



Dispatches From The Wild, Weird World Of Humanity And Its Biosphere

August 18 2021

Conservation Successes



[Jacob the lion](#) (pictured) lives in Uganda's Queen Elizabeth National Park, part of a population of lions that have adopted the unusual (for their species) behavior of tree climbing. In his six years of life, he has survived four incidents which might easily have killed him. In October 2019, he was caught in a poacher's snare, and had to be rescued by the Uganda Wildlife Authority and partner conservation groups. (Jacob, like many endangered animals in the

Anthropocene, wears a radio collar that alerts conservationists when he stops moving for a prolonged period of time in an unusual location). In March 2020, six lions in his pride were poisoned by poachers and died, with Jacob only escaping by luck. A few weeks after that near miss, he was gored by an unknown animal—likely a buffalo or warthog—and sustained deep wounds to his chest. And in August 2020, his [back left leg was severed](#) by a brutal wheel trap (similar to a bear trap). The Authority and an array of conservationist veterinarians launched several rounds of treatment, and managed to save his life. Amazingly, given the harsh life of a wild lion, Jacob has made a full recovery and is successfully thriving as a wild three-legged lion. He has been observed hunting with his pride, climbing trees, and even mating with a female. “It just shows that if these animals are given half a chance to continue, they can still eke out an existence, and that’s pretty amazing,” said lion researcher [Alex Braczkowski](#). “It’s heroic stuff.” In the field of conservation, primarily concerned with the health of populations

and species as a whole, one can sometimes forget that every animal sharing this Anthropocene epoch with us is an individual, with an extraordinary life story of its own. There are about 20,000 lions left in the wild-every Jacob, surviving against all odds in a human-dominated world full of both allies and enemies, is a success story. Fascinating news!

After centuries of absence, [European wildcats](#) (the wild ancestor of the common domestic cat) have [returned to the Netherlands](#), the latest marker in the [last few decades' trend](#) of forest regrowth and species returning across Europe. This didn't even require a reintroduction, they simply returned on their own from the growing populations in Belgium and Germany!

The [Eurasian beaver](#) was hunted to extinction in **Great Britain** by the 1500s, but after several reintroductions beginning in 2001 (a fascinating story, as these included several controversial "vigilante rewilding" releases) the species is once again thriving. [A recent study by government agency NatureScot](#) found 13,204 confirmed signs of beaver activity, from dams to tree feeding marks, and calculated that over 1,000 beavers now live wild in Scotland, split between 251 territories-more than double the population found by a similar survey in 2017. Great news!

Since the horrors of the [mad cow disease epidemic](#) (now under control) it has been forbidden, for good reason, to leave dead farm animals outside in the UK. However, this has forced carrion-eating birds like eagles and vultures to subsist on roadkill, putting their lives at risk on the busy roads. Now, nature-minded citizens in **Britain** are creating and stocking "[sky tables](#)" (elevated wooden platforms on which are placed roadkill and other carrion) to help support species ranging from white-tailed eagles to griffon vultures to ravens. This is a lovely example of humans proactively helping other species-hope this movement spreads!

In 2016, a community of the Samburu people in northern **Kenya** established [Reteti](#), the first [indigenously owned and run sanctuary](#) for baby elephants orphaned or abandoned by drought or conflict with humans. Since then, they have rescued 35 elephants and returned 10 to the wild, in many cases even



successfully reuniting elephants with the very herds they were separated from. During the pandemic, they couldn't get the usual powdered milk formula to feed the elephants, but fortunately improvised an even more effective formula based on local goats' milk, the production of which now provides a sustainable source of income to many of the local women. Local employee Rimland Lemojong [was quoted by the Guardian](#): "When I was a young boy, I first looked after the kids of goats, then goats, then my parents upgraded me to care for cows. Then I went to

school. I am so happy because I used to raise my family's cows here, and now I am raising baby elephants. It's incredible."

An [award-winning short film](#) about the sanctuary will be [available online](#) until August 31.

[Two new Javan rhino calves](#) have been observed in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon National Park, the [critically endangered species'](#) last redoubt on Earth. Their arrival ekes up the total world population of Javan rhinos to 75, from a low of less than 50 in the mid-2000s. Thanks to extremely high security provided by the Indonesian government, there have been [no known poaching attempts](#) in the park for over 20 years. Hopefully, slow and steady growth wins the race for the survival of the Javan rhino! Great news.



Climate Impacts

For the first time in recorded history, there is [wildfire smoke over the North Pole](#), from the massive fires in Siberia.

Those fires have now ripped through over 22.7 million acres, an area about the size of Portugal. The Yakutia region [urged people to stay at home](#) on Friday, August 13th, to avoid harmful health effects from the cloud of smoke shrouding towns in the area.



The two-decade megadrought spanning the American West has brought unprecedented water shortages. Lake Mead and Lake Powell, two major reservoirs, are at the lowest water level since their creation in the 20th century. [For the first time ever](#), the federal government declared a formal water shortage in the **Colorado River Basin** (pictured), which will require new cuts to water usage for the [seven states using the water](#) of the Colorado River (California, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, Wyoming, and New Mexico). The last two decades are the driest the basin has been in [1200](#)

[years](#). [Stakeholders are working](#) to manage the new water restrictions.

Fortunately, there is one obvious solution on the table: drastically scale back and eventually end water-intensive agriculture in the basin, which uses 70% of the Colorado River's water. This will be [politically painful](#) but eventually an unavoidable necessity: the US has plenty of other agriculturally productive areas, and when it's a choice between hay and cotton fields or drinking water for Phoenix and Las Vegas, there's no contest.

A heat wave in **Italy** [cooked snails in Sicily alive in their shells](#), and may have resulted in the highest temperature ever recorded in Europe: nearly 124 degrees Fahrenheit. The region also saw wildfires and blackouts caused by high air conditioner use.

Some good news: **investment** in renewable energy and other climate action-related technologies [is at an all-time high](#), with an estimated \$500 billion USD being invested in decarbonization in 2020 by entities ranging from venture capital to individual companies' internal efforts.



Note: there will be no Weekly Anthropocene on August 25th, due to a family vacation.

The Weekly Anthropocene

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