



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

May 26, 2021

Biden Administration

On May 18th, President Biden [toured the Ford Rouge EV Center](#) in Dearborn, Michigan, to talk about his \$174 billion electric vehicle proposal to build and deploy more electric vehicles in America. President Biden also test-drove (pictured) Ford's new all-electric pickup truck, the F-150 Lightning ([which is a pretty big deal in itself](#)).



The event and test drive was a rather decent analogy for the ongoing Biden presidency; unobtrusively yet surely moving forward.

On May 20, Biden issued [an executive order](#) on climate-related financial risk, requiring an array of federal agencies to analyze and plan for the climate crisis-related risk to the US financial system. This sort of low-key initiative may seem dry, but [it could pay off substantially](#) by influencing federal capital allocation and providing important data to major investors and other market players.

[The Senate has passed The Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act](#), creating a \$35 billion fund for states and tribes to use for long-overdue upgrades of their drinking water systems. Among other fixes, this money will be used to remove lead pipes from schools and make infrastructure more resilient in the face of climate change. Amazingly given the political climate, it passed with 89 senators supporting it, and [the Biden Administration loves it](#), so as soon as the Democratic-controlled House gets around to it, it's good to go!

The Limetree Bay oil refinery, on the island of St. Croix in the US Virgin Islands, [is an open sore](#). It's spilled over 43 million gallons of oil into the island's groundwater over the past few decades and routinely belched toxic fumes into nearby (mostly nonwhite) communities. The refinery filed for bankruptcy in 2012 after being slapped with fines for Clean Air Act violations-and then the Trump Administration decided to [cut the refinery's new owners an under-the-table sweetheart deal to get going again](#). When the plant reopened in February 2021, problems began immediately, with a malfunctioning valve spewing a cloud of oil into the sky and noxious fumes containing sulfur dioxide forcing the shutdown of three local schools. Fortunately, Biden's EPA is on the case, with Administrator Michael Regan using emergency powers to shut the refinery down for at least 60 days (potentially much longer) and instituting a wide array of new inspections and testing. "These repeated incidents at the refinery have been and remain totally unacceptable. Today, I have ordered the refinery to immediately pause all operations until we can be assured that this facility can operate in accordance with laws that protect public health," said Administrator Regan. It's great to have America's environmental cops back on the job!

(Author's note: Sometimes I worry that regular coverage of Biden Administration actions on climate and environmental issues makes this newsletter seem too much like a hyper-partisan fan site. I feel it's important to state at this point that I do disagree with Biden on some issues; for example, [I think he hasn't done nearly enough to let in more refugees](#). But on climate action, the meta-issue of the century, the Democrats are the only game in town, and there's awesome new stuff happening every week. In short: it's not my fault I keep praising Biden, he just keeps doing stuff I like!).



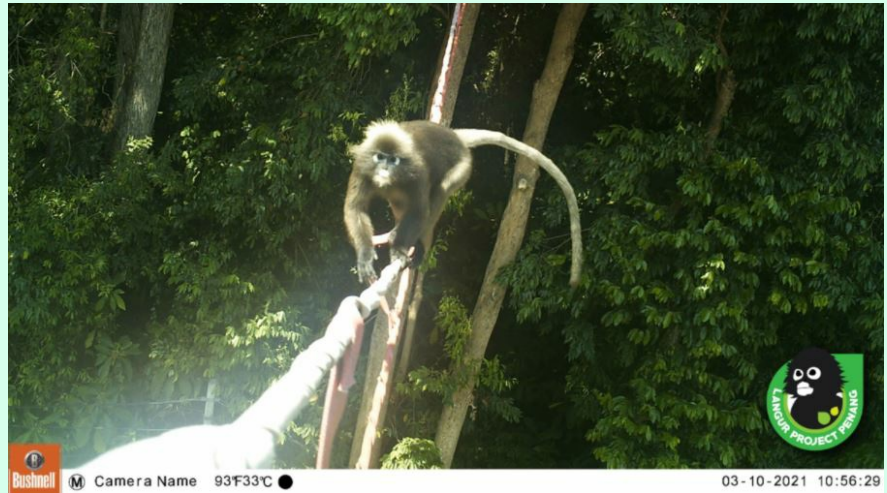
United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's government has announced that it will push through [a suite of animal-rights bills](#), based around legally affirming the reality that most animals are sentient and can feel pain. (That government [currently has a massive parliamentary majority](#), so them saying they'll pass something is close to a done deal, as opposed to the current situation in America where President Biden's proposals have to navigate arcane Senate rules and a razor-thin vote margin). The new laws are set to include the banning of egregiously cruel threats to endangered species such as elephant ivory, shark fins, and the keeping of primates as pets, as well as a medley of other measures such as cracking down on puppy smuggling, halting most exports of live animals from the UK, banning electric shock collars and the importation of hunting trophies, microchipping pet cats to make lost ones easier to find, and more. Overall, it's a fascinating mix of conservation, agricultural, and pet-focused legislation, organized around the noble principle of extending some legal protections to the fellow life-forms in our power and under our care.



Malaysia

[Langur Project Penang](#) (LPP), a small team of local researchers and citizen scientists from Malaysia's island of Penang, have devised an ingenious, thrifty method of helping humans and wildlife thrive in the same landscape. Penang is heavily urbanized, with a population density of 1,663 people per square



kilometer, but it's also home to a population of the endangered dusky langur (*Trachypithecus obscurus*) who eat fruit, berries, leaves, and flowers in the island's patches of forest. However, they're often killed by cars when trying to cross roads, or electrocuted when they try to use power lines as bridges. Langur Project Penang had [the brilliant idea of recycling fire hoses to form a waterproof, high-tensile-strength bridge](#) to allow langurs to safely cross 40 feet above the road, well out of the range of cars and power lines. They're already being used by the langurs (see image above!) and LPP is working to improve their design by adding a slightly higher "handhold" and to build more such bridges. "We really hope that the canopy bridge is not just to connect the fragments in a large area or even for the roads and highways, but also a conservation tool [to] reduce human-primate conflict," said Ms. [Jo Leen Yap](#), a local Ph.D. student and the founder and leader of LPP. "The ultimate goal is to bridge the gap between humans and urban wildlife." This is a lovely example of humans putting in the effort to give other animals a chance to thrive alongside us. Great news!

The Weekly Anthropocene

Contact Us Today

Email Address:
samuel.matey@maine.edu

