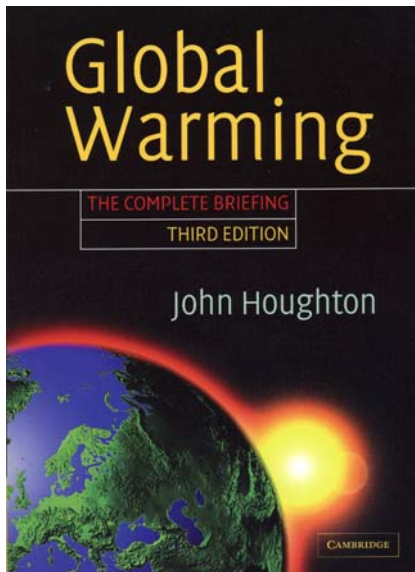




Global warming: the complete briefing (3rd edition)



by John Houghton

Cambridge University Press, 2004. Pp xxx + 351. ISBN 0-521-81762-5 (hbk), £50.00; 0-521-52874-7 (pbk), £22.99.

When I received this book my initial impression, based on size and weight, was that this third edition had greatly expanded on the second. I was partly right – the font is

larger and the margins are wider! To be fair, the author has also revised much of the text, however publishers do seem to be increasing the size of books by adding more white space. All in all, the text and figures have improved on the previous edition and some of the criticisms in my earlier review (*Journal* 108, p.46) have been answered. For those with a technical background the book provides a clear explanation of the issues associated with global warming from a knowledgeable expert in the field.

Science has advanced in the intervening seven years between the editions. We are now more certain that we can see real changes in the climate of our planet and computer predictions for the future are getting more accurate, but are far from perfect. What science cannot tell is what people will do – despite the Government's acknowledging that global warming is a bigger threat than terrorism and committing the country to a 60% cut in emissions by 2050, we are actually emitting more greenhouse gases than when the present Government took office. Although the majority of scientists agree with the evidence that we are seeing man-made heating of the planet, a small minority disagree. In the interests of balance, the media almost always present both arguments equally, thus distorting the debate. The Antarctic ozone hole is much better un-

derstood than global warming and international treaties are now working to effect a long term cure. However, while the causes of the ozone hole are now well understood, it still manages to surprise us – in 2002 it split in two and this year there was a near repeat. It is quite likely that increased levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere will also spring surprise changes to our weather and climate.

But what of the astronomer? When I last reviewed the book, I was hopeful that controls to prevent the waste of energy might lead to a reduction in light pollution. Whilst such controls may still occur, technology has advanced and brighter, lower energy lighting is becoming available. Future aspects of our climate that will affect astronomers are still very uncertain, but by the time the next edition of the book appears in 2010 some of the answers should be available.

Jonathan Shanklin

Jon Shanklin is mentioned in the book for helping to discover the Antarctic ozone hole, with a paper that Nature regards as one of the top twenty that it published in the twentieth century. To misquote Newton, it is disconcerting to be standing amongst giants!

This review is copyright © the *Journal* of the British Astronomical Association, www.britastro.org/journal. If you wish to reproduce it, or place it on your own Web page, please contact the Editor: Mrs Hazel McGee, hazelmcgee@compuserve.com