limited to below 2°C relative to the pre-industrial level. However, no mechanism was put in place whereby this target could be assured. Also many thought the target should be lower, e.g. 1.5°C. Setting up goals in principle is a long way from setting them up in practice! To achieve the 2°C goal global greenhouse gas emissions would have to stop increasing and begin to fall increasingly rapidly by 2020. Figure 1.5, in illustrating how difficult this will be to achieve (note the substantial increase in emissions between 1970 and 2010, an increase continued to the present), demonstrates the urgency of the action required by the community of nations. More of that will be addressed in the book's later chapters.

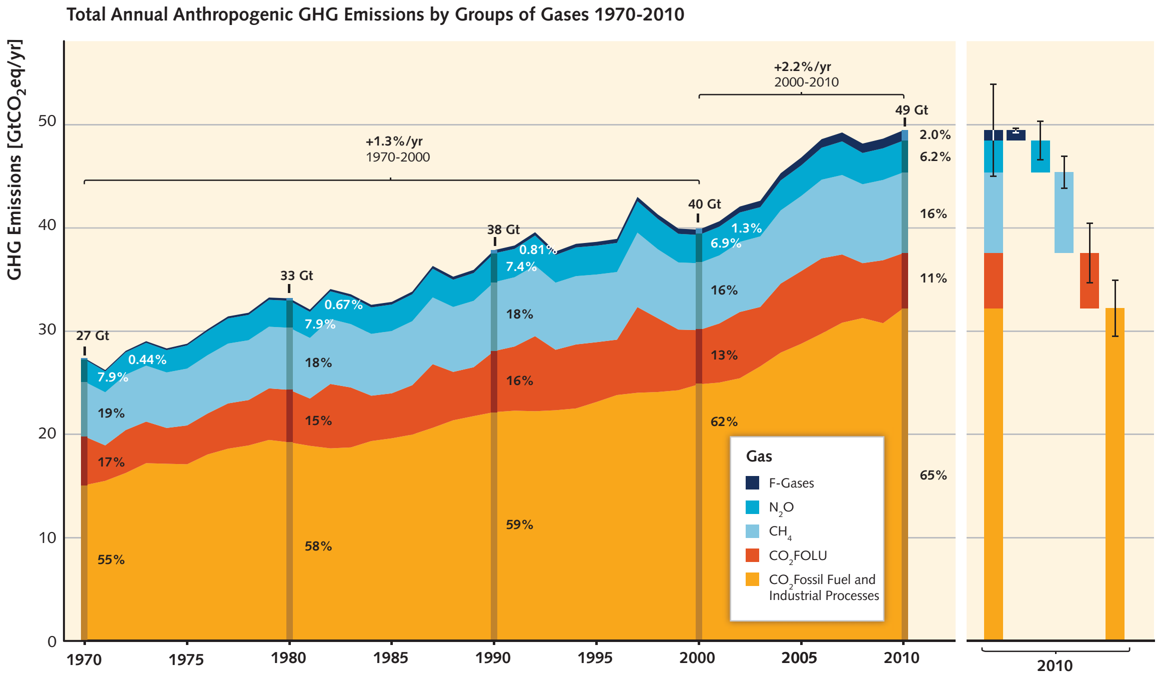


Figure 1.5 Total annual greenhouse gas emissions by groups of gases 1970–2010: CO_2 from fossil fuel combustion and industrial processes (yellow); CO_2 from Forestry and Other Land Use (FOLU; orange); CH_4 (light blue); N_2O (blue); fluorinated gases (dark blue). All emissions are plotted in $GtCO_2$ equivalent per year based on a 100-year timescale (see Chapter 3, page 58–9). The emissions data from FOLU represents land-based CO_2 emissions from forest and peat fires and decay that approximate to net CO_2 flux from the FOLU sub-sector (see Chapter 7, page 189–96).

Uncertainty and response

Predictions of the future climate are surrounded with a measure of uncertainty that arises from our imperfect knowledge both of the science of climate change and of the future scale of the human activities that are its cause. Politicians and others making decisions are therefore faced with the need to weigh all aspects of uncertainty against the desirability and the cost of the actions that can be taken in response to the threat of climate change. Much mitigating action can be taken easily at relatively little cost (or even at a net saving of cost), for instance the development of programmes to conserve and save energy, and many schemes for reducing deforestation and encouraging the planting of trees. Such actions are beginning to gather pace. However, there is an increasing realisation that much stronger and determined action is required. As we shall see from later chapters, the impacts of carbon emissions on the climate are not reversible on any reasonable timescale. But more than that, even if we were able to stop all carbon emissions from tomorrow, the world's climate for some decades into the future would continue to warm and to change in response to the emissions that have already occurred. Chapters 10 and 11 therefore address the strong imperative to all the world's countries, both developed and developing, especially those with large carbon emissions, to move with great urgency and as completely as possible to energy sources that are free from significant carbon emissions.

In the following chapters I shall first explain the science of global warming, the evidence for it and the current state of the art regarding climate prediction. I shall then go on to say what is known about the likely impacts of climate change – on sea level, extreme events, water and food supplies, for instance. The questions of why we should be concerned for the environment and what action should be taken in the face of scientific uncertainty are followed by consideration of the technical possibilities for large reductions in the emissions of carbon dioxide and how these might affect our energy sources and usage, including our means of transport.

Finally I will address the issue of the 'global village'. So far as the environment is concerned, national boundaries are becoming less and less important; pollution in one country can now affect the whole world. Further, it is increasingly realised that problems of the environment are linked to other global problems such as population growth, poverty, the overuse of resources and global security. All these pose global challenges that must be met by global solutions.

QUESTIONS

1. Look through recent copies of newspapers and magazines for articles that mention climate change, global warming or the greenhouse effect. How many of the statements made are accurate?
2. Make up a simple questionnaire about climate change, global warming and the greenhouse effect to find out how much people know about these subjects, their relevance and importance. Analyse results from responses to the questionnaire in terms of the background of the respondents. Suggest ways in which people could be better informed.

FURTHER READING AND REFERENCE

Houghton, J. 2013. *Autobiography: In the Eye of the Storm*. Oxford: Lion Publishing.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Fifth Assessment Report, published in 2013/2014 in three volumes: *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*, from Working Group I; *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, from Working Group 2; *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change*, from Working Group 3. All volumes are very substantial in size. All begin with a relatively short 'Summary for policymakers'.

Lynas, M. 2007. *Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet*. London: Fourth Estate. A very readable book that won the Royal Society Prize for Science Book of the Year in 2008.

Walker, Gabrielle and King, Sir David 2008. *The Hot Topic*. London: Bloomsbury. A masterful paperback on climate change for the general reader covering the science.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 1

1 Including windstorms, hurricanes or typhoons, floods, tornadoes, hailstorms and blizzards but not including droughts because their impact is not immediate and occurs over an extended period.

2 See Bolin B. *et al*. 1986. *The Greenhouse Effect, Climatic Change and Ecosystems*. Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment (SCOPE 29). New York: John Wiley & Sons.

The greenhouse effect

2

The Earth and the Moon.

THE BASIC principle of global warming can be understood by considering the radiation energy from the Sun that warms the Earth's surface and the thermal radiation from the Earth and the atmosphere that is radiated out to space. On average these two radiation streams must balance. If the balance is disturbed (for instance by an increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide) it can be restored by an increase in the Earth's surface temperature.

How the Earth keeps warm

To explain the processes that warm the Earth and its atmosphere, I will begin with a very simplified Earth. Suppose we could, all of a sudden, remove from the atmosphere all the clouds, the water vapour, the carbon dioxide and all the other minor gases and the dust, leaving an atmosphere of nitrogen and oxygen only. Everything else remains the same. What, under these conditions, would happen to the atmospheric temperature?

The calculation is an easy one, involving a relatively simple radiation balance. Radiant energy from the Sun falls on a surface of one square metre in area outside the atmosphere and directly facing the Sun at a rate of about 1370 watts – about the power radiated by a reasonably sized domestic electric fire. However, few parts of the Earth's surface face the Sun directly and in any case for half the time they are pointing away from the Sun at night, so that the average energy falling on one square metre of a level surface outside the atmosphere is only one-quarter of this[1] or about 342 watts. As this radiation passes through the atmosphere a small amount, about 6%, is scattered back to space by atmospheric molecules. About 10% on average is reflected back to space from the land and ocean surface. The remaining 84%, or about 288 watts per square metre on average, remains actually to heat the surface – the power used by three good-sized incandescent electric light bulbs.

To balance this incoming energy, the Earth itself must radiate on average the same amount of energy back to space (Figure 2.1) in the form of thermal radiation. All objects emit this kind of radiation; if they are hot enough we can see the radiation they emit. The Sun at a temperature of about 6000°C looks white; an electric fire at 800°C looks red. Cooler objects emit radiation that cannot be seen by our eyes and which lies at wavelengths beyond the red end of the spectrum – infrared radiation (sometimes called longwave radiation to distinguish it from the shortwave radiation from the Sun). On a clear, starry winter's night we are very aware of the cooling effect of this kind of radiation being emitted by the Earth's surface into space – it often leads to the formation of frost.

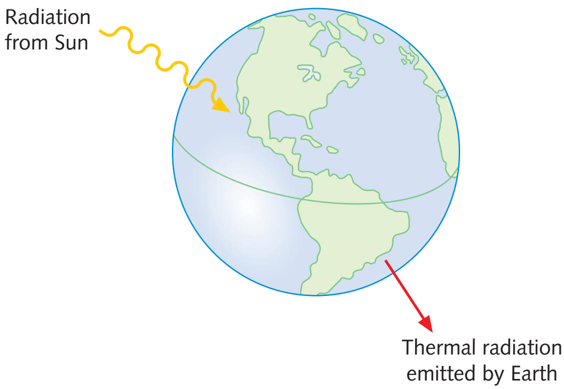


Figure 2.1 The radiation balance of planet Earth. The net incoming solar radiation is balanced on average by outgoing thermal radiation from the Earth.

The amount of thermal radiation emitted by the Earth's surface depends on its temperature – the warmer it is, the more radiation is emitted. The amount of radiation also depends on how absorbing the surface is; the greater the absorption, the more the radiation. Most of the surfaces on the Earth, including ice and snow, would appear 'black' if we could see them at infrared wavelengths; that means that they absorb nearly all the thermal radiation which falls on them instead of reflecting it. It can be calculated[2] that the 288 W m^{-2} of incoming solar radiation received by the Earth's surface can be balanced by thermal radiation emitted by the surface at a temperature of –6°C.[3] This is over 20°C colder than is actually the case. In fact, an average of temperatures measured near the surface all over the Earth – over the oceans as well as the land – averaging, too, over the whole year, comes to about 15°C. Some factor not yet taken into account is needed to explain this difference.

The greenhouse effect

The gases nitrogen and oxygen that make up the bulk of the atmosphere (Table 2.1 gives details of the atmosphere's composition) neither absorb nor emit thermal radiation. It is the water vapour, carbon dioxide and some other minor gases present in the atmosphere in much smaller quantities (Table 2.1) that absorb some of the thermal radiation leaving the surface, acting as a partial blanket for this radiation and causing the difference of 20 to 30°C between the actual average surface temperature on the Earth of about 15°C and the temperature that would apply if greenhouse gases were absent.[4] This blanketing is known as the *natural greenhouse effect* and the gases are known as greenhouse gases (Figure 2.2). It is called 'natural' because all the atmospheric gases (apart from the chlorofluorocarbons – CFCs) were there long before human beings came on the scene. Later on I will mention the *enhanced greenhouse effect*: the added effect caused by the gases present in the atmosphere due to human activities such as deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels.

Table 2.1 The composition of the atmosphere, the main constituents (nitrogen and oxygen) and the greenhouse gases as in 2007

Gas	Mixing ratio or mole fraction[a] expressed as fraction* or parts per million (ppm)
Nitrogen (N_2)	0.78*
Oxygen (O_2)	0.21*
Water vapour (H_2O)	Variable (0–0.02*)
Carbon dioxide (CO_2)	400
Methane (CH_4)	1.8
Nitrous oxide (N_2O)	0.3
Chlorofluorocarbons	0.001
Ozone (O_3)	Variable (0–1000)

[a]For definition see Glossary.

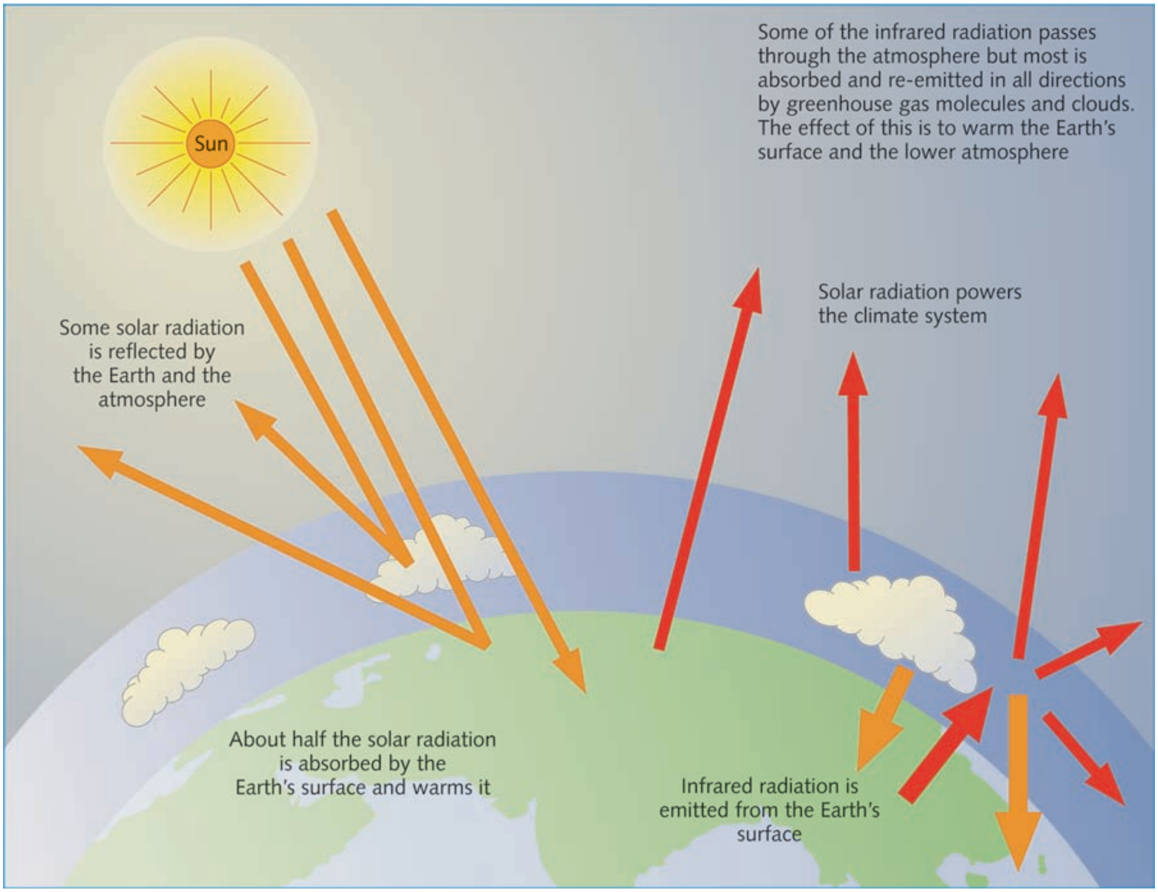


Figure 2.2 Schematic of the natural greenhouse effect.

The basic science of the greenhouse effect has been known since early in the nineteenth century (see box on page 22) when the similarity between the radiative properties of the Earth's atmosphere and of the glass in a greenhouse (Figure 2.3) was first pointed out – hence the name 'greenhouse effect'. In a greenhouse, visible radiation from the Sun passes almost unimpeded through the glass and is absorbed by the plants and the soil inside. The thermal radiation that is emitted by the plants and soil is, however, absorbed by the glass that re-emits some of it back into the greenhouse. The glass thus acts as a 'radiation blanket' helping to keep the greenhouse warm.

However, the transfer of radiation is only one of the ways heat is moved around in a greenhouse. A more important means of heat transfer is convection, in which less dense warm air moves upwards and more dense cold air moves downwards. A familiar example of this process is the use of convective electric heaters in the home, which heat a room by stimulating convection in it. The situation in the greenhouse is therefore more complicated than would be the case if radiation were the only process of heat transfer.

Mixing and convection are also present in the atmosphere, although on a much larger scale, and in order to achieve a proper understanding of the greenhouse effect, convective heat transfer processes in the atmosphere must be taken into account as well as radiative ones.

Within the atmosphere itself (at least in the lowest three-quarters or so of the atmosphere up to a height of about 10 km which is called the troposphere) convection is, in fact, the dominant process for transferring heat. It acts as follows. The surface of the Earth is warmed by the sunlight it absorbs. Air close to the surface is heated and rises because of its lower density. As the air rises it expands and cools – just as the air cools as it comes out of the valve of a tyre. As some air masses rise, other air masses descend, so the air is continually turning over as different movements balance each other out – a situation of convective equilibrium. Temperature in the troposphere falls with height at a rate determined by these convective processes; the fall with height (called the lapse rate) turns out on average to be about 6°C per kilometre of height (Figure 2.4).

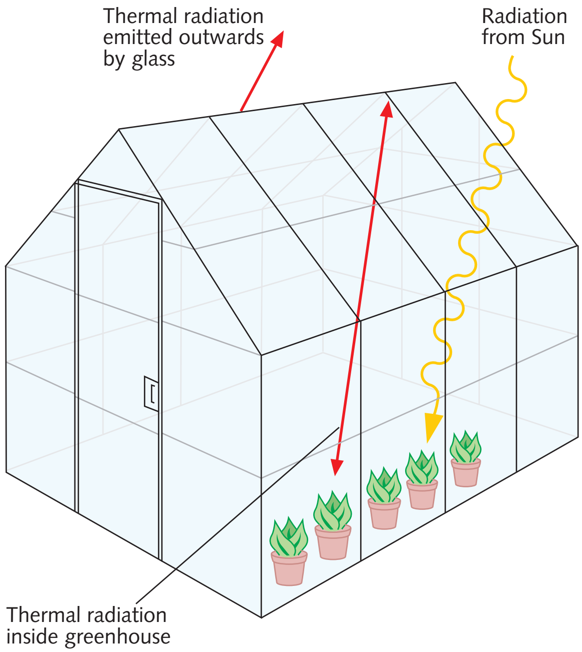


Figure 2.3 A greenhouse has a similar effect to the atmosphere on the incoming solar radiation and the emitted thermal radiation.

A picture of the transfer of radiation in the atmosphere may be obtained by looking at the thermal radiation emitted by the Earth and its atmosphere as observed from instruments on satellites orbiting the Earth (Figure 2.5). At some wavelengths in the infrared the atmosphere – in the absence of clouds – is largely transparent, just as it is in the visible part of the spectrum. If our eyes were sensitive at these wavelengths we would be able to peer through the atmosphere to the Sun, stars and Moon above, just as we can in the visible spectrum. At these wavelengths all the radiation originating from the Earth's surface leaves the atmosphere.

At other wavelengths radiation from the surface is strongly absorbed by some of the gases present in the atmosphere, in particular by water vapour and carbon dioxide.

Objects that are good absorbers of radiation are also good emitters of it. A black surface is both a good absorber and a good emitter, while a highly reflecting surface absorbs rather little and emits rather little too (which is why highly reflecting foil is used to cover the surface of a vacuum flask and why it is placed above the insulation in the lofts of houses).

Absorbing gases in the atmosphere absorb some of the radiation emitted by the Earth's surface and in turn emit radiation out to space. The amount of thermal radiation they emit is dependent on their temperature.

Pioneers of the science of the greenhouse effect[5]

The warming effect of the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere was first recognised in 1827 by the French scientist Jean-Baptiste Fourier, best known for his contributions to mathematics. He also pointed out the similarity between what happens in the atmosphere and in the glass of a greenhouse, which led to the name 'greenhouse effect'. The next step was taken by a British scientist, John Tyndall, who, around 1860, measured the absorption of infrared radiation by carbon dioxide and water vapour; he also suggested that a cause of the ice ages might be a decrease in the greenhouse effect of carbon dioxide. It was a Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, in 1896, who calculated the effect of an increasing concentration of greenhouse gases; he estimated that doubling the concentration of carbon dioxide would increase the global average temperature by 5 to 6°C, an estimate not too far from our present understanding.[6] Nearly 50 years later, around 1940, G.S. Callendar, working in England, was the first to calculate the warming due to the increasing carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels.

Svante August Arrhenius (19 February 1859–2 October 1927).

The first expression of concern about the climate change that might be brought about by increasing greenhouse gases was in 1957, when Roger Revelle and Hans Suess of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography in California published a paper which pointed out that in the build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, human beings are carrying out a large-scale geophysical experiment. In the same year, routine measurements of carbon dioxide were started from the observatory on Mauna Kea in Hawaii. The rapidly increasing use of fossil fuels since then, together with growing interest in the environment, has led to the topic of global warming moving up the political agenda through the 1980s, and eventually to the Climate Convention signed in 1992 – of which more in later chapters.

Radiation is emitted out to space by these gases from levels somewhere near the top of the atmosphere – typically from between 5 and 10 km high (see Figure 2.4). Here, because of the convection processes mentioned earlier, the temperature is much colder – 30 to 50°C or so colder – than at the surface. Because the gases are cold, they emit correspondingly less radiation. What these gases have to do, therefore, is absorb some of the radiation emitted by the Earth's surface but then to emit much less radiation out to space. They, therefore, act as a radiation blanket over the surface (note that the outer surface of a blanket is colder than inside the blanket) and help to keep it warmer than it would otherwise be (Figure 2.6).

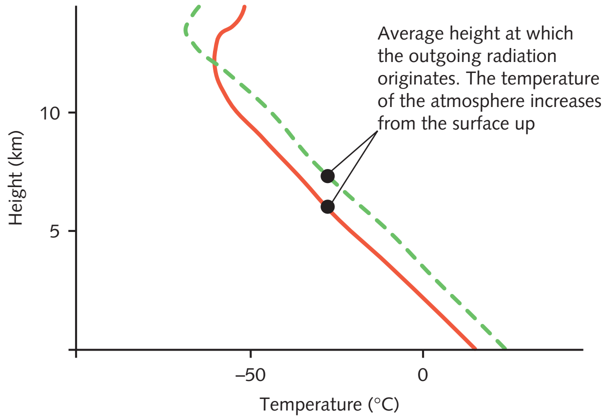


Figure 2.4 The distribution of temperature in a convective atmosphere (red line). The green line shows how the temperature increases when the amount of carbon dioxide present in the atmosphere is increased (in the diagram the difference between the lines is exaggerated – for instance, for doubled carbon dioxide in the absence of other effects the increase in temperature is about 1.2°C). Also shown for the two cases are the average levels from which thermal radiation leaving the atmosphere originates (about 6 km for the unperturbed atmosphere).

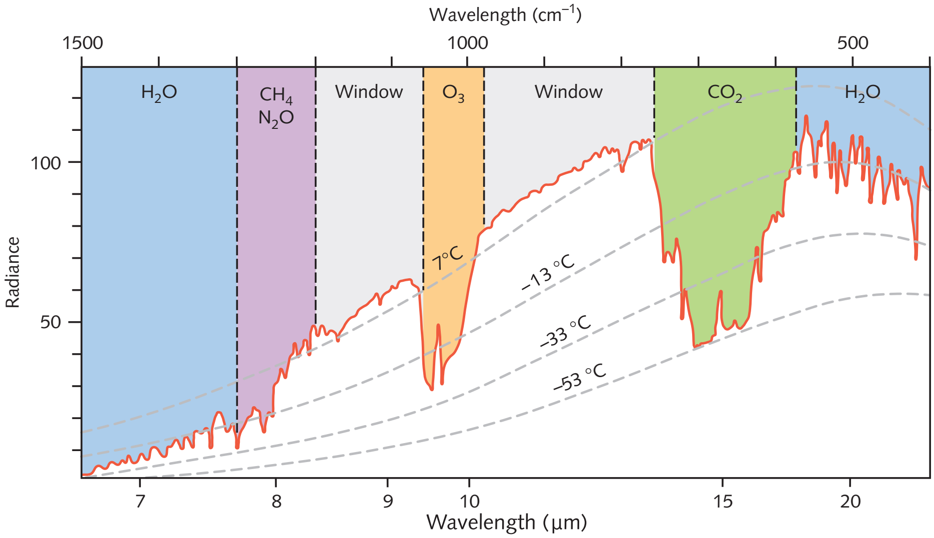


Figure 2.5 Thermal radiation in the infrared region (the visible part of the spectrum is between about 0.4 and 0.7 μm) emitted from the Earth's surface and atmosphere as observed over the Mediterranean Sea from a satellite instrument orbiting above the atmosphere, showing parts of the spectrum where different gases contribute to the radiation. Between the wavelengths of about 8 and 14 μm, apart from the ozone band, the atmosphere, in the absence of clouds, is substantially transparent; this is part of the spectrum called a 'window' region. Superimposed on the spectrum are curves of radiation from a black body at 7°C, −13°C, −33°C and –53°C. The units of radiance are milliwatts per square metre per steradian per wavenumber.

There needs to be a balance between the radiation coming in and the radiation leaving the top of the atmosphere – as there was in the very simple model with which this chapter started. Figure 2.7 shows the various components of the radiation entering and leaving the top of the atmosphere for the real atmosphere situation. On average, 235 watts per square metre of solar

Ice, oceans, land surfaces and clouds all play a role in determining how much incoming solar radiation the Earth reflects back into space.

radiation are absorbed by the atmosphere and the surface; this is less than the 288 watts mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, because now the effect of clouds is being taken into account. Clouds reflect some of the incident radiation from the Sun back out to space. However, they also absorb and emit thermal radiation and have a blanketing effect similar to that of the greenhouse gases. These two effects work in opposite senses: one (the reflection of solar radiation) tends to cool the Earth's surface and the other (the absorption of thermal radiation) tends to warm it. Careful consideration of these two effects shows that on average the net effect of clouds on the total budget of radiation results in a slight cooling of the Earth's surface.[7]

The numbers in Figure 2.7 demonstrate the required balance: 239 watts per square metre on average coming in and 239 watts per square metre on average going out. The temperature of the surface and hence of the atmosphere above adjusts itself to ensure that this balance is maintained. It is interesting to note that the greenhouse effect can only operate if there are colder temperatures in the higher atmosphere. Without the structure of decreasing temperature with height, therefore, there would be no greenhouse effect on the Earth.

Mars and Venus

Similar greenhouse effects also occur on our nearest planetary neighbours, Mars and Venus. Mars is smaller than the Earth and possesses, by Earth's standards, a very thin atmosphere.

A barometer on the surface of Mars would record an atmospheric pressure less than 1% of that on the Earth. Its atmosphere, which consists almost entirely of carbon dioxide, contributes a small but significant greenhouse effect.

The planet Venus, which can often be seen fairly close to the Sun in the morning or evening sky, has a very different atmosphere to Mars. Venus is about the same size as the Earth. A barometer for use on Venus would need to survive very hostile conditions and would need to be able to measure a pressure about 100 times as great as that on the Earth. Within the Venus atmosphere, which consists very largely of carbon dioxide, deep clouds consisting of droplets of almost pure sulphuric acid completely cover the planet and prevent

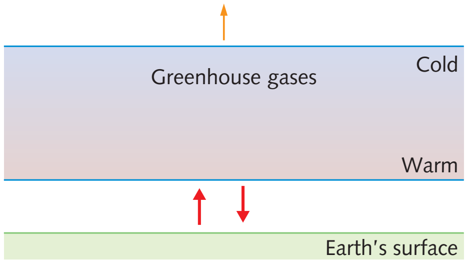


Figure 2.6 The blanketing effect of greenhouse gases.

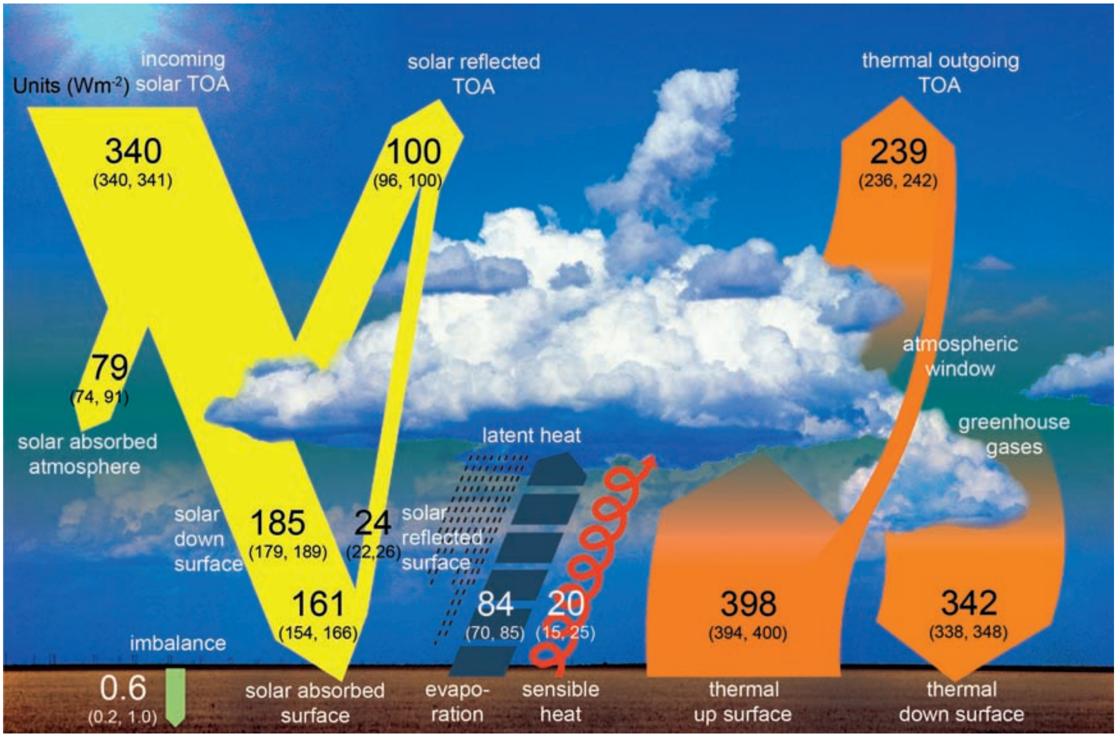
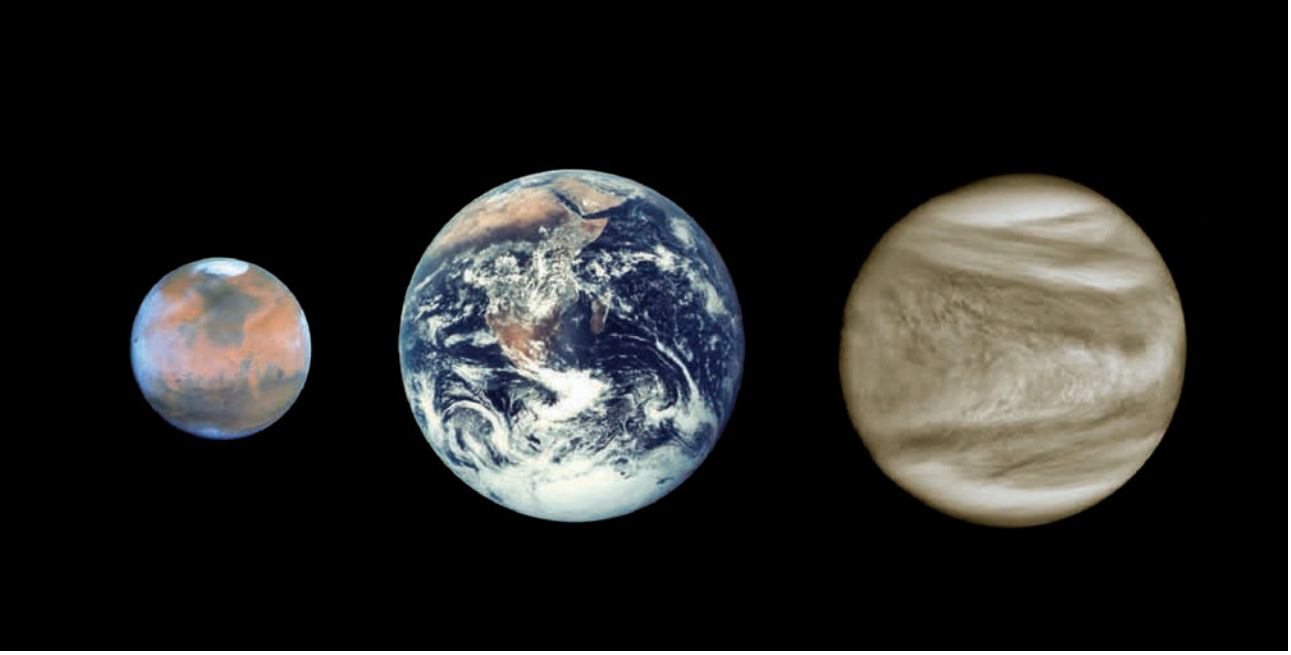


Figure 2.7 Components of the radiation (in watts per square metre) which on average enter and leave the Earth's atmosphere and make up the energy budget for the atmosphere. Note that about half of the incoming solar radiation is absorbed by the Earth's surface. This energy is transferred to the atmosphere by warming the air in contact with the surface (sensible heat), by evaporation and by thermal radiation that is absorbed by clouds and by greenhouse gases. The atmosphere in turn radiates thermal radiation back to Earth as well as out to space. Numbers state magnitudes of individual energy fluxes adjusted within their uncertainty ranges to close the energy budgets. Numbers in parentheses cover the range of values in line with observational constraints. (TOA - top of atmosphere.)



The planets Mars, Earth and Venus have significant atmospheres. This diagram shows the approximate relative sizes of the terrestrial planets.

most of the sunlight from reaching the surface. Some Russian space probes that have landed there have recorded what would be dusk-like conditions on the Earth – only 1% or 2% of the sunlight present above the clouds penetrates that far. One might suppose, because of the small amount of solar energy available to keep the surface warm, that it would be rather cool; on the contrary, measurements from the same Russian space probes find a temperature there of about 525°C – a dull red heat, in fact.

The reason for this very high temperature is the greenhouse effect. Because of the very thick absorbing atmosphere of carbon dioxide, little of the thermal radiation from the surface can get out. The atmosphere acts as such an effective radiation blanket that, although there is not much solar energy to warm the surface, the greenhouse effect amounts to nearly 500°C.

The 'runaway' greenhouse effect

What occurs on Venus is an example of what has been called the 'runaway' greenhouse effect. It can be explained by imagining the early history of the Venus atmosphere, which was formed by the release of gases from the interior of the planet. To start with it would contain a lot of water vapour, a powerful greenhouse gas (Figure 2.8). The greenhouse effect of the water vapour would cause the temperature at the surface to rise. The increased temperature would lead to more evaporation of water from the surface, giving more atmospheric water vapour, a larger greenhouse effect and therefore a further increased surface temperature. The process would continue until either the atmosphere became saturated with water vapour or all the available water had evaporated.

A runaway sequence something like this seems to have occurred on Venus. Why, we may ask, has it not happened on the Earth, a planet of about the same size as Venus and, so far as is

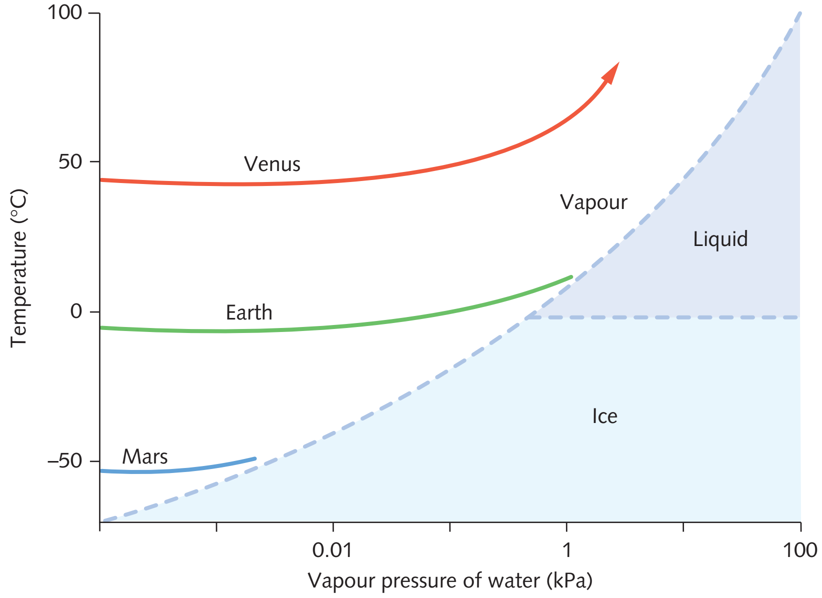


Figure 2.8 The evolution of the atmospheres of the Earth, Mars and Venus. In this diagram, the surface temperatures of the three planets are plotted against the vapour pressure of water in their atmospheres as they evolved. Also on the diagram (dashed) are the phase lines for water, dividing the diagram into regions where vapour, liquid water or ice are in equilibrium. For Mars and the Earth the greenhouse effect is halted when water vapour is in equilibrium with ice or liquid water. For Venus no such halting occurs and the diagram illustrates the 'runaway' greenhouse effect.

known, of a similar initial chemical composition? The reason is that Venus is closer to the Sun than the Earth; the amount of solar energy per square metre falling on Venus is about twice that falling on the Earth. The surface of Venus, when there was no atmosphere, would have started off at a temperature of just under 50°C (Figure 2.8). Throughout the sequence described above for Venus, water on the surface would have been continuously boiling. Because of the high temperature, the atmosphere would never have become saturated with water vapour. The Earth, however, would have started at a colder temperature; at each stage of the sequence it would have arrived at an equilibrium between the surface and an atmosphere saturated with water vapour. There is no possibility of such runaway greenhouse conditions occurring on the Earth.

The enhanced greenhouse effect

After our excursion to Mars and Venus, let us return to Earth! The natural greenhouse effect is due to the gases water vapour and carbon dioxide present in the atmosphere in their natural abundances as now on Earth. The amount of water vapour in our atmosphere depends mostly on the temperature of the surface of the oceans; most of it originates through evaporation from the ocean surface and is not influenced directly by human activity. Carbon dioxide is different. Its amount has changed substantially – by nearly 40% so far – since the Industrial Revolution, due to human industry and also because of the removal of forests (see Chapter 3). Future projections are that, in the absence of controlling factors, the rate of increase in atmospheric

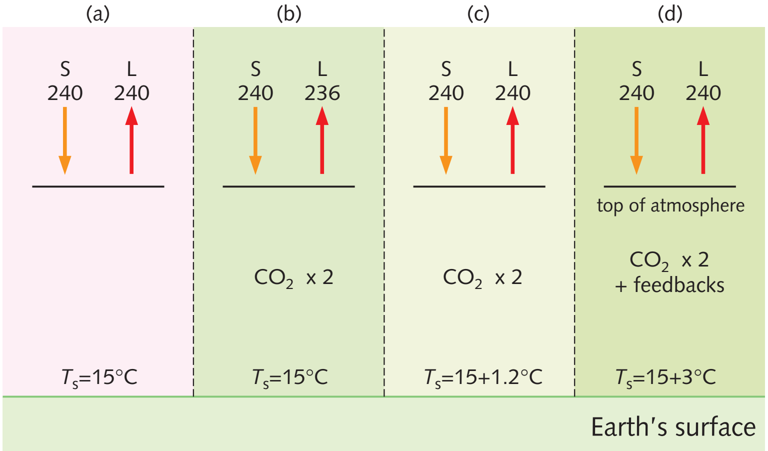


Figure 2.9 The enhanced greenhouse gas effect. Under natural conditions (a) the net solar radiation coming in (S = 240 watts per square metre) is balanced by thermal radiation (L) leaving the top of the atmosphere; average surface temperature (T_s) is 15°C. If the carbon dioxide concentration is suddenly doubled (b), L is decreased by 4 watts per square metre. Balance is restored if nothing else changes (c) apart from the temperature of the surface and lower atmosphere, which rises by 1.2°C. If feedbacks are also taken into account (d), the average temperature of the surface rises by about 3°C.

carbon dioxide will accelerate and that its atmospheric concentration will double from its pre-industrial value within the next 100 years (Figure 6.2).

This increased amount of carbon dioxide is leading to global warming of the Earth's surface because of its enhanced greenhouse effect. Let us imagine, for instance, that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere suddenly doubled, everything else remaining the same (Figure 2.9). What would happen to the numbers in the radiation budget presented earlier (Figure 2.7)? The solar radiation budget would not be affected. The greater amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere means that the thermal radiation emitted from it will originate on average from a higher and colder level than before (Figure 2.4). The thermal radiation budget will therefore be reduced, the amount of reduction being about 4 watts per square metre (a more precise value is 3.7).

This causes a net imbalance in the overall budget of 4 watts per square metre. More energy is coming in than going out. To restore the balance the surface and lower atmosphere will warm up. If nothing changes apart from the temperature – in other words, the clouds, the water vapour, the ice and snow cover and so on are all the same as before – the temperature change turns out to be about 1.2°C.

In reality, of course, many of these other factors will change, some of them in ways that add to the warming (these are called positive feedbacks), others in ways that might reduce the warming (negative feedbacks). The situation is therefore much more complicated than this simple calculation. These complications will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5. Suffice it to say here that the best estimate at the present time of the increased average temperature of the Earth's surface if carbon dioxide levels were to be doubled is about twice that of the simple calculation: 3.0°C. As the last chapter explained, for the global average temperature this is a large change. It is this global warming expected to result from the enhanced greenhouse effect that is the cause of current concern.

Having dealt with a doubling of the amount of carbon dioxide, it is interesting to ask what would happen if all the carbon dioxide were removed from the atmosphere. It is sometimes supposed that the outgoing radiation would be changed by 4 watts per square metre in the other direction and that the Earth would then cool by one or two degrees Celsius. In fact, that would happen if the carbon dioxide amount were to be halved. If it were to be removed altogether, the change in outgoing radiation would be around 25 watts per square metre – six times as big – and the temperature change would be similarly increased. The reason for this is that with the amount of carbon dioxide currently present in the atmosphere there is maximum carbon dioxide absorption over much of the region of the spectrum where it absorbs (Figure 2.5), so that a big change in gas concentration leads to a relatively small change in the amount of radiation it absorbs.[8] This is like the situation in a pool of water: when it is clear, a small amount of mud will make it appear muddy, but when it is muddy, adding more mud only makes a small difference.

An obvious question to ask is: has evidence of the enhanced greenhouse effect been seen in the recent climatic record? Chapter 4 will look at the record of temperature on the Earth during the last century or so, during which the Earth has warmed on average by about three-quarters of a degree Celsius. We shall see in Chapters 4 and 5 that there are good reasons for attributing most of this warming to the enhanced greenhouse effect, although because of the size of natural climate variability the exact amount of that attribution remains subject to some uncertainty.

SUMMARY

- No one doubts the reality of the natural greenhouse effect, which keeps us over 20°C warmer than we would otherwise be. The science of it is well understood; it is similar science that applies to the enhanced greenhouse effect.
- Substantial greenhouse effects occur on our nearest planetary neighbours, Mars and Venus. Given the conditions that exist on those planets, the sizes of their greenhouse effects can be calculated, and good agreement has been found with those measurements that are available.
- Study of climates of the past gives some clues about the greenhouse effect, as Chapter 4 will show.

First, however, the greenhouse gases themselves must be considered. How does carbon dioxide get into the atmosphere, and what other gases affect global warming?

QUESTIONS

1 Carry out the calculation suggested in Note 4 (refer also to Note 2) to obtain an equilibrium average temperature for an Earth partially covered with clouds such that

30% of the incoming solar radiation is reflected. If clouds are assumed to cover half the Earth and if the reflectivity of the clouds increases by 1% what change will this make in the resulting equilibrium average temperature?

2 It is sometimes argued that the greenhouse effect of carbon dioxide is negligible because its absorption band in the infrared is so close to saturation that there is very little additional absorption of radiation emitted from the surface. What are the fallacies in this argument?

3 Use the information in Figure 2.5 to estimate approximately the surface temperature that would result if carbon dioxide were completely removed from the atmosphere. What is required is that the total energy radiated by the Earth plus atmosphere should remain the same, i.e. the area under the radiance curve in Figure 2.5 should be unaltered. On this basis construct a new curve with the carbon dioxide band absent.[9]

4 Using information from books or articles on climatology or meteorology describe why the presence of water vapour in the atmosphere is of such importance in determining the atmosphere's circulation.

5 Estimates of regional warming due to increased greenhouse gases are generally larger over land areas than over ocean areas. What might be the reasons for this?

6 (For students with a background in physics) What is meant by Local Thermodynamic Equilibrium (LTE),[10] a basic assumption underlying calculations of radiative transfer in the lower atmosphere appropriate to discussions of the greenhouse effect? Under what conditions does LTE apply?

FURTHER READING AND REFERENCE

Historical overview of climate change science, Chapter 1, in IPCC WGI 2013. *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Stocker, T.F., Qin, D., Plattner, G.-K., Tignor, M., Allen, S.K., Boschung, J., Nauels, A., Xia, Y., Bex, V. and Midgley, P.M. (eds.)]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Houghton, J. 2002. *The Physics of Atmospheres,* third edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapters 1 and 14.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 2

1 It is about one-quarter because the area of the Earth's surface is four times the area of the disc which is the projection of the Earth facing the Sun; see Figure 2.1.

2 The radiation by a black body is the Stefan–Boltzmann constant (5.67×10^{-8} J m^{-2} K^{-4} s^{-1}) multiplied by the fourth power of the body's absolute temperature in Kelvin. The absolute temperature is the temperature in degrees Celsius plus 273 (1 K = 1°C).

3 These calculations using a simple model of an atmosphere containing nitrogen and oxygen only have been carried out to illustrate the effect of the other gases, especially water vapour and carbon dioxide. It is not, of course, a model that can exist in reality. All the water vapour could not be removed from the atmosphere above a water or ice surface. Further, with an average surface temperature of −6°C, in a real situation the surface would have much

more ice cover. The additional ice would reflect more solar energy out to space leading to a further lowering of the surface temperature.

4 The calculation I made giving a temperature of −6°C for the average temperature of the Earth's surface if greenhouse gases are not present not only ignored the different reflectivity of ice compared with the present surface but also ignored the presence of clouds. Depending on the assumptions made regarding clouds and other factors, values ranging between 20 and 30°C are quoted for the difference in surface temperature with and without greenhouse gases present.

5 Further details can be found in Mudge, F.B. 1997. The development of greenhouse theory of global climate change from Victorian times. *Weather*, **52**, 13–16.

6 A range of 1.5 to 4.5°C is quoted in Chapter 6, page 137.

7 More detail of the radiative effects of clouds is given in Chapter 5; see Figures 5.16 and 5.17.

8 The dependence of the absorption on the concentration of gas is approximately logarithmic.

9 For some helpful diagrams and more information about the infrared spectrum of different greenhouse gases, see Harries, J. E. 1996. The greenhouse Earth: a view from space. *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Meteorological Society*, **122**, 799–818.

10 For information about LTE see, for instance, Houghton, J. 2002. *The Physics of Atmospheres*, third edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3 The greenhouse gases

Traffic jam and smog in Beijing's Central Business District in May 2012.

THE GREENHOUSE gases are those gases in the atmosphere which, by absorbing thermal radiation emitted by the Earth's surface, have a blanketing effect upon it. The most important of the greenhouse gases is water vapour, but its amount in the lower atmosphere is not changing directly because of human activities. The important greenhouse gases that are directly influenced by human activities are carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, the chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and ozone. This chapter will describe what is known about the origin of these gases, how their concentration in the atmosphere is changing and how it is controlled. Also considered will be particles in the atmosphere of anthropogenic origin, some of which can act to cool the surface.