



# the weekly anthropocene



dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere

By Sam Matey

**Australia.** In the small Australian city of Townsville, an innovative program that could save the lives of millions has taken flight. Scientists from the World Mosquito Program (pictured) have helped 7,000 families hatch mosquito larvae in their backyards in an effort to combat the town's outbreak



of mosquito-borne dengue fever. This sounds insanely counterintuitive, but the mosquitos they're releasing are inoculated with a bacterium called *Wolbachia*, which reduces their ability to spread diseases and is intended to spread to the wild population. Since the release, Townsville's dengue problem has completely vanished. This amazing program is cheap, scalable, and could be a vital lifesaving tool for our increasingly mosquito-stricken world. It's a great example of the kind of innovative solution that we desperately need in the Anthropocene. "This study was not set up as an experimental, epidemiological trial." said World Mosquito Program leader Scott O'Neill (pictured, right). "We're actually doing that in Indonesia at the moment—a randomized, controlled trial, which will read out in about 18 months. But this is showing extremely encouraging evidence as we lead up to that piece of work." The researchers are currently working to expand their "Trojan mosquito" release program to the rest of the world. Spectacular work! For more, check out [goo.gl/Ri6sQE](http://goo.gl/Ri6sQE). Thanks to the World Mosquito Program for the picture-check them out at [worldmosquitoprogram.org](http://worldmosquitoprogram.org).

**USA.** Recently, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives introduced a number of "poison pill" provisions into the Interior-EPA Spending Bill. Their version of the bill would have undermined the authority of the Endangered Species Act, slashed funding for the EPA, and undermined drinking water protections. Now, the Senate has passed their own version of the bill (in a 92-6 vote) that keeps EPA funding constant, omits the anti-environmental riders, and in fact increases funding for national parks maintenance and programs to keep lead out of drinking water. The bills still need to be reconciled, but the Senate version will likely prevail. America's land and water just dodged a bullet. Great news!



# the weekly anthropocene



dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere

By Sam Matey

**Plastics.** In a disturbing new development, a new study in *PLOS One* has found that ocean-going plastics (pictured) are emitting greenhouse gases. This was discovered by earth science researcher Sarah-Jeanne Royer, of the University of Hawaii and Manoa, and her team. The researchers tested the effect of Pacific seawater and solar radiation on six common types of plastic and found that the plastics were emitting copious amounts of methane and ethylene, potent greenhouse gases. They found that emissions varied by type of plastic and conditions. Low-density polyethylene, one of the most common types of plastic, had the highest greenhouse gas output. This got worse over time. After 212 days immersed in seawater and exposed to the sun, its methane production increased 176-fold. As this is the first time plastics' contribution to greenhouse gas emissions has been studied, it is currently unclear what kind of effect this is having on the global climate. However, it's unlikely to be good. For more, check out [goo.gl/3AJnj9](http://goo.gl/3AJnj9).



**Auburn, Maine.** It's only three days now until the Androscoggin River

Cleanup and BioBlitz! On Saturday, August 11th, Maine Conservation

Voters is joining the Androscoggin Land Trust in organizing an

Androscoggin River Cleanup and BioBlitz. We'll be meeting at Little Andy

Park in New Auburn, and the event will run from 10 AM to 1 PM. This

will be the Land Trust's seventh annual cleanup, but the first ever to

include a BioBlitz. A BioBlitz is a short, citizen-led biological survey of a given area to learn more about the local wildlife.

It can be thought of as a "scientific treasure hunt," a group effort to catalog as many of the life-forms in the area as

possible. For our BioBlitz, we'll be using the citizen science app iNaturalist to take pictures of the local wildlife. To

download iNaturalist, check out [www.iNaturalist.org](http://www.iNaturalist.org). For our BioBlitz page, check out

[www.inaturalist.org/projects/androscoggin-river-bioblitz](http://www.inaturalist.org/projects/androscoggin-river-bioblitz). This event will be a fun, community endeavor that will both

help the participants learn more about the natural world and contribute to scientific research. Plus, the Baxter Brewing

Company in nearby Lewiston is now offering one free pint to all participants! If you can, please join us on the 11th! For

more information, text 207-572-7937 or email [Samuel.matey@maine.edu](mailto:Samuel.matey@maine.edu).



Download the  
iNaturalist app  
before you arrive  
on the day.



# the weekly anthropocene



*dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere*

By Sam Matey

## Heroes of the Anthropocene: Dr. Alan Rabinowitz. In

deeply saddening news, world-renowned big cat researcher and conservation Dr. Alan Rabinowitz died on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Alan Rabinowitz (pictured) was one of this writer's personal heroes and writing about his death is profoundly emotional for me. Dr.

Rabinowitz began his conservation career in the 1980s, when he began studying jaguars in the remote Cockscomb region of Belize. When he found that the population he was studying was one of the most important surviving strongholds for jaguars in Central America, he successfully lobbied the Belizean government to protect the area as the world's first jaguar preserve. It's now a major ecotourism

hotspot and a haven for wildlife. Over the next few decades, Dr. Rabinowitz worked extensively in Southeast Asia, studying clouded leopards, Asiatic leopards, tigers, Sumatran rhinos, bears, leopard cats, raccoons, and civets. In this period, he helped designate Thailand's Huai Kha Khaeng reserve as a World Heritage Site, spearheaded the creation of five new national parks in Myanmar, and discovered a new species of large mammal, the leaf deer, in northern Myanmar. In the early 2000s, Dr. Rabinowitz was diagnosed with an incurable form of leukemia but resolved not to let this stop him from fighting to protect the world's last wild places. In 2006, he became the first CEO of Panthera, an organization devoted to big cat conservation around the world. As Panthera CEO, he led the Path of the Jaguar initiative, a groundbreaking attempt to create a network of jaguar-traversable corridors from Mexico to Argentina.

During his travels, Dr. Rabinowitz often suffered extreme personal danger. He has survived a plane crash in Belize, being stabbed through the leg by a punji stick trap in Thailand, and a plethora of tropical diseases and infections. And, for the last decade, he has continued to explore the world despite his life-threatening condition. As recently as summer 2017, Dr. Rabinowitz led the Journey of the Jaguar, a series of expeditions along the Path of the Jaguar network to evaluate jaguar conservation in the area. He lived fearlessly, unwilling to be dictated to by threats and handicaps others would have deemed insurmountable.

The world is poorer for Dr. Rabinowitz' passing. Wild creatures and lands have been robbed of a protector, and conservationists around the world of a mentor, collaborator, and leader. Yet his legacy lives on, in his family, the conservation organizations he helped build, the young scientists he helped inspire, and in the thousands of square miles of wild forest that have been saved from the saw due to his work. Wild creatures that will never know his name owe their lives to him. Dr. Rabinowitz was a true hero of the Anthropocene. We salute him.

