

GREEN

GIANTS

THE ECO

POWER

LIST

We all agree that the planet is in a perilous position. But what is the best way to save it? We name the 20 activists, filmmakers, writers, politicians and celebrities who will be setting the global environmental agenda in the coming year

WORDS **LUCY SIEGLE**
PHOTOGRAPH **RAINER HOSCH**

From David Attenborough to Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition Town movement, the *Observer* Ethical Awards has honoured many movers and shakers in ecological and social justice. So it seems fitting to launch our sixth awards by profiling the 20 global figures who'll exert influence in 2011. For those on our list, the coming year might best be described as "take your partners" time, as activists and corporates scramble for power – and we're predicting some unlikely marriages ahead. Commentators have noted that big business is taking an unprecedented interest in the environment and are pushing for conservation capitalism. The really big decisions from the climate-change conference in Cancun have effectively been rolled over to December's summit in Durban when the pressure is on to come up with a successive treaty to Kyoto, and we highlight the likely stars in Durban. It also celebrates those who inform our cultural, political, business and activist lives. From retail to politics, these are the people who will set the tone for how green issues are perceived and how the planet is protected. They may also provide inspiration for you to vote in the campaigner categories in this year's awards (see page 22).

1 **ECO ICON** **DAVID TAKAYOSHI SUZUKI**

The eco warrior's eco warrior, Suzuki is a scientist and author of dozens of books (his latest is *The Legacy*) who has long been frustrated by time-wasting over the planet's precarious position: "We're in a giant car heading towards a brick wall and everyone's arguing over where they're going to sit." Now his radical conservation methods are the subject of a film, *Force of Nature*, directed by Sturla Gunnarsson. Billed as Suzuki's last definitive lecture (let's hope not: he's only in his 70s and the planet could do with him for a good while longer), it also charts how Pearl Harbour changed the course of his Japanese family's history and how Suzuki was one of the first scientists to become a counter-culture folk hero. It is the first green film of 2011 and may turn out to be the most important.

2 **DEFENDER OF THE RURAL POOR** **HENRY SARAGIH**

There are grassroots organisations, and then there's La Via Campesina. An alliance of small-scale farmers and rural workers in their millions, it has become their most vociferous champion as "peasant farmers" all over the world face down forced evictions because of the rise in agrofuels and monocultures backed by transglobal corporations. It is widely believed that the world is at a crucial crossroads and that without a struggle small-scale producers will disappear. Not if General Secretary Henry Saragih has anything to do with it – as head of the Indonesia Peasant Union, he has also fought the so-called "palm oil barons". As the *Guardian's* John Vidal puts it: "How this struggle plays out in the next 20 years will determine whether there is any rainforest left intact in southeast Asia in 50 years' time, and possibly the political future of many developing countries."

3 **BIRD-LOVING NOVELIST** **JONATHAN FRANZEN**

Franzen has given previous hints to a green disposition in his novels – climate change has twice been a minor character – but in *Freedom*, published last year, the theme was more overt. Protagonist Walter Berglund is "greener than Greenpeace", a professional ecologist who makes a Faustian pact with a mountaintop-mining company in an effort to save a rare warbler. Grist.org (the online resource for ecovists everywhere) was smitten, suggesting that *Freedom* was the new *Silent Spring* (Rachel Carson's 1962 book that gave rise to





6 CLIMATE CHANGE-BUSTING MAYOR MIKE BLOOMBERG

This year humankind will pass the 7 billion population marker and, as the US Center for Urban Restoration puts it: "Some time during this decade, a child will be born who will mark humanity's transformation into an urban species – for the first time, more people will live in cities than in the rural areas of the earth." The C40, set up in 2005, brings together leaders of 40 of the world's largest cities to organise a co-ordinated response to climate change. The mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, is in charge. "Our cities have demonstrated that we are prepared to boldly confront climate change," Bloomberg says. "As mayors, we know that we don't have the luxury of simply talking about change without delivering it." Think of it as a particularly high-end town hall meeting with a very serious outcome.

7 NGO LEADERS NIMMO BASSEY (FRIENDS OF THE EARTH), KUMI NAIDOO (GREENPEACE)

For the first time, the heads of the two most famous planet-saving NGOs, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, hail from Africa: Bassey from Nigeria and Naidoo from the Durban townships. Both have gritty experience as activists. Bassey became an environmentalist after he witnessed the massacre when Nigerian forces opened fire on the village of Umuechem in the Niger Delta, where residents had campaigned against the Shell Petroleum Development Company. "Oil has been the destruction of the Nigerian economy," he says. "It destroys the relation between the people and the state." Naidoo began campaigning against apartheid in education as a 15-year-old. He was exiled in 1987. Years of experience have taught him that "having a seat at the table is very different from being equal voices at the table, and it is very different from being listened to." Come December both men will make politicians listen in Durban.

8 GREEN RETAILERS WALMART VERSUS TIMBERLAND

There may soon come a time when you won't be able to buy anything from toothpaste to shoes without knowing the quantity of emissions it's responsible for or how it compares to the hemp version. Big retailers have big plans for green labelling: Jeff Swartz, CEO of Timberland, has already kicked things off with the Earthkeeper boot that minimises your footprint's footprint. Timberland is one of 200 clothing companies creating a giant Eco Index. Meanwhile the planet's biggest retailer, Walmart, has promised to apply eco labels to thousands of product lines. Less impressive for those who think planet saving is about not buying stuff.

GETTY IMAGES/MIKE MCGREGOR/RUBRA

9 ECO FESTIVAL FOUNDER EDUARDO FISCHER

Eduardo Fischer has been described as the Richard Branson of Brazil, which may or may not be a compliment. As well as owning the advertising group Grupo TotalCom, he is the founder of SWU – Starts With You – a populist sustainability movement. SWU hosts an annual awareness-raising music festival in Brazil which, with a capacity of 300,000, is one of the biggest in the world. Fischer views it as the modern Woodstock. Well, perhaps – if Woodstock had had corporate sponsors including Nestlé.

10 TREE-PLANTING TWEENIE FELIX FINKBEINER

Without so much as a Prince Charles picture book (see next page), the nine-year-old Felix Finkbeiner announced he wanted to plant 1m trees in his native Germany. Like a junior Wangari Maathai (the Nobel Prize winner who has planted 30m trees), he achieved his goal by the age of 12. Now the organisation he set up, Plant for the Planet, has gone international. In December Felix spoke in Cancun: "We children feel really cheated because such a lot was done for Copenhagen and at the end, what was really achieved there?" Don't mess with Felix.

11 YOUTH EDUCATOR ELLEN MACARTHUR

The English sailor has become one of the major advocates for sustainable resource use, and champions the idea of viewing nature as natural capital. She had a Damascene conversion when she was still racing and came across abandoned whaling stations in South Georgia.



What did humankind do when the number of whales plummeted? Just moved on to the next resource: oil. MacArthur's Foundation has become one of the leading sustainable educators of young adults.

12 SUSTAINABLE BUILDERS BRAD PITT AND WILLIAM McDONOUGH

"I don't even like the word green," Brad Pitt told historian Douglas Brinkley in a recent interview. But the 13 new homes recently completed by his Make It Right Foundation in the Lower 9th district of New Orleans are undeniably so. Post Hurricane Katrina, Pitt raised funds and teamed up with sustainable-building visionary William McDonough to get these houses built and now, according



to the Green Building Council, it's the "most high-performing clean neighbourhood in the world". The self-confessed "architecture junkie" is clearly delighted by the results. "You know, out of all the Lower 9th homes we built, all are producing more energy than they are consuming. They're all pollution-free. This is an amazing story to me. Many of our home owners don't owe anything for energy use. We can prove that low-income and high-performance houses work."

13 ECO DIPLOMAT SALEEM H ALI

The pervading fear is that global disputes over water and land-based resources are likely to escalate into conflict. But professor of environmental studies at the University of Vermont and experienced mediator Saleem H Ali thinks natural resources have the capacity to unite, not just divide. A fan of peace parks (border regions used to resolve disputes by giving conflicting countries incentives to maintain them), he considers consumption of material goods to be a good thing. "Money from oil wealth can be used to invest in other sectors. And that in turn can yield sustainable development," he told *Forbes* magazine. He does, however, agree that Nigeria is the exception to this idea. Good – we'd hate him to be in conflict with Nimmo Bassey.

14 "LUNATIC" FARMER JOEL SALATIN

There's a certain rock 'n' roll energy about Joel Salatin of Polyface – a "multi-generational, pasture-based, beyond organic, local-market farm" in Virginia. The "lunatic" prefix is one he applied to himself (just in case you thought us unspeakably rude), because he is apt to come out with statements such as: "Industrial

the modern eco movement). "I've moved away from that sort of deep-ecological extremism," Franzen replied. "I started to think: what can we do for wild birds right now? I don't want these particular species to disappear." That's more than enough evidence for him to be crowned the (reluctant) eco novelist.

industry. His critics point out that, while he talks the green fight, his country is dependent on hydrocarbon and extraction industries. Can he prove he's more than hot air?

5 RE-FORESTING GURU CAROLE SAINT-LAURENT

Saint-Laurent is a woman with a plan, rather literally. The International Union for Conservation of Nature's senior advisor on forests has headed up a study that maps 1.5bn hectares of potential new forest; that's an area the size of Russia. This doesn't negate the outrage that three-quarters of the world's forests have either been cleared, destroyed or fragmented, with a third lost forever – but restoring forest has big benefits for communities and ecosystems. And this year is the UN Year of Forests. In case you missed it, last year was the UN Year of Biodiversity. Since 80% of biodiversity is land based, and much of that in forests, we hope that this year's choice has double the resonance and double the impact.

4 THE GREEN PRESIDENT EVO MORALES

The leader of Bolivia's Movement for Socialism has become a self-proclaimed defender of Mother Earth. His dramatic rhetoric was perhaps the highlight of a lacklustre Cancun conference: "We are familiar with the slogan 'Country or Death', but it is better now to talk about 'Planet or Death'." Bolivia's radical position includes a proposal to the UN to make water a human right, and nationalising the oil

LUCY SIEGLE IS THE OBSERVER'S ETHICAL LIVING CORRESPONDENT. HER BOOK *TO DIE FOR: IS FASHION WEARING OUT THE WORLD?* IS PUBLISHED IN APRIL

food never asks whether the pig is happy. The pig-ness of the pig never enters the conversation.” But his surprisingly sane beliefs are finding plenty of traction internationally. The debate he has generated goes far beyond the usual “conventional versus organic” conversation (he deems “organic” irrelevant). Ultimately it’s all about the soil. “The soil is the only thread upon which civilisation can exist. If a person could ever realise that our existence depends on literally inches of active aerobic microbial life on terra firma, we might begin to appreciate the ecological umbilical to which we are all still attached,” Salatin told treehugger.com. “The food industry, I’m convinced, actually believes we don’t need soil to live.” Which is where the real lunacy lies.

15 ELECTRIC CARMAKER ALAN MULALLY, CEO, FORD MOTOR COMPANY

We’re reliably informed by everyone that 2011 will be the year of the electric car, which makes a nice change from wondering Who Killed The Electric Car? (as per the 2006 indie documentary). At home the UK welcomes the Plug-In Car Grant, although only three qualifying models are currently on the market. Across the Atlantic, last week’s big unveiling by Alan Mulally was his company’s new electric Ford Focus. Time to plug in?

16 HOLLYWOOD’S CONSCIENCE DEBBIE LEVIN

Twenty years ago Ted Turner and other Hollywood luminaries set up the Environmental Media Association (EMA) to put star power to work on behalf of the planet. It went well; by mid-2000 it was de rigueur to turn up at the Oscars in a Prius. Debbie Levin, who took over the EMA presidency five years ago, has her sights trained on young Hollywood: A-listers under 35: “They are the ones we really want to model these sustainable behaviours we are all talking about,” she



says. EMA events now feature young starlets such as Rosario Dawson, Amy Smart and Olivia Wilde talking about sustainable solutions and EMA programmes, including the 16 organic gardens it runs around Los Angeles. Levin’s plans are for more projects, more stars and more green chatter. “We never stop. While you sleep we’re greening the world!” she says.

17 THE GREEN ROYAL PRINCE CHARLES

To build on *Harmony*, his book (and accompanying NBC documentary) on sustainability, His Royal Greenness is releasing a picture-book version for children this year. Naturally his eco efforts in the next few months run the risk of being eclipsed by *that* wedding. The famous ecological activist Vandana Shiva says: “Prince Charles has been a very courageous man because he has never thought through the throne he will occupy – but he has thought through the planet.”

18 ONLINE ACTIVISTS AVAAZ

Youthful dissent is in the air. Blame WikiLeaks, the protests against tuition fees, or both. The question is: can environmental campaigns capitalise and rally slacktivists and activists alike? Campaigning global web community Avaaz promises “new nimbleness and flexibility” and claims more than 6.5m active members worldwide. Campaign ideas are polled to a sample group, and only those that get a strong response are “taken to scale”. But once up and running campaigns can become “supercharged” in a way the old guard could never have imagined.

19 THE GREEN GUZZLER JAY LENO, TALKSHOW HOST

There’s deep green and then there’s *Tonight* show host Jay Leno – the proud owner of 240 cars. “The two are not mutually exclusive,” he has explained. “You can be interested in the environment and still like cars. And there is a way to just do it sensibly.” To underscore the fact, he has made his cars as green as possible. One even runs on tequila, and he recently took delivery of the new electric Chevrolet Volt.

20 THE (EX) GOVERNATOR ARNOLD SCHWARZENEGGER

Officially the Emissions Terminator has left the building. Arnie effectively outlawed his own Hummer and ignored Washington to commit California to a 25% cut in the state’s greenhouse emissions by 2020. Expect the former Governor to become an influential champion of green technology and a wandering eco ambassador. Never has his former catchphrase “I’ll be back” seemed more likely. ■

Turn the page to vote in our 2011 Ethical Awards

