



# the weekly anthropocene

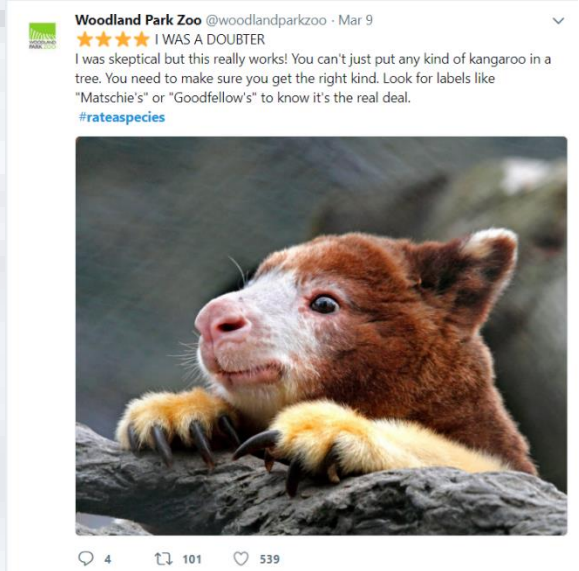
dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere

by Sam Matey

**Brazil.** The *quilombo* communities of Brazil are descendants of escaped slaves, who created communities in wild areas where they could live off the land in peace. Today, *quilombo* communities are spread across the Amazon rainforest. For years, they have been denied their traditional land rights, with agribusiness giants lobbying to keep them impoverished and exploit the forest. In February the Brazilian supreme court finally ruled that *quilombos* did have rights over their land. Now, the Brazilian government has deeded the Cachoeira Porteira *quilombo* community (pictured) 220,000 hectares of forest (about 849 square miles). This is a great victory for the environment and human rights and could be the first of many new land titles for *quilombos*. For more information check out [goo.gl/qbPdzs](http://goo.gl/qbPdzs). Great news!



**Cyberspace (1): #rateaspecies.** In an amusing and fun way to promote conservation, zoos and conservation groups have taken to tweeting “Amazon reviews” of different species. The creativity shown in these “#rateaspecies” reviews is very impressive! This rating (pictured) describes the Matschie’s tree kangaroo. For more species ratings, check out <https://twitter.com/hashtag/rateaspecies>. Awesome news!



**Cyberspace (2): Wildlife Trafficking.** On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018, an array of tech companies and conservation organizations launched the Global Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online, an alliance to stamp out the illegal wildlife trade by cracking down on online sales of wildlife products. The Coalition includes Google, Facebook, Instagram, eBay, Etsy, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the International Fund for Animal Welfare, and many others. Members of the coalition will share their skills and knowledge: WWF is training companies’ teams to evaluate ads’ and posts’ legality and tech companies are building alert systems tailored to their platforms. For example, Instagram has already developed a program that identifies selfies depicting activity that harms wildlife. This coalition has the potential to make a serious dent in the illegal wildlife trade. “Criminal groups and illegal traders are exploiting the technology to operate anonymously online with less chance of detection and to reach a wider market than ever before,” explained Crawford Allan, senior director of wildlife crime at WWF. “The companies themselves were the obvious answer. If the companies can take down the ads before they’re even posted, we’re in good shape.” For more information, see [goo.gl/QRtsKa](http://goo.gl/QRtsKa). Excellent news!



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**Malaysia (1).** In 1866, Italian Odoardo Beccari discovered a strange plant in Malaysia, and described it for science as *Thismia neptunis*. No one ever saw it again-until now. Researchers have rediscovered *Thismia neptunis* (pictured), and it's just as weird as Beccari made it out to be. The reason for its strange, un-plant-like shape is because it's a mycoheterotroph-it gets its energy from parasitizing fungi in the soil, so it doesn't need leaves to photosynthesize. The researchers are now searching for more lost plants from Beccari's notes. For more on this epic tale, check out [goo.gl/g7Jez1](http://goo.gl/g7Jez1). Great news!



**Malaysia (2).** A new study from the journal *Wildlife Research* has found that Bornean bearded pigs (*Sus barbatus*) in Malaysian Borneo can survive in oil palm plantations, as long as there is still some forest nearby to support activities like nesting. Bornean bearded pigs are a vital species for the local ecosystem, as they disperse trees' seeds and provide prey for clouded leopards. This study has positive implications for the adaptability of the ecosystem as a whole. For more info, see [goo.gl/dgrVgz](http://goo.gl/dgrVgz).

**Colombia.** Colombia has expanded its great Chiribiquete National Park, protecting 1.5 million more hectares (5792 square miles) of Amazon rainforest. For more info, see [goo.gl/3XcPnm](http://goo.gl/3XcPnm). Great news!

**Gulf of California.** The vaquita (*Phocoena sinus*) is a critically endangered small porpoise living only in the Gulf of California. Its primary threat is fishers illegally targeting the totoaba fish. Totoabas are a major vaquita food source, and vaquitas are often caught and killed by the illegal fishers' nets. In 2017, surveys recording their underwater calls estimated that there were only 30 vaquitas left. Andrea Crosta, agent of a wildlife trafficking watchdog group, reports that scientists' surveys indicate that there may be as few as 12 vaquitas still alive. Crosta believes that the totoaba fishers "are actually waiting for the vaquita to go extinct so they can fish more and with fewer restrictions." He estimates that the vaquitas will not survive the next major fishing season, which is beginning now. A recent attempt to capture and captive-breed the last few vaquitas failed, as the delicate porpoises died in captivity. It appears there is no hope left for this species, and we can only pray that its sad fate serves as a cautionary tale for the future. For more information, see [goo.gl/GK5aQD](http://goo.gl/GK5aQD). Ave atque vale, vaquitas.

**Corals.** As is well known, coral reefs are in great danger, threatened by warming temperatures, ocean acidification, overfishing and pollution. Scientific American recently published an article reviewing the desperate measures scientists are taking to save reef biodiversity, from replanting coral fragments to freezing coral sperm to breeding new, tougher types of coral. For the full article, see [goo.gl/yZu6oT](http://goo.gl/yZu6oT).

**Congo.** Scientists have taken an unprecedented video of a wild baby gorilla. Check out [goo.gl/j3Fkft](http://goo.gl/j3Fkft).



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**Big Cats (1): Jaguars.** A new analysis by the Wildlife Conservation Society has found that jaguar populations at WCS field sites have grown by 8% per year from 2002 to 2016. In Bolivia's Madidi National Park, jaguar density increased threefold during this period. WCS credits working with indigenous peoples and reducing deforestation for the increase in jaguars. For more info, see [goo.gl/dXqfCH](http://goo.gl/dXqfCH). Great news!



**Big Cats (2): Tigers.** In contrast, tigers are in trouble. A new study of over 100 tiger conservation areas found that only 13% met global standards, with one-third of the conservation areas at risk of losing their tigers. The biggest problem was a lack of funds and personnel, with Southeast Asian conservation areas being particularly understaffed and underfunded. The study found that 86% of conservation areas in South Asia, Russia, and China reported that their finances were sustainable or on the way to being sustainable, but only 35% of areas in Southeast Asia agreed. "Unless governments commit to sustained investments in the protection of these sites, tiger populations may face the catastrophic decline that they have suffered over the last few decades. This funding is needed urgently, particularly for many sites in Southeast Asia to support recovery of its tiger population," said Michael Baltzer, head of WWF's Tigers Alive initiative. For more info, see [goo.gl/VCV721](http://goo.gl/VCV721). More news as it develops.

**Big Cats (3): Leopards in Cambodia.** Tigers aren't the only big cat at risk due to lax wildlife protection in Southeast Asia. A new study published in the *Royal Society Open Science* journal found that the population density of Indochinese leopards in a Cambodian protected area fell from 3 leopards per 100 square kilometers in 2009 to 1 leopard per 100 square kilometers in 2014, one of the lowest leopard densities in Asia. This is mostly due to uncontrolled poaching, especially with snares. The decline of Cambodia's leopard population is especially worrying because it is the only breeding leopard population in a wide swath of Southeast Asia. For more info, see [goo.gl/Bxoiuq](http://goo.gl/Bxoiuq). Sobering news.

**Big Cats (4): Leopards in Mumbai.** Fortunately, leopards in the Indian city of Mumbai are doing just fine-and helping humans while they're at it. Mumbai is one of the largest cities in the world, home to over 18 million people. It's also home to about 40 leopards, who live in Mumbai's tiny Sanjay Gandhi National Park but often venture into the city. A new study in the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* has found that the leopards are even saving human lives. The Mumbai leopards' primary diet is feral dogs, which are major carriers of rabies. Based on statistical averages, the researchers calculated that the presence of the leopards prevents 1,000 dog bites and 90 possible rabies cases. This research, and indeed the very existence of an urban leopard population, is a spectacular example of the kind of integrated human-wildlife landscape we need in the Anthropocene. For more info, see [goo.gl/WzkYju](http://goo.gl/WzkYju). Also, amazing Indian wildlife photographer Nayan Khanolkar has taken a plethora of awe-inspiring photos of Mumbai's urban leopards. For his work, copy and paste [nayankhanolkar.com](http://nayankhanolkar.com).