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## Frontlines Dispatches From Around The World

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## North & South America



**Nearly a third of America's bald eagles are infected** with a potentially fatal virus. Scientists at the Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison, the USGS National Wildlife Health Center and the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources identified the [virus](#) while investigating WRES, Wisconsin River Eagle Syndrome, which causes eagles near the Lower Wisconsin River to stumble and have seizures. Since then, BeHV, bald eagle hepacivirus, has been found in 32% of 47 eagles from 19 states across the contiguous US. However, the virus may not be related to WRES, and research is ongoing.

**California bans the production and sale of animal fur.** Per a BBC News [report](#), as of 2023, people in California will no longer “be able to make or sell any clothing, shoes or handbags made from fur.” When he signed the bill, Gov. Gavin Newsom said, “California is a leader when it comes to animal welfare and today that leadership includes banning the sale of fur.” (No word on the use of leather, aka fur without hair, or any reference to the environmental impact of artificial furs, as outlined [here](#).)

**Macy's and Bloomingdale's also ditch fur.** The announcement aligns with fur-free policies of other fashion brands, including Prada, Chanel, Gucci, Michael Kors, Burberry and more. Yet Anna Wintour, editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, had a different take on fur in an April 2019 [interview](#) with CNN's Christiane Amanpour. Wintour understands the environmental impact of synthetic substitutes for leather and fur; within the context of sustainability, she noted that "fake fur is obviously more of a polluter than real fur," adding that it's up to the retailers to follow best practices and be ethical.

**Deer are the most economically important quarry in North America,** according to the NDA, National Deer Alliance. Around 83% of hunters in the US identify as deer hunters. NDA keeps members informed on deer issues across North America through a weekly e-newsletter, social media and the NDA [website](#). Membership is free.

**Legislation to return management of gray wolves** to the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan has been introduced by two Minnesota congressmen. According to a Sept. 28 [report](#) in *The Dickinson Press*, groups including the American Farm Bureau Federation, National Farmers Union, the US Cattlemen's Association and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation support the proposal, which would remove the wolves from federal protection under the Endangered Species Act.

**The House Natural Resources Committee advanced NAWCA,** the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, in a bipartisan vote. Since its inception in 1989, NAWCA grants totaling more than \$1.73 billion have leveraged \$3.57 billion in contributions from partners to "protect, restore, enhance and manage more than 30 million acres of habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife in all 50 states," [according](#) to the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation.

**Well-managed trophy hunting is important to wildlife management,** [writes](#) US Forest Service biologist Brett Roper in Utah's *Herald Journal*. If trophy hunting is problematic, he asks, why is it

allowed? Because to a large extent trophy-hunting fees pay for most wildlife management in the US, and trophy hunters often spend far more than other hunters. Roper concludes, “instead of eliminating trophy hunting, we simply need to better manage this activity.”

**Indiana’s Natural Resource Commission added ruffed grouse** to its endangered species list.

The Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation supported the [listing](#), proposed by the Ruffed Grouse Society, which calls for the “swift implementation of a strong action plan focused on sound scientific wildlife and forestry management practices with clearly defined goals and benchmarks for recovery.”

**Vermont Fish & Wildlife needs ruffed grouse hunters** to collect blood and feather samples. A kit with instructions, sampling supplies and mailers will be provided. Call state wildlife biologist Chris Bernier at (+1) 802-289-0628 or email him at [chris.bernier@vermont.gov](mailto:chris.bernier@vermont.gov).

**Bison range expands in the Dakotas.** CNN [reported](#) that on October 11 four bison were released into a new section of South Dakota’s Badlands National Park. The 22,000-acre (8,900 ha) addition to the park came from a 2014 land swap with a local ranch, aided by the US Forest Service and the World Wildlife Fund. The project also included new fencing to separate the bison from cattle. This is the first time bison have populated this part of South Dakota in 150 years; some 1,200 bison already inhabit the park’s previous, more remote 200,000 acres (81,000 ha). (See also [“The Yellowstone Bison Range War.”](#))

**The Senate Environment & Public Works Committee approved Aurelia Skipwith** to become Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Skipwith, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fish, Wildlife and Parks at the Dept. of the Interior, was nominated to the USFWS post by Pres. Trump in July. Her [nomination](#) now awaits a floor vote in the Senate.

**Mountain biking can create hazards for humans and wildlife**, according to a recent *New York Times* [report](#). “We tell people not to run in grizzly bear habitat, to make noise and to be aware

of their surroundings,” said the former coordinator for the grizzly bear recovery program of the Fish and Wildlife Service. “[But the Forest Service is] permitting the very activities we are telling people not to do.” In 2016, a ranger in Glacier National Park was killed by a grizzly that he collided with while mountain biking.

**Expansion of the US border wall with Mexico** will interrupt vital migration corridors for wildlife; biologists are raising the alarm in this PRI [report](#).

**The First Americas Regional Conference on the Illegal Trade in Wildlife**, October 3-4 in Lima, was organized by the Government of Peru in cooperation with the Government of the UK, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and WCS, the Wildlife Conservation Society ([People Not Poaching](#)). During a workshop, experts from indigenous, peasant and local communities as well as scientific experts developed a set of priority recommendations. The statement "[Voices of the Communities](#)" by 20 representatives of indigenous communities from Peru, Bolivia, Guyana, French Guyana, Colombia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Mexico and Argentina, was read out during the plenary session on October 4. The event also developed a sustainable use and livelihoods strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Chile’s iconic huemul deer are affected by a life-threatening foot disease** caused by parapoxvirus. Only about 2,500 of these endangered southern Andean deer, *Hippocamelus bisulcus*, remain in the wild; 24 cases of the disease have been found in Bernardo O’Higgins National Park. The disease causes partial or complete loss of the hoof, leaving animals susceptible to starvation and predation. Parapoxvirus probably arrived between 1991 and 2004, when livestock were introduced to the region. Wildlife veterinarians from UC Davis and Chile who recently [identified](#) the disease are now searching for a treatment.

**Marsh deer have been found in the floodplains** of the Teles Pires River in mid-northern Mato Grosso, Brazil, according to scientists from the IUCN Deer Specialist Group. The marsh deer—

*Blastocerus dichotomus*, the largest Latin American cervid—is restricted to wetlands ([DSG Newsletter #31, Page 9](#)).

**The habitats or lives of at least 500 jaguars were lost to fire** in the Amazon forests of Brazil and Bolivia as of September 17. The numbers will increase until the rains come, researchers [say](#). In Bolivia, the fires have so far destroyed more than 2 million hectares (5 million acres) of forest in a region with the highest density of cat species in South America. Scientists predict that many more jaguars will starve or turn to killing livestock as a result of the fires, likely increasing conflict with ranchers.

**Prompted by the Amazon fires, 230 global investors** with \$16.2 trillion in assets have warned hundreds of companies to meet their anti-deforestation commitments or risk economic consequences. In a related move, according to a Mongabay [story](#), the VF Corp., which owns Timberland and The North Face, has stopped buying Brazilian leather in an attempt to push Pres. Bolsonaro to act against deforestation.

# Europe



**More forest + less meat = climate protection.** Reforestation can decisively mitigate global warming, but researchers at Germany's Karlsruhe Institute of Technology have determined that "a sufficient increase in forest areas requires a transformation of the food system and, in particular, the reduction of meat consumption." (Commercially raised meat, that is, not wild game.) Their [study](#) appears in *Environmental Research Letters*. Trees absorb CO<sub>2</sub> greenhouse gas from the atmosphere and thus fight global warming. However, forests compete with land for agriculture, and population growth and changes in dietary habits are driving the worldwide demand for meat.

**Hunters are well represented in Europe, says a 2018 [statistical overview](#) from Germany.** The stats show 7.35 million licensed hunters in 35 European countries (including Turkey) with a total population of some 605 million. The stats do not include the Russian Federation; and for Montenegro, a country of 700,000 inhabitants, there was no information on hunter numbers. The 35 countries thus have 82.3 non-hunters for every hunter. The Republic of Ireland tops the list with 12 inhabitants per licensed hunter, followed by Finland with 17. Norway, Sweden and Denmark all rank in the top 10, with 25, 31 and 33 non-hunters per hunter, respectively.

Hunters figure prominently also in Spain, Greece, Portugal and France. The United Kingdom ranks 14th, with about 800,000 active hunters, or one in 76 inhabitants. In absolute numbers, France tops Europe with 1,331,000 hunters, beating out Spain (980,000) and the UK and followed closely by Italy with 750,000 hunters. (By contrast, in 2016, the most recent year for which statistics are available, the US had some 11.1 million hunters age 16 or older among a population of 230 million, or almost 21 non-hunters for every hunter.)

## Africa



**Lion, Cape buffalo, cheetah, giraffe, rhino and zebra** became farm animals, along with 26 other wild species, in May this year when South Africa amended its [Animal Improvement Act](#), which governs livestock breeding. The legislation was slipped through without public consultation; it allows artificial insemination, the collection of semen and embryos and the transfer of “genetic material” to be collected, evaluated, processed, packed and sold. A *Daily Maverick* [story](#) explains how these species now can be manipulated as “farm stock.” There is no precedent anywhere for such a mass “domestication” of wildlife. *Conservation Frontlines* will discuss this in January.

**Zambia’s High Court has ruled that the controversial Kangaluwi copper mine** may go ahead, dismissing an appeal against the mine on a technicality. After a landmark legal case brought by conservationists and NGOs against Zambia’s Attorney General and mining company Mwembeshi Resources Limited, the hearing has apparently ended nine years of political intrigue, interference by Zambian authorities and alleged corruption. The mine site is across the Zambezi River from Zimbabwe’s famous Mana Pools National Park, a UNESCO World

Heritage Site. *Africa Geographic* [reports](#) that the verdict is “sending shock waves through the Zambian and regional tourism community.”

**In September, Zimbabwe’s Mana Pools was a devastating sight**, one that bears little or no resemblance to the park at the same time last year. The park has been ravaged by drought—the landscape is scorched, food is scarce and the famous pools, if not already dry, are becoming hollowed-out memories. See Janet Winterbourne’s dramatic [photos](#) of the drought’s impact on elephants and other wildlife in *Africa Geographic*.

**The Okapi Wildlife Reserve in northeastern Congo**, created to protect the secretive *Okapia johnstoni*, will come under a new management agreement between the Wildlife Conservation Society and the Congolese Nature Conservation Agency. On October 21, Mongabay [reported](#) that the new partnership is meant to restore stability in the reserve and surrounding forests and improve the welfare and operations of rangers and local communities.

**Nordic Safari Club challenges anti-hunting activists**—including Ricky Gervais, Kevin Pieterston, Trevor Noah, Piers Morgan, Zac Goldsmith, Chris Packham, Brian May, Ed Sheeran, Carrie Symonds, Lewis Hamilton, Hannes Jaenicke and Eduardo Gonçalves—to “take over” 10 giraffes, which otherwise will be culled as surplus in Namibia and their meat distributed to local communities. NSC communications officer Jens Ulrik Høgh has written an open [letter](#) informing the celebrities of the situation and noting that buyers must have the animals professionally caught and translocated to a suitable habitat before the end of April 2020.

**Elephant poaching in a remote and pristine section** of Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in northern Congo has been discovered. A [study](#) of the impact of new logging roads on the area’s gorillas and chimpanzees also found that the roads enabled poachers to reach elephants there for the first time.

**One of Kenya's largest tuskers has died** at the age of 52, apparently of natural causes. "Matt" was first collared in 2002 and roamed farther than any other tracked Kenyan elephant, a loop of approximately 245 km (152 mi) around Mt. Kenya and north across Samburu for 220 km (137 mi). His remains were found by an anti-poaching unit on October 7. Photos of this extraordinary bull, as well as a map of his movements between 2002 and 2019, are on [Save the Elephants](#).

**Tembe Elephant Park holds eight of Africa's known remaining 30 big tuskers**, bulls with tusks exceeding 100 lbs (45 kg) per side. The park, in South Africa near the Mozambique border, will expand by up to 26,000 hectares (64,200 acres) to allow its elephant herd of 200 to increase. The park is owned and managed by local communities; at the premiere of the documentary *Last of the Big Tuskers*, in Durban, tribal leader iNkosi Mabhudu Tembe told guests, "we have already identified some pockets of land adjacent to the park. On the eastern boundary there is potential to extend the park by about 15,000 hectares (37,100 acres) . . . And we also have potential in the southern boundary to do the expansion that could also be a total of 11,000 hectares (27,100 acres)." According to a Mongabay [story](#) on 14 October, he gave no specifics about funding the expansion, saying only that a budget was "almost complete."

**A population of critically endangered riverine rabbits** (*Bunolagus monticularis*) has been [discovered](#) in the Baviaanskloof area of South Africa's Southern Cape. This is a new distribution of the species. Of 38 camera traps placed in 12 clusters for 50 days, eight captured images of riverine rabbits.

## Asia



**Snow leopards depend on their human neighbors.** *Panthera uncia* is a “vulnerable species,” with an estimated 4,000 left in the wild, and protected areas in the Nepal Himalaya have been set aside for them. But snow leopards range over much larger areas, and co-existence with humans is key to their survival. Cambridge University researchers [investigated](#) local attitudes towards the cats and conservation methods. People who felt negatively were most worried about the potential danger to livestock and to themselves. Positive attitudes were mostly driven by cultural beliefs in the intrinsic value of the species, and by the potential benefits of attracting tourists and controlling wild herbivores. The report does not mention hunting tourism.

**Pakistan strengthened wildlife legislation** at its 18th cabinet meeting in August by approving the Punjab Wildlife Protected Areas Act, establishing the Kalabagh Private Game Reserve and enhancing licensing for grey and black partridge. Pakistan’s *Dawn* newspaper also [reported](#) improvements in urial sheep conservation, trophy-hunting rules and brown bear protection.

**Pakistan's markhor wild goat is no longer endangered;** nor is the blind dolphin of the Indus River. Both species were thought to be on the verge of extinction. According to an October [story](#) in the *Tribune*, Joint Secretary Suleman Khan delivered the news to the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Climate Change, adding that only 12 markhor hunting permits are issued per year, at more than \$100,000 each, and that no more will become available until the markhor population is confirmed. Khan noted flaws in provincial wildlife surveys and announced that, beginning this year, all Pakistan wildlife species will be surveyed along standardized formats.

**The World Wildlife Fund and Intel will use AI to monitor Siberian tigers** in northeastern China. With image recognition technology and other forms of artificial intelligence, endangered species can be tracked and their behaviors understood more accurately. According to a [report](#) in *Synced Review*, similar technology is being used to protect polar bears, chimpanzees, whales and elephants.

## World



**South Atlantic humpback whales have recovered** to their pre-exploitation levels of some 25,000 animals after commercial whaling reduced the population to 450 a century ago. A [study](#) by the Univ. of Washington and the Alaska Fisheries Science Center showed the whales are repopulating more quickly than expected. The researchers say their new software and advanced modeling techniques can be used to determine more accurate population numbers in other species also and are making them available for use elsewhere.

**Half of our planet's surface remains relatively wild**, but many of these “low human-impact” areas—not covered with water or ice—are being broken into smaller, isolated pieces. A two-year satellite-mapping [inventory](#) by the National Geographic Society, released in early October, concluded that despite widespread environmental damage by humans, the opportunity to protect “vast, relatively wild regions of Earth [as connected habitats] for the benefit of people and other living species” still exists. Most of these areas are in the boreal forests of northern Canada and Russia, the highlands of Central Asia, the deserts of North Africa and Australia, and in the Amazon Basin.

**Preserving Earth's remaining wilderness areas will reduce extinction risks** for terrestrial species by more than half. In [Nature](#), researchers write that species persistence is highly dependent on wilderness habitat in good condition and that “retaining these remaining wilderness areas is essential for the international conservation agenda.” (Note that regulated hunting protects wilderness habitats across the Americas, Europe, Africa and, to a lesser extent, in North and Central Asia. Hunting provides economic, ecologic and socio-cultural incentives for local communities to strengthen habitat protection.)

**Extreme snowfall wiped out the Arctic's 2018 breeding season.** Last year, vast amounts of snow were spread across most of the Arctic and did not melt until late summer, if at all. In October, in the journal *PLOS Biology*, researchers [documented](#) the consequences of this in northeast Greenland, where they found “the most complete reproductive failure ever encountered”; few plants and animals were able to reproduce. Such poor reproduction across all levels of the ecosystem has never been seen before. Although the Arctic is warming and snow/ice cover is retreating, climatic variability increases the risk of such extreme events.

**Carnivores deliver important benefits to society**, but studies emphasize the problems they cause. Researchers in Spain, Germany, Poland, South Africa, the US and the Netherlands have [reviewed](#) more than 500 scientific papers and found that “globally, research on the relationship between carnivores and humans is deeply skewed” toward conflict and ignores the ecological benefits that predators provide. The studies also tended to focus on large species—bears, wolves and big cats—and ignore small and medium-sized carnivores; and did not use the social sciences to fully understand the relationships between humans and carnivores.

**A free global online Animal Study Registry** launched in January 2019 offers scientists a service that will “significantly support the planning of animal experiments and at the same time contribute to the improvement of animal welfare.” Patterned after a similar documentation process for human clinical trials, the ASR is meant to avoid redundancy and should “enhance

both the knowledge gained from animal studies and the reproducibility of results.” Researchers can protect their intellectual property for up to five years before the full results of their studies become public.

**New modeling helps predict extinction drivers for species.** Faced with unprecedented climate change, animals and plants are scrambling to keep up, with mixed results. The World Economic Forum [reports](#) that the impacts of environmental extremes—such as more or greater heat waves, longer heatwaves or heat waves affecting larger areas—can now be forecast for different animal and plant species. The new model gives wildlife managers and conservationists insight into the potential vulnerabilities of species based on their natural histories and historical environments.



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Conservation Frontlines and the free electronic distribution of its media are funded by the

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