



DEDICATED TO THE WORLD'S CUSTODIANS OF WILD SPACES & WILDLIFE



Frontlines Dispatches From Around The World

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North & South America



6.5 million acres protected in Canada. The Nature Conservancy has [announced](#) that after a multi-decade effort, the Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation has signed a historic agreement with the government of the Northwest Territories and Parks Canada to establish Thaidene Nënë, “Land of the Ancestors,” a huge (2.6 million ha) protected area that includes Canada’s newest national park. The new reserve is equal to the combined size of Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Glacier, Redwood, Zion, Arches, Shenandoah, Everglades and Acadia US national parks and contributes directly to Target 1, Canada’s goal to conserve 17% of the nation’s terrestrial and freshwater areas by the end of 2020.

Polar bears “will endure” despite climate change, according to Stanley Adjuk of the Kivalliq Wildlife Board, of Nunavut, Canada, who told the *Nunavut News* on Feb. 22 that the bears “can adapt to anything.” His [statements](#) came after a Norwegian conservationist expressed concern that, on top of climate change, selective hunting of the bears “for size and fur quality” posed an existential threat to the species.

Feral hogs have arrived in western and central Canada. On April 3, *National Geographic* [reported](#) that wild hogs crossbred from domestic pigs and escaped European wild boar are

now causing agricultural and environmental havoc from British Columbia to Manitoba and beyond, just as they do throughout much of the US.

Alberta finds that local people are the key to grizzly bear restoration. A new [study](#) reported last month in *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* suggests that heeding local perspectives, fears and frustrations may be the key to increasing community support for controversial conservation projects, thereby improving their success. [See also "[Modern-Day Grizzly Bear Reality](#)" in the April issue of Conservation Frontlines.]

Wild Harvest Initiative unites harvesters of all kinds. The Wild Harvest Initiative is the first scientific program to assess and communicate the scale, value and relevance of recreationally harvested wild meat and fish in North America. The [website](#) offers information and updates and hosts a blog for hunters, anglers, wild-mushroom foragers, medicinal-plant gathers and more—for photos, videos, stories, recipes and ideas related to natural harvests. As the harvest of wild foods is another reason to protect wild lands, the National Wildlife Federation has entered into a [partnership](#) with the Wild Harvest Initiative.

Louisiana black bears will be de-listed from ESA. A district court has upheld the removal of the Louisiana black bear from federal protection. Plaintiffs sued the US Fish and Wildlife Service over the 2016 delisting, but Safari Club International successfully [defended](#) the USFWS's science-based decision. The bears are one of 16 subspecies of the American black bear and the only one to be listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act, in 1992, when their habitat was found to have declined by more than 80%.

US Interior Dept. decision to allow imports of elephant & lion trophies from Zimbabwe will be challenged by the Center for Biological Diversity at a hearing [scheduled](#) for April 22 at the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit.

Otter, fisher, beaver and bobcat have been re-established in Pennsylvania. Thanks to reintroduction programs and modern management, these and other fur-bearing species have returned to that point that the Pennsylvania Game Commission is considering expanded hunting and trapping seasons, [reported](#) the Harrisburg *Bradford Era* on Feb. 27.

Dogs may sniff out chronic wasting disease. The Pennsylvania *Patriot-News* [reported](#) on Feb. 25 that the Univ. of Pennsylvania will receive funding from the state's dept. of agriculture to explore the potential for working dogs to detect chronic wasting disease in deer feces. CWD, a little-understood fatal brain disease, was first found in Pennsylvania deer in 2012.

Missouri deer hunters donated 348,535 pounds of venison to the state's Share the Harvest program, coordinated by the Missouri Dept. of Conservation and the Conservation Federation of Missouri. According to a Feb. 24 Ozark Radio News [story](#), the meat is delivered to local food banks in ready-to-use packages; and since the program began, in 1992, it has provided more than 4.3 million pounds (1.95 million kg) of venison.

Staten Island is NYC's "ground zero" for unwanted wildlife, according to a March 6 *New York Times* [story](#). "Urban pests" such as whitetail deer and wild turkeys eat garden plants, damage woodlands and cause traffic accidents, and feral cats have become more and more abundant as well. Some residents and state officials are open to a limited cull, but the city is looking into a sterilization program.

Fewer hunters but more support. Per a March 5 [report](#) in the Minneapolis (MN) *StarTribune*, support for some non-profit hunting-and-habitat groups in the US is up although hunter numbers have declined by about 5 million since their 1982 peak of 16.7 million. Ducks Unlimited membership has grown 2.3% in eight years and the National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever have seen similar trends. The value of such groups to habitat conservation is impossible to calculate—providing benefits for bees, butterflies, drinking water, floodwater retention, species conservation and much more. [*Ed. note: Communicating these societal benefits is more important than ever for hunting organizations.*]

No surprise: Americans polarize as pro-wolf or anti-wolf. While heated public debates over wolf restoration and hunting typically reflect personal values, a March 6 *Outdoor Life* [article](#) points out some basic facts that the two camps should agree on: "Wolves are neither demons nor gods," but their presence is a matter of habitat preservation and access—critically important to hunting and non-hunting conservationists.

Baiting for black bears in grizzly country is especially problematic because bait attracts grizzlies too, and smaller sow grizzlies may be shot mistakenly. A March 5 *Mountain Journal* [article](#) notes that the controversial practice not only violates tenets of fair chase, it also runs counter to safe food-storage guidelines in grizzly country.

Wyoming plans highway overpasses for migrating wildlife. A *Washington Post* [story](#) on March 18 notes that Rte. I-80 across Wyoming, which blocks the ancient north-south movement of deer, elk and pronghorn antelope, now averages one vehicle every 10 seconds. In response, Wyoming officials and scientists want to build bridges, tunnels and other structures to allow the animals to safely cross the four lanes of high-speed traffic.

Do you eat bear meat? Ask hunters about bear meat and you will likely get a number of wildly different responses, from “it’s inedible” and “it isn’t safe to eat” to “it’s the best meat out there.” Hunting-gear maker Sitka published chef and hunter Coonor Gabbott’s [take](#) on the subject.

Interior Secretary Bernhardt to disburse nearly \$1 billion, generated in 2019 through taxes on hunting, shooting and fishing equipment and boat fuel, to all 50 states and US territories. In an April 3 [story](#) in North Dakota’s *Grand Forks Herald*, [Aurelia Skipwith](#), director of the USFWS, said, “These grants are the epitome of the great things that can happen when industry, hunters and anglers and state and federal governments work together.”

Guanacos are critically endangered in Bolivia and Paraguay. Perhaps 220 remain in both countries, where they are threatened by habitat loss and poaching. A Feb. 26 *Mongabay.com* [article](#) details efforts to conserve the species in the vast Gran Chaco region.

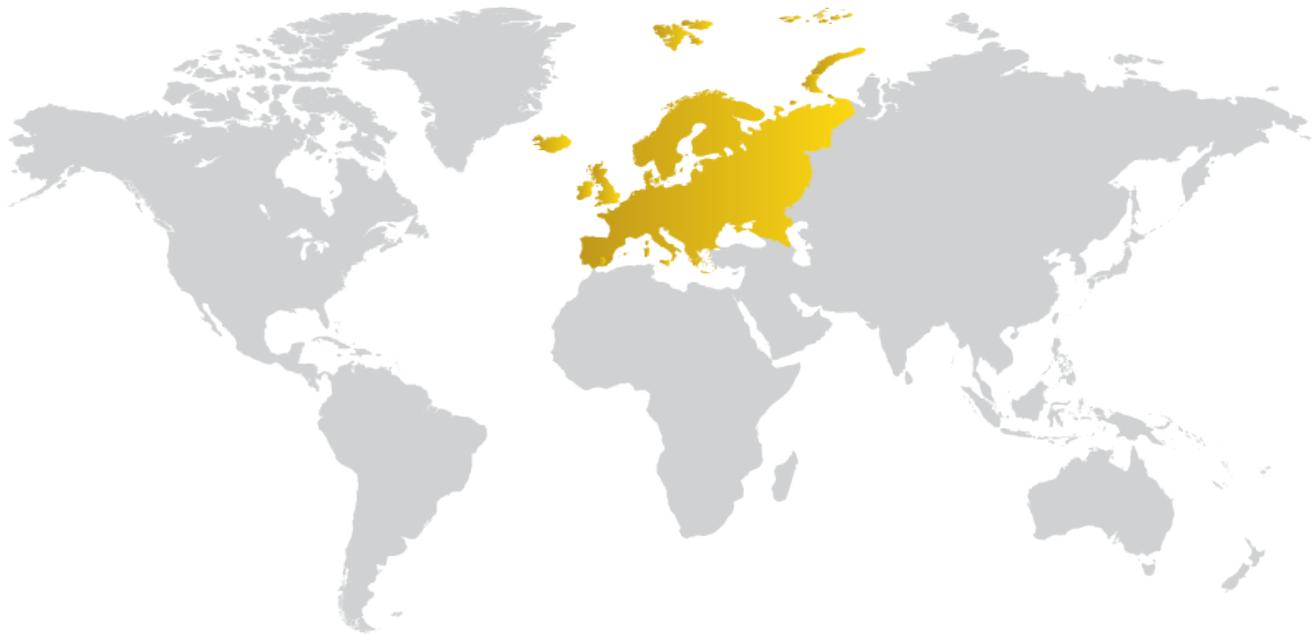
White-lipped peccary range in Mexico and Central America has shrunk by as much as 90%, suggests a new [study](#) in *ScienceDirect*. “It’s shocking . . . how fast this population is declining compared to the last assessment,” Harald Beck, chair of the IUCN Peccary Specialist Group, [told](#) *The New York Times* on Feb. 19.

Monarch butterfly populations wintering in Mexico are down by more than half this year. A [survey](#) reported on *Mongabay.com* on March 20 found that during the 2019-20 winter the

butterflies occupied just seven acres (2.8 ha) of forest, a 53% decrease from the 2018-2019 season, when monarchs covered 15 acres (6 ha).

African hippos in South America—pests or replacements? When cocaine kingpin Pablo Escobar was shot dead, in 1993, four hippos he'd imported were left behind in a pond on his ranch. Since then, their numbers have grown to an estimated 80-100 and the animals have expanded into the country's rivers. A new [study](#) in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* challenges the view that these are invasive pests that should not run wild, pointing out that the hippos restore the ecological traits of native species that were exterminated thousands of years ago.

Europe



Wildlife in the Netherlands has halved in 30 years, mainly due to pollution by agricultural nitrogen. The World Wildlife Fund [reported](#) in February that birds, butterflies and some reptiles have all but disappeared in heathlands and agricultural areas. Yet areas where nitrogen compounds have been reduced showed a 24% growth in animal populations, with nuthatches, wood owls and marsh tits making the most successful comebacks. Affected areas can recover if farmers switch to more environmentally friendly practices.

Kai-Uwe Denker, past president of the Namibian Professional Hunting Association, told EU parliamentarians that habitat loss is the world's biggest conservation challenge, and that sustainable, ethical conservation hunting contributes significantly to habitat protection. Denker's [presentation](#) was in Brussels on February 20.

Fishing & hunting expos continue to draw crowds in Europe. The largest one, Germany's *Jagd & Hund*, drew 82,000 nature lovers, hunters, anglers and working-dog and falconry aficionados. *Jagen & Fischen*, also in Germany, reported 37,600 visitors and *Hohe Jagd & Fischerei*, in Austria, attracted 44,000 people. The culinary sections of these exhibitions—with star-rated chefs demonstrating ways to prepare wild game and fish for the table—are increasingly well received.

Rewilding Scotland with wolves and lynx? For “Apocalypse Cow: How Meat Killed the Planet,” George Monbiot, a British environmental writer, shot a Scottish deer—a “gruesome, horrible experience”—and then, in an [essay](#) for *Mountain Journal*, he discussed the tradeoffs in favoring one wildlife species over another. Wolves and lynx were removed from the Scottish Highlands; deer numbers exploded and then grazed down native trees. At Glenfeshie, in the Cairngorms, deer are being culled, the trees are returning and the regenerating forests are full of birds and other wildlife. “Some of us have campaigned for years for the return of wolves and lynx to Scotland, having watched what happened in Yellowstone, but . . . in the meantime, what should be done?”

Africa



Elephant conservationist killed by elephants. Beyers Coetzee, 45, was herding a group of elephants that had broken out of a private reserve back to safety when two bulls “blindsided” him, according to this [report](#) on RovingReporters.co.za. The attack took place south of Vryheid, in South Africa, on February 18.

Zambian communities will receive the \$1.06 million in hunting fees owed to those living in hunting areas. Zambia’s Minister for Tourism and Art, Hon. Ronald Chitotela, confirmed to six traditional chiefs that government will release the funds, ZMK19.8 million in Zambian currency. The CIC broke the [news](#) on Feb. 21.

Nature conservation is a growth industry for Africa. So says Fred Swaniker, founder of the African Leadership University, in an [interview](#) with Mongabay.com in February. ALU recently launched a School of Wildlife Conservation to help young Africans develop the skills and knowledge necessary to “own and drive” the conservation agenda on the continent.

Namibia has endorsed a campaign to promote conservation hunting. In a recent [story](#) in the country’s *New Era* newspaper, Information Minister Stanley Simataa pointed out that a hunting ban will damage the country and its conservation efforts. He listed benefits from hunting such

as income, jobs, rural electrification and the upgrading of water infrastructure and schools, and noted that if hunting is banned, human-wildlife conflict will worsen as people “will not see the need to co-exist with wildlife.”

Lowland gorillas have been recorded on camera traps deep in Monte Alén National Park in central Equatorial Guinea—the first time that the animals have been caught on film in more than a decade. Local communities had reported gorilla sightings and the photographs confirm their existence despite heavy hunting pressure. Mongabay.com [announced](#) the discovery in late February.

West African lions show no preference for protected areas, indicates a Univ. of Michigan camera survey in a large area of five national parks and 14 hunting concessions in Burkina Faso and Niger. The conclusion comes from a 2019 research [project](#) described in the *Journal of the Society for Conservation Biology*. Researchers suspect that plentiful water and prey, good habitat and added patrols draw lions to hunting concessions whereas the nominally protected parks struggle with degraded habitat, poachers, inadequate staffing and displacement of wildlife by livestock.

African black rhino numbers are slowly increasing as conservation efforts counter poaching, according to the March 19 [update](#) of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The Southwestern Black Rhino subspecies, previously assessed as “vulnerable,” has seen sufficient population growth over the past three generations to be re-categorized as “near-threatened.” The other two subspecies, the Southeastern and Eastern, remain “critically endangered.” All three are on a slow path to recovery, but highly dependent on continuing conservation. [See also Birgit Köttling’s [description](#) of Namibia’s black rhino custodianship program in the April issue of Conservation Frontlines.]

South African Police Lt. Col. Leroy Bruwer was assassinated on his way to work on the morning of March 17. A News24 [column](#) describes the ambush by gunmen that killed Bruwer, the top investigator of the elite [Hawks](#) police unit and an expert in combating rhino poaching. His death leaves a vacuum of knowledge, institutional memory, skill, capacity and commitment.

Asia



A CITES [notification](#) about China's wildlife trade clarifies the ruling by the Chinese government to **ban trade in and consumption of wild animals**. Per a Feb. 25 [story](#) in the *Daily Maverick*, "the illegal consumption and trade of wildlife will be 'severely punished' as will be hunting, trading or transporting wild animals for the purpose of consumption. The use of wild animals for non-edible purposes, including scientific research, medical use and display, will be subject to strict examination, approval and quarantine inspection." This was spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, traced to a wildlife market in Wuhan. ICCS, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Conservation Science, provides this excellent [overview](#), including what it might mean for poaching.

China's wildlife trade is worth \$74 billion annually and employs more than 14 million people. China must find alternative livelihoods for these people in a real-time case study of the complex trade-offs between ethics, conservation, economics and public health. A March 4 [report](#) in the *South China Morning Post* adds that "Since the coronavirus epidemic began, [China's] National Forestry and Grassland Administration has confiscated 39,000 wild animals and 'cleaned up' more than 350,000 sites such as restaurants and markets where the animals are traded."

Across China, nearly 20,000 “secretive” wildlife farms—raising peacocks, civet cats, porcupines, ostriches, wild geese and boar—have been shut down in the wake of COVID-19 and the country’s (temporary) ban of the wildlife trade. The National People’s Congress is now working on a deep regulatory overhaul of the Wildlife Protection Law, [wrote](#) Michael Standaert in *The Guardian* on Feb. 20.

Malaysia and Southeast Asia “at the heart of massive wildlife trade” says a March 1 [article](#) in the *New Straits Times*. Malaysia has become a hotbed for poaching and wildlife trafficking, creating (among other problems) a security risk for the country. According to TRAFFIC’s latest [report](#), the investigation across 10 countries reveals “just a fraction of the true magnitude of illegal wildlife trade in the region.”

Some Indian wildlife get international protection. Three endangered species—the great Indian bustard, Bengal florican and Asian elephant—have been listed in the UN’s Appendix 1 at the 13th Conference of the Parties to the Conventional on Migratory Species, held in Gandhinagar. The [story](#) appeared in the *Financial Express* on Feb. 21.

Govt. offers “canned” shooting of nilgai, blackbuck and chinkara. On March 24, *Pakistan Today* [reported](#) that the Punjab Wildlife Dept. was advertising semi-domesticated animals “Guaranteed to be hand fed by us, in their cages and enclosures. Fattened to your heart’s desire and readied for the ‘slaughter.’ We assure you that these animals will not run away, even if you have fired numerous shots at them.” The “hunts” take place at the Lal Sohanra National Park—an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve—apparently because the animals cannot otherwise be removed.

Pacific



Australia’s devastating fire season has led to significant forest loss in tropical and subtropical parts of the east coast. One of the areas most affected is the border region straddling New South Wales and Queensland, which includes large sections of the Gondwana rainforests. Mongabay.com [reports](#) on early findings from Queensland’s Dept. of Environment and Science that the habitat of 648 threatened species has been damaged by fire.

Foveran, a well-known red-deer breeding farm and game park in the Hakataramea Valley of New Zealand’s South Island is for sale. A March 4 [story](#) on Voxy.co.nz says the facilities, on 2,645 hectares (6,536 acres) include deer crush and drafting areas, a surgical room and laboratory for embryo transplants, and a “trophy estate” producing many “world record trophies”—virtually all the stags produced are sold as trophies. [*Ed. note: aka as genetically manipulated monsters.*]

World



Even low levels of lead in the blood can lead to serious health problems, including kidney and cardiovascular disease. As the use of lead ammunition continues to be widespread, scientists say it is crucial that health officials get the message out to hunting communities. Read about facts and myths in “[Lead in hunted meat: Who’s telling hunters and their families](#)” in *Environmental Health News*. Even lead heavy bullets can fragment into tiny microparticles too small to see or feel when eating game meat.

Ending subsidies for environmental damage. Global subsidies for sustainable fisheries amount to \$10 billion while those funding overfishing [total](#) \$22 billion. Brazil’s government spent \$158 million to curb deforestation, but it spent \$14 billion supporting deforestation. Indonesia’s ratio is worse—\$165 million vs. \$27 billion. A Feb. 20 [article](#) in *Anthropocene* looks at the “silo effect” that allows governments to fund conservation programs while simultaneously subsidizing environmental damage. Identifying and ending such subsidies was agreed to by 193 nations in 2010 as part of the global [Convention on Biological Diversity](#). Those countries also promised to tax pollutants, link subsidies to improved environmental practices and so on—yet these efforts are still “dwarfed by subsidies driving land use change and biodiversity loss.”

Big conservation projects that abuse indigenous peoples must end, [argues](#) Survival International—these peoples should be recognized as senior partners in the fight to protect the land they own and live on. “The tragic irony is that mass tourism, trophy hunting and ‘sustainable’ logging, mining or other resource extraction are often welcomed in areas where the original inhabitants have been evicted and forbidden from using the land themselves.”

“Sentiment analysis” shows we’re getting better at wildlife conservation. Using artificial intelligence to review more than 4,000 studies across four decades, researchers found that, generally speaking, we’re getting better and better at reintroducing species to the wild. In addition, machine learning could be used to identify the best techniques and solutions in conservation biology. In *Patterns* on March 19, co-author Lucas Joppa, Chief Environmental Officer at Microsoft, [writes](#), “If we are going to maximize our conservation dollars, then we need to be able to quickly assess what works and what doesn't.”

Horses, bison and reindeer can slow the loss of permafrost in the Arctic. Experiments near Chersky, in northeast Russia, indicate that the hooves of herds of grazing animals dramatically reduce the insulating effect of snow, thus intensifying the freezing of the soil and reducing the release of the enormous deposits of carbon locked in permafrost. A new [study](#) from the University of Hamburg explores this unconventional countermeasure to climate change.

Hunting bans hurt rural communities and conservation alike, academic researchers from Arizona and Maryland have determined: “Prohibitions against wildlife hunting often have impoverishing outcomes for rural households. Previous research has emphasized the financial losses and attributed material deprivation as the motivation for illegal wildlife hunting. However, this narrow focus does not capture the values rural communities ascribe to hunting nor consider the broader outcomes hunting bans have on multidimensional well-being.” The research [paper](#) is in the March issue of *Biological Conservation*.

Even small clearcuts can have big effects. A study in Brazil by researchers at the universities of São Paulo and Campinas shows that if just one-quarter of an Atlantic rainforest fragment of approximately 1 hectare (2.5 acres) is deforested, the local air temperature will increase by 1°C (1.8°F). Clear-cutting the entire fragment would increase the local temperature by as much as 4°C. Announced in March, the [findings](#) are in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

There's a name for it: Nature Deficit Disorder. A new study in [Frontiers in Psychology](#), led by a team at Mexico's Sonora Institute of Technology, has shown that a disconnection to nature may contribute to the destruction of the planet, as the lack of a bond with the natural world is unlikely to result in desire to protect it. As younger generations will be the future custodians of the planet, researchers are studying how to promote sustainable behaviors and develop environmental care in children.

Large ecosystems can collapse significantly faster than expected. The new [research](#), published in *Nature Communications*, suggest that ecosystems the size of the Amazon forests could collapse in only 49 years and the Caribbean coral reefs in just 15 years. British university scientists discovered that while larger ecosystems take longer to collapse, due to their sheer size, the rate at which the transformation occurs is significantly faster than the pace of change for smaller systems.



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