



Interview Mark Hillsdon

## Time for change

He spent almost 20 years helping to mould environmentalism in the UK – now **Tony Juniper** elucidates the movement's future.

Tony Juniper is feeding his chickens when I call. You'd be forgiven for thinking that, as he prepares to call time on his six years as executive director of Friends of the Earth, the chickens will be seeing a lot more of Juniper over the coming months.

Juniper certainly isn't leaving Friends of the Earth under a cloud. When he hands over to Andy Atkins, who arrives from the Tearfund later this summer, Juniper's passion for the environment, and the movement that he's done so much to shape, will be as great as ever.

It's a passion that was sparked in 1990 when he visited Brazil in search of the last wild Spix's Macaw (he's a world authority on macaws). He found the bird, but the journey brought him face-to-face with the reality of what was happening to the world's rainforests. It's a moment he describes as his epiphany.

Later that year he joined Friends of the Earth's rainforest campaign, and so began an 18-year commitment to the organisation. It has spanned an era of unprecedented change in the public's perception of environmental issues, with the green agenda edging in from the fringes to the centre of British politics.

**Public support is crucial if the movement is to take its next great leap forward.**

"One thing that I think we've really achieved is to reposition the environmental agenda," explains Juniper from his home in Cambridge, where he lives with his wife and three children. "I think a fantastic mainstreaming has taken place."

And this public support, he argues, is crucial if the movement is to take its next great leap forward.

"One of the great debates within the environmental movement over the last few years has been whether to put efforts into getting individuals to make lifestyle changes or whether we should be arguing for governments to enact new policies," he says.

"It needs to be both – one of the things that is very clear, even given heightened public awareness, is that

most people won't even do the basic things. Most people are still flying a lot, they are still buying 4x4 cars, some people are still resistant to recycling, some people don't even have energy efficient light bulbs.

And no amount of public awareness raising is going to change that. So we need laws to change the cars, the light bulbs, and the aviation policy for them, so they naturally start to do the right thing.

**"Even when politicians won't lead, they very often follow."**

"But the policies won't change, and government won't put in the new rules, until there's public consent."

In the past, says Juniper, green victories over issues such as acid rain and CFCs didn't really affect the day-to-day lives of most people. Climate change is different – as shown by Friends of the Earth's Big Ask campaign, which despite political resistance has delivered a new act of parliament on climate change and the first legal framework of its kind in the world.

"The government wasn't keen on this idea to begin with and the case was made through a combination of good argument and, crucially, massive public backing for change. So even when politicians won't lead, they very often follow. And if we can create the conditions whereby the public will see the need for change, I think we can do an awful lot."

Of course Juniper is pragmatic enough to know that this is only the beginning. "Yes there are going to be deficiencies with this bill and one of the things we are fighting hard for at the moment is the inclusion of international aviation and shipping (emissions).

The government says it doesn't want to have those numbers in the carbon budget; we think that's mad and I'm confident we can still win that argument."

One way of helping to influence the argument is, of course, to do so from within. And Juniper doesn't rule out standing for parliament one day – intriguingly he joined the Green party for the first time earlier this year.

"It's possible," he says. "I'm certainly going to be staying with the issues and may think about going towards politics."

Until then Juniper's diary is full. In between speaking engagements and writing commissions, he'll be working for the Prince of Wales' Rainforest Project, as well as a new sustainability group at Cambridge University. Which is all good news for the environment, but perhaps not such good news for his chickens.

**Tony Juniper on Manchester's proposed £3 billion transport revolution, which includes congestion charging:**

**"If we want motorists in Manchester to drive less, there must be an improvement in alternatives to the car such as better public transport and cycling facilities. We must wean ourselves off our addiction to oil. Congestion charging can play a significant role in developing a clean, safe and prosperous future."**