



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



FRONTLINE DISPATCHES - AUGUST 2020 VOL II, NO. 8

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The [Amur Tiger Project](#) report: The pandemic's effects continue to ripple around the world. Project leader Scott Waller writes, "Since I will not be able to travel to Russia this fall, I will be taking graduate courses here [the University of Montana] instead. Fortunately, the [fieldwork](#) will proceed as planned: WCS Russia will be putting out cameras in collaboration with the Sikhote-Alin Reserve and conducting track surveys. I'll be in regular contact with folks over there and I'll be making maps and doing other GIS work, sending data forms, studying their photos and updating our findings. I am now hoping to get over to Russia in January, if at all possible.

"But because I can't be there this fall, [funding](#) from *Conservation Frontlines* has become even more important: We have to hire extra staff to conduct the fieldwork I won't be able to carry out.

"As soon as I get my hands on the photos from this past field season and can start our first analyses of prey population size, I'll update you and your readers."

A [description](#) of Scott's work, CFL's first Select Study, appeared in the July 2020 *Conservation Frontlines*.

North & South America



Photo: Tom Bauer, *Missoulian*

Jim Posewitz, March 6, 1935 – July 3, 2020, a force behind the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, blazed a trail for all conservationists. More than a million copies of his first book, *Beyond Fair Chase – The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting*, have been sold, and he went on to establish the non-profit Orion / The Hunter’s Institute. Among his many awards, the National Wildlife Federation’s National Conservationist Achievement Award of 2015 stands out. [Read](#) more about Mr.

Posewitz in the Helena, MT, *Independent Record*.

Trump’s Corps of Engineers has green-lighted Alaska’s Pebble Mine, despite objections from 250 outdoor organizations and businesses and thousands of citizens—deciding that it “would

not be expected to have a measurable effect on fish numbers” in Bristol Bay, home of the world’s largest salmon runs. The mine, focused on a gold and copper lode worth as much as \$500 billion, had been a flashpoint for almost 20 years until the Obama Administration nixed it. *The Washington Post* broke the [story](#) on July 24. On July 27, the Final Environmental Impact Statement was released; experts say it makes clear that only the mine’s concept had been evaluated, not its full effects. Objections may still be filed [here](#).

But ‘America’s rainforest,’ the Tongass, will not be logged after all—at least not yet. On June 24, a federal judge halted the Trump Forest Service’s plan to allow logging on 24,600 acres of pristine old-growth forest on southeast Alaska’s Prince of Wales Island. Alaska Public Media covered the [decision](#); *Outdoor Life* presented the conservationist [view](#).

Was BC’s wolf cull based on bogus statistics? Last winter, to try to conserve its remnant mountain caribou, British Columbia killed 463 wolves at the recommendation of a predator study. This spring, a different group of scientists found a [flaw](#) in the statistical modeling of that study, one that indicates the wolves—which rank only 4th among caribou predators—were eradicated for no conservation benefit. The only beneficiary appears to have been BC’s logging, oil and gas industries. A [review](#) of the debate appeared in *The Atlantic* on July 14.

Spirit bears of the British Columbia coastal rainforest are culturally significant to the Kitasoo/Xai’xais and Gitga’at Nations, but scientific understanding of the animals is lacking. Spirit, or Kermode, bears, though white, are not albino. A July 6 *New York Times* [article](#) describes the mapping of spirit-bear genes and the efforts to protect their habitat.

Eagle feathers have figured in Native American culture for centuries. In recognition of this, the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s National Eagle Repository stores bald and golden eagles that were found dead and ships them to federally recognized tribes for their ceremonies. Watch the [video](#) on *The Great Big Story*.

‘Elk Return to Kentucky, Bringing Economic Life’ is a June 30 *New York Times* [article](#) about a conservation success that began in 1997 with 1,500 elk airlifted (at Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation expense) from the western US to eastern Kentucky’s reclaimed coalfields.

Kentucky's elk population has since grown to more than 13,000 and elk-hunting and -sightseeing now add about \$5 million to local economies.

From guerrilla fighters to conservation citizen-scientists. A wildlife geneticist from the University of Sydney (AUS) is training former Colombian rebels in conservation science skills in a program called Peace with Nature. ([Science](#), July 8) Colombia's jungles and forests remain largely unexplored by scientists, partly because of years of guerrilla activity. Colombia's government and FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, signed a peace treaty in 2016. Now, ex-FARC members, intimately familiar with the jungle, are fighting instead for their country's ecological survival.

The Lakota people plan to reintroduce up to 1,500 bison on 28,000 acres (11,300 ha) of prairie on South Dakota's Rosebud Indian Reservation. Over the next five years, tribal groups will work with the World Wildlife Fund and the Dept. of the Interior's [Bison Conservation Initiative](#) on this. The project and its benefits—ecological, spiritual and economic—are [detailed](#) on Mongabay.

'Texotics'—the 2 million kudu, nilgai, addax and other non-native species on game ranches in Texas—amount to a “massive unplanned and unregulated natural experiment,” says a recent *Texas Observer* [article](#). *National Geographic's* [story](#) on the same topic, on July 7, noted that raising, buying, selling and transporting exotic animals is big business in Texas, where a female Cape buffalo or giraffe can bring \$200,000.

In Colorado, paddleboarders must buy hunting & fishing licenses—as do hikers, bikers, campers, off-road drivers, birders and others who want to “recreate” in the state's nearly 600 wildlife areas and trust lands. These areas are managed for wildlife, so all users must now contribute toward conservation funding by buying the licenses, [reported](#) *The Colorado Sun* on June 25.

No mere slap on the wrist. In late June, New Mexico's Dept. of Game and Fish fined Cody W. Davis, of Dickinson, North Dakota, \$77,000 for poaching a mule deer in 2015—\$20,000 for the deer, \$54,000 in restitution (conservation officers logged nearly 2,000 hours and more than

25,000 miles in order to charge Davis) and \$3,000 toward Operation Game Thief. More [details](#) are in GoHunt.

When North America stopped overusing wildlife and created a culture of conservation, a century ago, many species on the brink of extinction rebounded. Prof. Roland Kays, North Carolina State University, [writes](#) in *The Conversation*, on June 17, that this conservation turnaround—involving wildlife management, species and habitat conservation and sustainable use—offers lessons in solving the wildlife crises in Asia and Africa.

Ten recommendations to improve wildlife conservation and management appear in “[Wildlife for the 21st Century: Volume VI](#)” from American Wildlife Conservation Partners—a group of more than 50 organizations. The recommendations cover funding, access to and management of federal lands, game migration corridors, integrating wildlife goals into energy planning, wildlife disease management and habitat conservation in a changing climate. They encourage collaboration between federal agencies, state fish & wildlife agencies and private landowners.

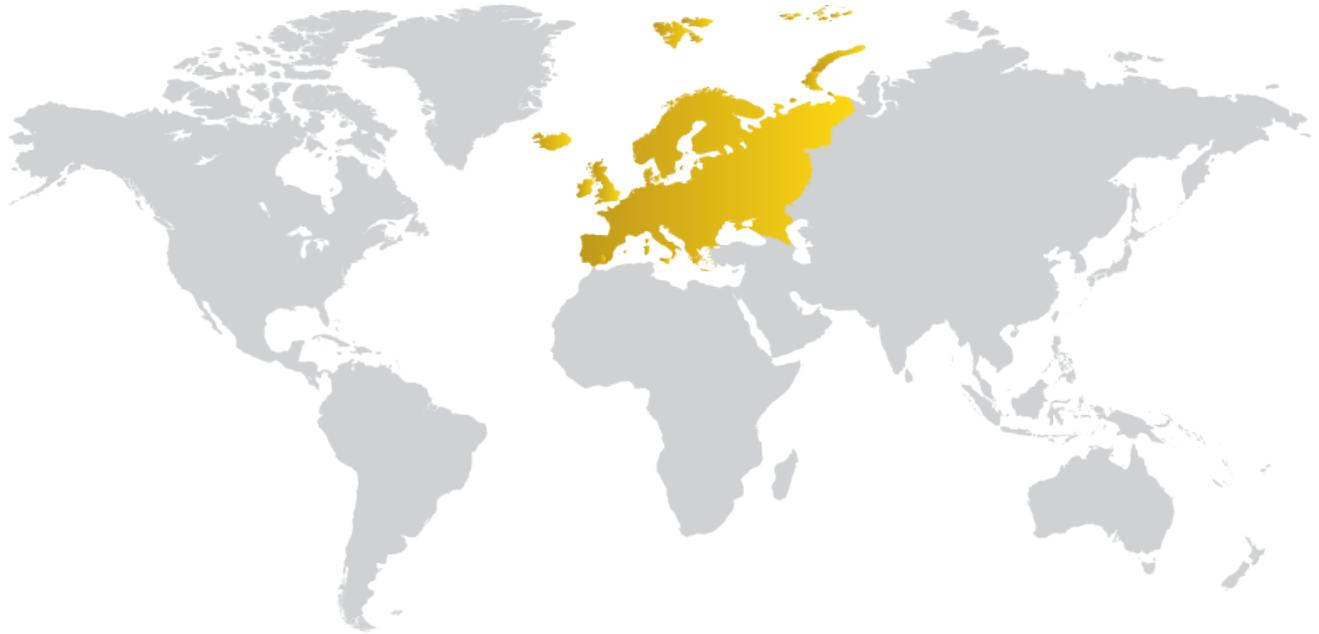
Landowners, your help is urgently needed. A [study](#) by Utah State University ecologists, published recently in *Scientific Reports*, finds that of the 159 endangered species in the continental US, only 21 are “adequately preserved” by areas such as national parks. The researchers conclude that without more federal protections—unlikely in the US political climate—private conservation easements are essential to set aside enough land for the survival of endangered species: “if we are going to win the fight against extinction, we need the help of private landowners.”



The 2020-21 Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp and the Junior Duck Stamp are now [available](#) from the US Fish & Wildlife Service. They depict a pair of black-bellied whistling ducks and a wood duck, respectively. The Federal Duck Stamp plays a critical role in wildlife conservation—since 1934, stamp sales have raised more than \$1 billion and protected 6 million acres of US wetlands.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife
Service

Europe



Rewilding Britain—better late than never. On July 20, *Forbes* [reported](#) that two UK wildlife NGOs plan to release four European bison into the Blean Woods, in southeastern England, in spring 2022. The goal is “to restore some of the natural balance by using a mix of large herbivores including bison, Exmoor ponies, longhorn cattle and a small number of Iron Age pigs.” Bison, or wisent, have been gone from Britain for more than 6,000 years. According to the 2019 [State of Nature Reports](#), Britain is one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth; its most important wildlife species have decreased on average by 60% since 1970.

A wolf that killed two horses and injured another in Germany has rekindled arguments over whether growing wolf populations should be controlled by regulated hunting. A June 25 *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [article](#) calls for balance between wolf-recovery efforts and mitigation of human-wildlife conflict, and says that wolf “romanticism” has no place in a human-cultivated landscape.

Romania has two-thirds of Europe’s remaining old-growth forests, but the country’s “systemic and continuous failure” to protect these forests has prompted the European Commission to demand that illegal logging be immediately stopped, [reported](#) *EuroNatur* on July 2.

Europe's forests are dying of heat. 2018 was the hottest, driest year on record across Europe, with average temperatures during the vegetation period as high as 3.3°C (6°F) above that of the years 1961 to 1990. A new University of Basel [study](#) found that even hardy species such as silver fir, beech and pine suffered, with needles and leaves wilted and shed prematurely. Many trees no longer formed new shoots or were more vulnerable to insect infestation or fungus.

European rivers now flood more often, too. A large multinational [study](#) just published in *Nature* concludes that Europe has entered a “flood-rich period” that will only get worse as climate change accelerates. Researchers studied tens of thousands of reports from 1500 to 2016 and found that floods now are more severe and occur more often in warmer rather than colder seasons.

Basic questions about rhino pregnancies are only now being answered. A recent [article](#) in *Theriogenology* reports the findings of scientists from the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research (Berlin) and veterinarians who monitored 19 pregnant white rhinos in six zoos to record pre-birth development, milk production, hormone levels, gestation periods, different stages of labor and the onset of birth. The knowledge will help zoos and other facilities care for pregnant rhinos.

The world's largest rhino information website, based in the Netherlands, offers more than 24,500 images, articles and references in PDF form. The [Rhino Resource Center](#) is “a knowledge center for rhinoceros aiming at collecting, preserving, and cataloguing all knowledge on the species . . . and distributing it through appropriate media.”

Africa



New bushmeat research points to better solutions. Across sub-Saharan Africa, the illegal bushmeat trades poses a double threat: unsustainable pressure on hundreds of species from rats to elephants; and the potential for zoonotic diseases like COVID-19. (An estimated 60% of new infectious diseases are zoonotic, meaning that they emerge in animals.) The most in-depth [study](#) of the bushmeat trade to date finds that one-size-fits-all preventives are ineffective and often harmful.

South African farmers say cows can solve the climate crisis in this July 7 CNN [story](#). The key to climate-friendly agriculture is the soil, and regenerative farming requires a combination of crop farming and cattle ranching that mimics the grazing patterns of migratory ungulate herds, which replenish the land.

On the 5th anniversary of the killing of Cecil the lion, a [post](#) on the Ruaha carnivore Project's Facebook page noted the extensive faulty reporting on the decline of wild lions, adding, "it is very important to note that while it can have negative impacts on some populations, trophy hunting is NOT a major threat to lion persistence—the key threats are loss of habitat & wild prey, and conflict with people."

Losing a collared leopard to a trophy hunter outraged wildlife researcher Dr. Hugh Webster, but in his “Natural Storytelling” [blog](#) on July 8 he wrote that few conservation scientists endorse bans on trophy hunting: “The truth is that trophy hunting is not the main threat facing wild animals in Africa. For most species it is not a threat of any sort. In fact, the opposite is true –trophy hunting provides a means of funding and therefore protecting the habitats that sustain populations of wild animals across large swathes of the continent where, without hunters’ dollars, wild bush country would soon be taken over by agriculture.”

Compassionate Conservation vs. Conservation Biology. A recent [article](#) in *Conservation Namibia* discusses the emerging global battle over the role of emotion in conservation, pointing out that “Compassionate Conservation,” promoted by animal-rights groups such as Born Free, prevents wildlife management actions, bans the sustainable use of wildlife and ignores the rights of rural communities; it also “lacks compassion toward the people who live with wildlife, and . . . is disconnected from real-world conservation challenges and the people on the frontlines who are critical to long-term success.”

Pacific



“Tahr decision keeps all sides happy” [reported](#) New Zealand’s *The Country* on July 11. The uproar over the plan to cull as many as 25,000 Himalayan tahr—an ungulate introduced more than a century ago—from public lands has subsided after the High Court ruled that the Dept. of Conservation must consult both hunters and the Royal Forest & Bird Protection Society before proceeding.

Maoris want exotics gone from New Zealand’s Raukūmara Forest, hard-hit by introduced species of wildlife. [Mongabay reported](#) on June 11 that two tribal groups are asking for \$21 million in COVID-19 stimulus funds to save their ancestral forest, with its thousand-year-old tōtara trees, from ecological collapse. Possums, rats and mustelids decimate native bird populations while deer and goats browse seedlings, shrubs and smaller trees. The 5-year plan would massively increase deer and goat control and kill possums, rats and mustelids with airborne applications of a controversial poison called 1080.

Hope for Hawaii’s dying ‘ohi’a trees. A fungal disease called ROD, Rapid ‘ohi’a Death, has killed more than a million of these long-lived, slow-growing hardwoods. Now, researchers have learned how to keep seedlings alive for a year in ROD areas. Scientists from the US Geological

Survey and the University of Hawai'i Hilo, [writing](#) in *Restoration Ecology*, believe they may be able to slow the disease and eventually regenerate the forests.

Finding koalas that survived Australia's bushfires requires aerial scanning with infrared cameras on drones and then feeding the data through a new algorithm. Queensland University of Technology researchers, writing in *Ecology and Evolution*, [report](#) that this is more reliable and less invasive than traditional methods such as people searching the trees, sniffer dogs or simply drones alone.

Asia

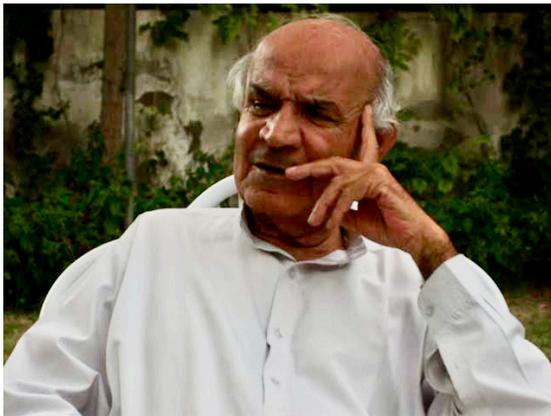


Photo: Salman Rashid

Sardar Naseer Tareen, a conservation hero of Pakistan, 81, died on June 24. He created the Torghar Conservation Project in northeastern Balochistan, home of the last Afghan urial sheep and Suleiman markhor goats. His [obituary](#), in *The Express Tribune*, noted that the Torghar Project is now recognized as one of the world's biggest conservation success stories. Luc Bellon's *A Treasure in my Back Yard*, about Tareen's work, is available in the Conservation Frontlines Library. Also watch "The Suleiman Markhor of the Torghar Hills," a [film](#) by Zig Macintosh.

Bushmeat poachers are killing Sri Lankan leopards, too, [reported](#) Mongabay in June. At least 42 of the rare cats (*Panthera pardus kotiya*) have died in snares in 10 years. Snares are illegal for bushmeat but allowed for trapping "pest species" such as wild boar; however, their indiscriminate nature means that most wildlife are potential victims.

A new wildlife corridor across the Trans-Mongolian Railroad reconnects the Gobi-Steppe Ecosystem. A trail camera installed by the Wildlife Conservation Society showed a khulan, an Asiatic wild ass, crossing into the eastern steppe for the first time since 1955, when the 2,215-kilometre (1,376 miles) railroad between Ulan-Ude, Russia, and Jining, China, halted migrations across one of the world's largest grazing areas. Mongolian gazelle and goitered gazelle are also using the corridor, according to a June 26 Mongabay [story](#).

The US is willing to try to help free Iranian conservationists. Invoking “basic human rights, the environment, and the preservation of endangered species,” Brian Hook, the US Special Representative for Iran, in a tweet ([#FreeMorad](#)) on June 5, called for the release of Morad Tahbaz, an Iranian-American conservationist, and seven colleagues who have been held for more than two years on espionage charges. ([Dispatches](#), August 2019) Hook said, “the door for diplomacy on our side is wide open, not just on these matters but on . . . all the issues that have been bedeviling US-Iran bilateral relations for 41 years.”

Chinese NGOs are combatting the illegal wildlife trade online, according to a recent [IUCN report](#). As COVID-19 swept the world, the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation and several other groups launched the Wildlife-Free E-Commerce Initiative, meant to protect biodiversity and public health by spreading public awareness about wildlife markets.

World



The great Climate Migration has begun, says the *New York Times Magazine's* July 24 climate [issue](#): “Today, 1% of the world is a barely livable hot zone. By 2070, that portion could go up to 19%. Billions of people call this land home. Where will they go?” This is the first of a series by the *Times*; it builds on the World Bank’s [Groundswell](#) report from 2018 and includes a new word: “ecoanxiety,” which means what you think it does.

‘King Coal’ may have to be bought out. A British [study](#) just published in *Nature Climate Change* recommends that governments pay billions of pounds to operators of coal-fired power plants and to regional economies based on coal (in Germany, the US and Poland, for example) for agreements to shut down their plants early, in the battle to slow climate change.

But planting forests does not always slow climate change. A Scottish [study](#) released in July found that birch trees planted in heather moorland removed as much carbon from the soil as they absorbed from the atmosphere, for no gain in carbon sequestration. The conclusion? “Changes to carbon storage—both above and below ground—must be better quantified and understood before we can be assured that large-scale tree planting will have the intended policy and climate outcomes.”

On the other hand, how about basalt dust? Rock dust spread across farmland could absorb huge quantities of CO₂ through weathering, which creates a chemical reaction that turns atmospheric carbon into a stored carbonate. University of Sheffield (UK) researchers say that basalt, a volcanic rock with high weathering potential, is common in China, the US and India, the three biggest carbon emitters. These countries could remove half a billion to two billion tons of CO₂ from the atmosphere each year this way. *Anthropocene* Magazine ran the [story](#) in late July.

Soil-free, computerized ‘vertical farming’ may be another answer to climate change and the loss of land, according to a recent [report](#) from the University of Bristol (UK) in *New Phytologist*. Vertical farming is “precision agriculture” that grows crops indoors in stacked systems with controlled water, lighting and nutrients: “Projected changes in regional weather patterns and water availability are likely to impact agricultural productivity soon. Vertical farming offers the ability to grow high-value nutritious crops in a climate-resilient manner all year round.”

Colonial notions of conservation were racist delusions (according to a recent [article](#) in *CounterPunch*) that “non-white people in Africa and Asia don’t know how to look after their own land and cannot be trusted with the animals that live there.” And national parks are “vast areas of land . . . stolen from tribal people and local communities under the false claim that this is necessary for conservation.” In 19th Century America, national parks were established on the basis that nature is “untouched wilderness” until white people “discover” it—ignoring the custodianship of Native Americans who lived there—and in Africa, such “cultural imperialism” can include the killing of poachers on sight.

Resurrecting extinct species—what could go wrong? A lot, suggests a [commentary](#) (“Think Before You De-Extinct”) in *Anthropocene*. Although a proxy mammoth might stir public interest in wildlife conservation, introducing new species to ecosystems—which is what de-extinction amounts to—often has unintended consequences. Until Jurassic Park’s laboratory dinosaurs become reality, consider Australia’s cane toads, or the tegu translocated to Brazilian islands overrun by rats (themselves introduced by ships): Instead of eating the rats, the lizards are wiping out endemic seabirds.

Trophy hunting: to ban or not to ban? Sustainable-use experts at [IUCN](#) note that while poorly regulated hunting can harm local populations of some species, it does not threaten any species at the larger level. A July 9 [article](#) on the group's website adds that trophy hunting protects habitat and incentivizes landowners to protect or at least tolerate hunted species; and that banning hunting could exacerbate far larger threats—habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, prey depletion and poaching—instead of “saving” game species.

And finally, boozy pigs are happier, tastier pigs. In Japan, feeding barley-mash leftovers from distilleries to pigs makes them taste better. Researchers from the University of Tokyo [attribute](#) this to the fact that the pigs are healthier and have lower stress levels than pigs fed normal diets. Mice, studied as a control group, showed similar physiological responses. [*Ed. note: Draw your own conclusions . . .*]



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