



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



FRONTLINE DISPATCHES - SEPTEMBER 2020 VOL II, NO. 9

Africa	2
North & South America	5
Asia	9
Europe	10
Pacific	11
World	12

Africa



Coexistence is the key to survival. The image above (an elephant being driven out of farm fields by a vehicle) is from “The Edge of Existence,” a forthcoming [documentary](#) about human-wildlife conflict on the boundaries of conservation areas in Africa. And an [article](#) in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* covers conservation in the Serengeti, Okavango Delta and Kalahari regions, some of the world’s most prolific wildlife ecosystems, which are surrounded by fast-growing human communities:

“Rural livelihoods depend on these forests, fisheries and rangelands, so effective and lasting conservation strategies must find ways not only to protect wildlife and the environment but also to deliver [economic opportunities](#) at local and national scales. In Kenya, for example, up to 65% of all wildlife is found on community and private lands, outside government parks and reserves, and [wildlife tourism](#) is a multi-billion dollar industry . . . As the President of Botswana [wrote](#) last year in the *Wall Street Journal*, ‘Elephants need to constitute a benefit, not a burden, to those who live side-by-side with them.’

“All of this is easier said than done, and conservation is littered with projects that promised to make conservation profitable and beneficial to local communities but [struggled to deliver](#). But since Zimbabwe’s [CAMPFIRE program](#) in the 1980s—which helped pioneer the idea of

generating community-level incentives for wildlife conservation through sustainable and locally managed use—the region has been a source of fertile innovation for conservation efforts around the world. Today, it's clear that it can be done: A “conservation economy” can create jobs and attract investment while protecting and sustaining the ecological wealth that peoples' livelihoods depend on. A rising generation of African conservation entrepreneurs . . . is reframing conservation as a growth sector.”

No more donkey skins for China. Kenya is the latest African country to ban the export of donkey “products.” Three slaughterhouses then took the government to court, according to an August 14 *Daily Maverick* [article](#). In 2016-18, the skins of more than 300,000 of Kenya's 2 million donkeys were sent to China for “traditional medicine.” (There's [more](#) on the global massacre of donkeys in *Science*.) In East Africa, women in particular rely on donkeys to carry water, firewood and other necessities.

The pandemic is a crisis for conservation across Southern Africa. A team of conservation leaders proposes—in this May 20 Mongabay.com [article](#)—to turn the crisis into opportunity by questioning assumptions, refining existing models and improving conservation practices.

But the Southern African Wildlife College is being kept afloat by the [Friends of African Wildlife](#) and the [Ivan Carter Wildlife Conservation Alliance](#) during the COVID-19 lockdown, according to the August [issue](#) of *The Bateleur*, its newsletter. The school, near Kruger Park's Orphen Gate, teaches students how to protect Africa's natural resources and biodiversity.

COVID-19 is hardly Africa's first pandemic. AIDS, for example, is still killing Africans. And outbreaks of rinderpest in 1887-96 and 1993-97 killed 90% of Southern and East Africa's cattle, decimated wildlife and created a staggering human tragedy, says a July 20 [article](#) in *AfricaGeographic.com*.

Baby boom at Amboseli. US National Public Radio [reported](#) that as of World Elephant Day, August 12, 170 elephant calves had been born at Kenya's Amboseli National Park—while in 2018, only 113 calves were born there. (Elephant pregnancies last almost two years.) The higher birth rate is probably due to more rain, which means more vegetation and fodder. The Kenya Wildlife Service also says it has been able to curb ivory poaching—since 1989, the

country's elephant population has reportedly climbed from 16,000 animals to some 34,800 by the end of 2019.

Hyenas killed 161 head of livestock in 2017-19 in Namibia's Zambezi region (formerly the Caprivi), [reported](#) the Kwando Carnivore Project in June. In a separate [analysis](#), the KWC reported the loss of 416 cattle to lions in 2013-19 in Mudumu South, also in Zambezi.

Lions avoid cattle with eyes on their backsides [say](#) these researchers in *The Conversation* on August 7. Ambush predators like lions are less likely to attack if the cows have eyes painted on their rumps. (Tigers in India [reportedly](#) exhibit similar behavior.)

Removing cattle from Bwabwata National Park will not hurt livelihoods, says Namibia's Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, which pointed out that the region's San people earn up to N\$5 million (\$285,000) annually from hunting concessions alone. But the Hambukushu community objects to the removal of cattle from Bwabwata and wants parklands for farming. The [story](#) was on NBC Namibia on August 7.

The 18th annual African Wildlife Consultative [Forum](#) is planned for November 9-13, in Kasane, Botswana. It convenes government officials, professional hunting associations, conservation policy experts and wildlife biologists.

Bushmen go digital. San hunters of the Kalahari are loading an app called CyberTracker into their smartphones to record where they've found wildlife and animal sign. The hunters are paid for their inputs and the data help scientists plot the region's biodiversity. CyberTracker is also used by indigenous hunters in Australia and for land management in Canada, dolphin studies off New Zealand, whale monitoring in Antarctica and turtle research in the Pacific. The [story](#) was on CNN on July 9.

North & South America



A ‘watershed moment’ for US water quality—a bad one. That’s how Ohio State University researchers, [writing](#) in *Science* on August 14, describe the potential impact of a new federal ruling that proposes to reduce protection of many waterways and wetlands under the Clean Water Act.

Pebble Mine shot down, finally. Maybe. Alaska’s huge Pebble Mine project was green-lighted in July after 20+ years of controversy—and then delayed again, on August 24, after influential people connected to the Trump Administration went public with their concerns about damage to Bristol Bay. As a result, the US Corps of Engineers ruled that the mining company “must show within 90 days how it will compensate for harming more than 2,800 acres of wetlands, 130 miles of streams and more than 130 acres of open water within Alaska’s Kaktuli River Watershed.” The proposed mine site is at the river’s headwaters. The [news](#) broke on [WashingtonPost.com](#) on August 24.

Changes to Alaska’s hunting laws have been sensationalized and misinterpreted, writes the Director of Wildlife Conservation for the Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game in a June 16 [article](#) on [MustReadAlaska.com](#). (Some general-media coverage—[discussed](#) in *OutdoorLife* in June—has

been misleading or false.) The recent federal ruling re-aligns wildlife regulations in Alaska's national preserves with the state's own laws; it does not legalize hunting in national parks. And some of the hunting or trapping methods under attack are restricted to traditional native Alaskan practices in remote areas. [Baiting](#) and [trapping](#) are closely regulated by ADF&G. A [series of videos](#) and the booklet [Hunt Alaska](#) explain the state's predator management programs.

Speaking of Alaska, lynx are being spotted even in Anchorage. The reason appears to be a boom in the population of the cats' favorite meal, the snowshoe hare. NatGeo.com reported the [story](#) on July 22.

A NY judge has halted changes to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act sought by the Interior Dept., the National Audubon Society [reported](#) on August 12—changes that would have cut protection of more than 1,000 wild bird species. The judge struck down the administration's argument that the MBTA only applies to the intentional killing of birds and not “incidental” killing from industrial activities. “It is not only a sin to kill a mockingbird, it is also a crime,” she wrote in her ruling, citing Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

President Trump has signed into law the GAOA, the Great American Outdoors Act, which received broad support in both houses of Congress. The law “fully and permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund [at \$900 million/year] and provides \$9.5 billion over five years to fix maintenance problems . . . in America's public lands.” An August 21 opinion [piece](#) in *The Colorado Sun* explains the rightness of using “dirty” oil money to further conservation.

\$5 million in federal funding will go to combat chronic wasting disease, but nearly a third of the money is for commercial deer farms with CWD-positive animals. An August 13 [report](#) on the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership website questions this and asks for a congressional review.

Lesser prairie chicken populations appear to be growing, says a July 1 [press release](#) from the Western Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies. Surveys estimate a range-wide breeding population of 34,408 birds this year, compared to 33,094 in 2018. Voluntary conservation efforts by landowners have created more habitat in recent years.

Ranchers and conservationists working together? It's happening in Florida, where a coalition of these unusual allies aims to keep "working" lands solvent and free of development. Cattle ranches in Florida, says an August 11 [article](#) on bioGraphic.com, have some of the best wildlife habitat the state has left.

Outdoor Afro is a nonprofit social community with 36,000+ participants in 30 states that reconnects African Americans with Nature through outdoor recreation and environmental education. Rue Mapp, a 2019 *National Geographic Education Fellow*, launched it as a blog from her kitchen table in 2009.

Dept. of Unintended Consequences, sec. 419(b): Light-emitting diodes are the poacher's new best friend. A July 31 [article](#) in *Science* credits LED flashlights—bright, lightweight and energy-efficient—with significantly boosting the kill of nocturnal animals in Amazonia. Researchers found that since 2011, when such flashlights became widely available, some nighttime hunters are twice as effective as before.

A 200-fold increase in trafficked dead jaguars seized by authorities in Central and South America between 2012 and 2018 was reported in a new [study](#) reviewed on Mongabay.com on August 11. The surge in jaguar poaching seems to be driven by Chinese traders.

If hunting and fishing stopped, what would be the consequences? An August 3 *Arizona Daily Sun* [article](#) challenges readers who would like to see "blood sports" disappear and discusses the [Wild Harvest Initiative](#) and wildlife habitat, biodiversity, environmental management and food security: "If you equate all the wild meat harvested [in the US] as quarter-pound hamburgers . . . annually recreational hunting [provides] a staggering 2.17 billion meals of wild-harvested, chemically free meat."

Hey, I'm no hunter or angler! Why do I have to buy a hunting or fishing license to use nearly 600 public lands in Colorado? The answer (see last month's *Dispatches*): because the license fees help support those lands. But now, [reported](#) *The Colorado Sun* on August 6, animal-rights and other "non-consumptive" groups are pressuring CO Parks and Wildlife to adjust the rule.

Can “The Harvest” change public perceptions? A Denver media company wants to showcase the “true heartland way of life” in a crowd-sourced film of that title, hoping that it will popularize hunting the way Robert Redford’s “A River Runs Through It” did fly-fishing. In *Forbes* on July 21, the producer [promised](#) an entertaining movie that will “go straight at stereotypes and preconceived notions, and audiences will be surprised as we detonate misconceptions about [the hunting] way of life and the people who enjoy it.” The 45 million-plus Americans who hunt and fish are a \$76 billion annual economic force.

This fall, Wyoming will welcome game meat donated to hungry families through its Food From the Field [project](#). Resident and nonresident hunters will be able to donate meat from elk, deer, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, pronghorn, bison and moose.

An ‘insect apocalypse’? Evidently not in North America, yet. In response to recent studies of massive insect die-offs, biologists at Hendrix College in Arkansas reviewed more than 5,000 datasets on arthropods in North America, covering thousands of species and dozens of habitats over decades of time, and [found](#) no change in population sizes. (Read also “Where have all the insects gone?” in *National Geographic* in [May](#).)

Greenland’s glaciers will keep shrinking even if global warming stopped today. The [study](#), published on August 13 on Nature.com, finds that Greenland’s annual snowfall is no longer enough to replenish its 200-plus large glaciers that flow into the ocean. Before 2000, Greenland’s ice sheet would have about the same chance to gain or lose mass each year. Now, the ice sheet will gain mass in only one out of every 100 years. The Greenland ice sheet is presently the largest single contributor to sea-level rise. On August 20, *The New York Times* [noted](#) that Greenland lost more than 530 billion metric tons of ice in 2019, more than double the annual average since 2003.

Asia



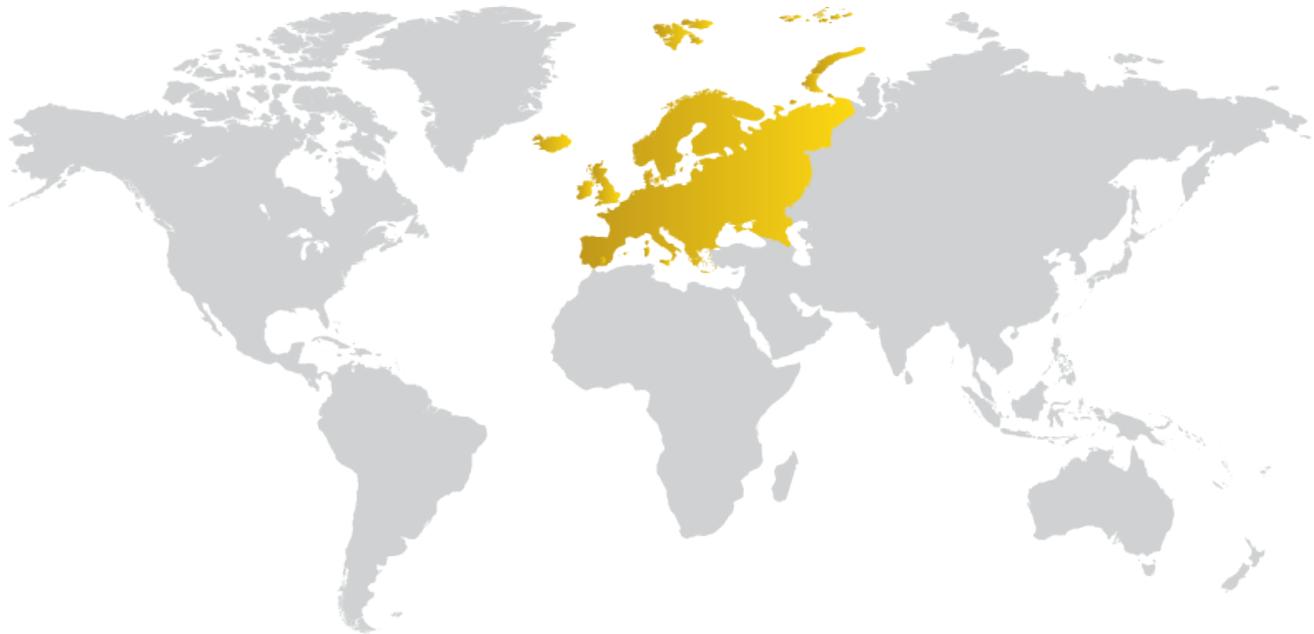
Cutting China’s enormous appetite for illegal wildlife products may be possible through religion, suggests a new British [study](#) in *People & Nature*. Applying Western conservation values to this market—for everything from rhino horn and lion bones to rosewood and pangolin scales—doesn’t work; instead “utilising Confucianist, Daoist and Buddhist belief messaging in targeted campaigns could effectively change the behavior of end consumers in the East Asia illegal wildlife trade chain.”

And now it’s Laos: Another Asian country’s hunger for wildlife products has now been documented, in an August 19 [report](#) in *Nature Conservation*. It advises the Lao government that “stricter and reinforced legislation is needed” to regulate the trade in and consumption of wildlife. “Across the tropical regions, mammals and birds have been vanishing, with recent models estimating up to 83% decline by 2050.”

Meanwhile, in Russia, reindeer are targeted for antler velvet on the Taymyr Peninsula in the Krasnoyarsk region. In the spring, poachers ambush the deer at river crossings and saw off their fresh antlers while they’re in the water, leaving behind open wounds. The velvet is valuable for its supposed medicinal properties. NatGeo.com [reported](#) on August 12 that

poaching and commercial hunting have reduced this reindeer herd, the largest on Earth, from 1 million to 400,000 animals in two decades.

Europe



Britain is ‘among the most nature-depleted countries in the world,’ says the National Biodiversity Network’s latest State of Nature [report](#), with most of its important wildlife species having declined by an average of 60% since 1970. One quarter of UK mammals and nearly half of the birds assessed are at risk of extinction, and the area inhabited by “priority species” has shrunk by 27%.

In the mountains of central Italy, villagers herd their livestock to and from summer and winter pastures every year in a tradition recently recognized by UNESCO for its cultural significance. *Transhumance* (Latin: *trans*, “across,” and *humus*, “earth”) is the seasonal movement of people and livestock between grazing grounds, which has been practiced for thousands of years on every inhabited continent. See the May issue of *National Geographic* for [more](#).

Conservation is not the same thing as animal rights, but an ethical approach to hunting demands consideration of animal welfare as well as conservation outcomes. In his “Natural

Storytelling” blog, British wildlife scientist and author Hugh Webster explores [grouse moor management](#) and [driven grouse shooting, snipe and woodcock shooting](#), the conservation status of [mountain hare](#) and more.

Robots are tracking sperm whales in the Mediterranean Sea. A July 29 [article](#) in *Endangered Species Research* reports the findings of unmanned underwater gliders that have been recording the animals’ sounds over thousands of kilometres. There are fewer than 2,500 adult Mediterranean sperm whales and threats to them include entanglement in fishing gear, ship strikes, marine debris, human noise and whale-watching activities.

Pacific



How fare Australia’s kangaroos, koalas, wombats and other animals after the cataclysmic bushfires of seven months ago? On July 17, NatGeo.com [reported](#) on the aftermath of the cataclysm, which killed at least one billion animals—and then COVID-19 shut down most recovery efforts.

World



DNA ‘fingerprints’ could quickly nail illegal wildlife products. Standard DNA assays can take up to 6 months in a laboratory; a new portable device being developed at universities in Alberta and Ontario promises near-instant species identification of wildlife samples by customs inspectors and others looking for prohibited materials. The [news](#) was in Geographical.co.uk on July 17.

50% more coastal flooding in the next 80 years due to climate change, predicts a July 30 British-Australian [study](#) in Springer Nature's *Scientific Reports*. Worldwide, “extreme flood” events will affect more than 800,000 square kilometres (309,000 sq mi), putting 225 million people at risk and threatening infrastructure worth 20% of global GDP.

Sharks are now gone from one in five coral reefs, “the greatest decline of reef sharks ever recorded,” says a [report](#) on ScienceMag.org on July 22. The most comprehensive study yet of shark abundance indicates that overfishing has driven sharks to “functional extinction” in the waters of eight countries. However, reefs elsewhere have plentiful sharks due to conservation measures.

Open access + open source = open science. The Netherlands Institute of Ecology [reports](#) in *PLOS Biology* on July 29 that presently only one in four scientific papers makes public the computer code behind its analysis. “If this code is shared with others, they can fully understand and evaluate the results. They can also use the code for their own work, accelerating scientific discovery.”

As with climate change, misinformation harms wildlife conservation. A common theme in the general media is that “well-loved animals are on the brink of extinction, people pay to kill them, this is horrible, and if we stop it, we will save species.” To counter this message, that stopping hunting would benefit conservation, 11 recognized wildlife scientists published a peer-reviewed [article](#) last month in *Conservation Biology*. They point out that such simplistic narratives, backed up by misrepresentations from animal-rights groups, have become a toxic wave of conservation misinformation similar to climate-change denial. [Ed. note: *The Conservation Frontlines Library* offers the latest information on this topic.]

Startling global decline in freshwater fish—as much as 76% in many species in the past 50 years, according to a July 27 [article](#) in NatGeo.com. Because of habitat loss, pollution, overexploitation and climate change, migratory freshwater fish are “among the most threatened animals on the planet.” The study’s lead author, from the Zoological Society of London, believes that when all data from the tropics are in, the numbers will be even worse.

Saturday, August 22, was Earth Overshoot Day, the day when humanity—you, me, all of us—used up the entirety of the biological resources that Earth can renew this year. The Global Footprint Network has been calculating this [date](#), a measure of the unsustainability of humanity’s actions, since 2006. Then, Earth Overshoot Day came in September and for most years since, it has been creeping ahead on the calendar—until now. Because the pandemic put the brakes on human activity, EOD arrived three weeks later this year than last.

Tribal Stories, a storytelling platform, was launched on the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, August 9, [reported](#) Mongabay.com. The [site](#), by the Netherlands-based nonprofit People’s Planet Project, currently features films created by the A’i Cofan community in Ecuador and the Kĩsêdjê community in Brazil.

Supporting indigenous people benefits conservation, concludes a University of Helsinki [study](#) released on July 29. It argues that the agendas of conservationists and indigenous peoples are converging and demand coordination. Using the Amazon as an example, “There is no doubt that [Amazonia] is at a crossroads in its social-ecological history. Rollbacks on environmental protections and Indigenous Peoples’ rights across the entire region are opening up vast natural areas to new external pressures.”

Hunting is a polarizing topic that makes many people think of poaching elephant ivory or rhino horn, or a “triumphant (usually) white Westerner straddling a dead, charismatic mammal.” But the matter is much broader and more nuanced, says a June 5 [article](#) on JustConservation.org that discusses human-wildlife conflict, wildlife revenues and uses, conservation incentives and management issues.

How’s your country’s ‘green recovery’ coming along? CarbonBrief.org tracks the emissions-reduction plans of 103 world economies in this interactive [tracker](#), just updated for Nigeria, Ireland and Spain. It also notes that CO2 emissions, which fell dramatically during the early days of the pandemic, are now rebounding.

Cleaning rivers by transforming their banks is beginning to pay off in the Eastern US, and the tactic may work in other regions where streams have been dammed for centuries. *Science* produced this short [video](#) in late August.

Biodiversity has real, measurable \$\$\$ value. For example, guano is worth at least \$474 million per year, according to a recent [study](#) in *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*. What is harvested for organic fertilizer brings in \$20 million annually, while seabird poop sliding into the ocean every year provides nitrogen and phosphorus to marine ecosystems worth \$454 million.

The majors are trending into ‘green’ energy. A different sort of environmental tipping point was reached this year when major oil companies began to shift their focus to renewable energy. The spur, [reported](#) the *Financial Times* on July 15, was COVID-19, which severely cut the global demand and price of oil. It’s a complicated story, but the author concludes that “The stage looks set for a much more rapid transition . . . comparable in speed and reach with the IT revolution of the past two decades.”



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