the weekly anthropocene

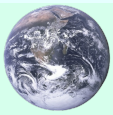
Dispatches From The Wild, Weird World Of Humanity And Its Biosphere

June 29 2022

Cambodia

On June 13th, 2022, a 4 meter (13 foot) long female giant freshwater stingray (*Urogymnus polylepis*) was captured in the Stung Treng province of Cambodia, in one of the deep pools of the great Mekong River. (Pictured above). This discovery is fascinating for several reasons: first, the stingray, given the name Boramy or "full moon" in Khmer, weighed nearly 300 kilograms (661 pounds), making it the heaviest freshwater fish ever recorded: a world record. Second, the giant freshwater stingray is an endangered species, and the Mekong River is under threat from drought and dam building among other factors; this discovery highlights both how much incredible biological wealth is still left and the importance of conserving it for the future. Third, the circumstances of the

capture underscore the level to which the local community has become invested in conservation: when Boramy was accidentally caught by Cambodian fisherman Moul Thun, he could have sold it for food, but instead chose to call the USAID-funded Wonders of the Mekong research team, which had been reaching out to fishers in the area. The researchers measured and weighed Boramy and implanted an acoustic tag to track her movements. “When people see that these animals exist, and begin to appreciate how incredible they are, they get inspired,” said Zeb Hogan, leader of the Wonders of the Mekong team. “I look at the fish that broke the record in 2005, and it was killed and sold for meat. Now we’re tracking the world’s largest freshwater fish. It’s such a contrast. It means that all is not lost.” Great news!

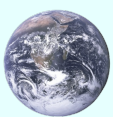


U.S. Clean Energy

In the wake of the Biden Administration's landmark executive order supporting the US solar industry, an array of companies announced on June 21 that they were forming the **U.S. Solar Buyer Consortium**. The alliance will work together to invest $6 billion in US domestic solar manufacturing, with a goal of producing 7 gigawatts of new US-built solar panels per year by 2024, enough to power 1.3 million homes. Great news!

Advancing further their consistent support of the nascent industry, the Biden Administration announced on June 23 a new initiative on offshore wind development, the **Federal-State Offshore Wind Implementation Partnership**. The US government and the states of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island will now work more closely together to develop the US offshore wind supply chain and streamline the permitting and zoning process to build more offshore wind. The Biden White House also designated specialized offshore wind installation ships as Vessels of National Interest, opening up more access to financing from the Federal Ship Financing Program for US shipyards and shipowners to purchase, build, and refit them.

The **Texas** Department of Transportation is planning to build a broad network of electric vehicle charging stations, enough to support 1 million EVs, on the state's highways over the next 5 years. The new charging stations will be placed every 50 miles on interstates to maximize connectivity and minimize "range anxiety," and will be built using funds from the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed in 2021.



Kazakhstan

The saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*, pictured) has survived several brushes with extinction in the Anthropocene so far. Once ranging across the Eurasian steppes in their millions, they were devastated by poaching for their horns and brought down to just 50,000 individuals after the fall of the Soviet Union. Conservation measures led to a partial recovery, but then a totally unexpected tragedy struck. In three weeks in May 2015, 200,000 saigas in Kazakhstan, around two-thirds of all that was left of the species, dropped dead for no immediately apparent reason, shocking and horrifying conservationists. Subsequent investigation discovered that this mass death was the result of a rapid-onset pandemic of *Pasteurella multocida*, a normally harmless nasal bacterium that had became more infectious due to unseasonable climate change-induced warm and humid conditions on the steppe. Since then, the saiga herds have bounced back again, reaching 334,000 individuals in 2019 and 842,000 in 2021, aided by better anti-poaching efforts from conservationists and the Kazakh government. Now, 2022's April aerial count revealed that Kazakhstan is now home to a whopping 1,318,000 saiga, a superb increase testifying to the resilience of the fast-breeding species. Excellent news!