

by Gerhard R. Damm

A New Year, New Horizons



Yes, 2020 was awful. But I am optimistic that 2021 will see our lives and work eventually return to normal. Then again, who dares make predictions? Still, let's focus on the future and new opportunities for conservation on all continents.

As Conservation Frontlines enters its third year, we continue our focus on presenting new ideas for how society can improve its relationship with nature while building respect and tolerance, even if individual interpretations of conservation differ. The natural world needs recognition and protection for its intrinsic value, but it also must—in responsible ways—provide utilitarian value to humanity. We want to deliver food for thought (and building blocks, if you like) for a better future.

While always sticking to facts and science, we also feature unique personal stories about individual experiences in nature. Sarah Keller, who grew up in Appalachia and lives now in Montana, presents a good example: her coming-of-age story, and how she managed to reconcile two very disparate cultures and finally become the proud heir of her PapPap's old lever-action rifle.

Similarly, Lois Red Elk-Reed's poetry inspires us to come together—now especially, as COVID-19 ravages mankind and intolerance and deep divisions split society. Lois, an elder of the Lakota/Dakota

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people, points us toward ancient healing energies of Native Peoples, no matter which continent they call home.

Then consider Paul McCarney's observation that animal-rights proponents and hunters can learn from each other. Follow Paul's essay with Max Abensperg-Traun's first-person analysis of US and UK animal-protectionists' impact on CITES and the threat this poses to the rural communities and wildlife of Southern Africa. Something's got to give there.

Our new UK contributor, Alec Christie, a Cambridge PhD student, introduces us to the Conservation Evidence Project and the surprising gaps and biases it finds. Recognizing the gaps builds better understanding of what works in conservation and ultimately helps protect more species. (If you're a conservation scientist, you should be aware of this project, which currently tabulates 6,807 studies from around the world.) Well-applied evidence is crucial to the fight against misinformation and disinformation.

Paul Weinberg, our correspondent from the Russian republic of North Ossetia, and a veteran wild goat and sheep specialist, offers a rare glimpse into the hidden natural world of the remote Caucasus Mountains—rarely seen by Westerners. In particular, note the enigmatic tur, a wild goat virtually unknown outside of sheep-hunting circles.

Also regarding rare animals, Scott Waller, the leader of Conservation Frontlines' first Select Study—on the Amur tiger's prey species and their importance to Russia's vast and remote Far East—presents another progress report peppered with camera-trap photos of the mammals of the Sikhote-Alin Zapovednik.

Lord Ashcroft's deep dive into the nefarious slaughter of canned, or captive-bred, lions in South Africa is both comprehensive and disturbing. (Silvio Calabi reviews Ashcroft's book in this issue.) A statement about captive-bred lions signed by hunting organizations and released on December 1 was welcome, but the IUCN and other groups have spoken out on this issue for years and African Indaba published a comprehensive overview in 2017. Perhaps now Safari Club International will not just ban but truly sanction vendors who offer canned-lion "hunts" at its conventions.

(In future issues, Conservation Frontlines will take aim, literally, at this and other unethical practices, which are too often used to lobby—effectively, I might add—against hunting. We will look at the "Frankendeer" being raised and killed in Europe, North America, Argentina and New Zealand; the African antelope and buffalo that are being bred for new colors and record-breaking horn lengths; and the breeding, releasing and shooting of huge numbers of gamebirds for the questionable pleasure of rendering shotgun barrels too hot to touch.)

Wildlife requires wild lands, and land use is the focus of the Patagonia company's "Public Trust" documentary, reviewed by Andreas Damm. The film is a cinematic love letter to the grand majesty of the American landscape, he writes (Andreas is my son)—and a political statement against the threats to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante monuments in Utah and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Minnesota.

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There's more in this issue too, of course, and I hope that you feel some optimism as you read. We thank you and our contributors for supporting science-based, yet empathic journalism. Make the most of being cooped up at home by reading through this issue and deciding how and where you can fight for conservation too. Stay healthy, never stop being curious, and explore nature with an open mind. If you wish, reach out to us at editorial@conservationfrontlines.org.

Finally, we have a favor to ask: To help us continue to grow, please share this magazine with three friends and suggest they too subscribe to our free publications—this quarterly e-zine and our monthly Frontline Dispatches. We are, by design, entirely nonprofit and beholden to no advertisers, so we may follow science, ethics and common sense wherever they lead.

And to that end, we have some welcome new allies, as our North American Editor explains next.

—Gerhard R Damm, Editor-in-Chief

Banner image: A cold morning on the Alberta prairie. Conny Damm photo