



the weekly anthropocene



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

By Sam Matey, July 15, 2020

United Kingdom. In a fascinating example of an innovative rewilding project, European bison (*Bison bonasus*) will be reintroduced to Britain, to form a wild bison herd on the island for the first time in 6,000 years. (Pictured: European bison relaxing in Germany). The Kent Wildlife Trust will reintroduce a small pioneer herd of bison (one male and three females) from either the Netherlands or Poland into the Blean Woods area near



Canterbury in spring 2022. Bison are ecosystem engineers, and their grazing will help create a mosaic-like forest-grassland landscape that should be great habitat for other species from nightingales to turtle doves. This is a great new chapter in a continent-spanning story of environmental restoration: the European bison was extinct in the wild by the early 20th century, but reintroductions from zoos were successful across the continent, and now the species is voyaging to a new land to help co-create new ecosystems of the Anthropocene! For more, see tinyurl.com/BritishBison.

Critically Endangered Species. On July 9th, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) released the latest update to its Red List, the world's master-list of the scientifically assessed status of wildlife species. With this update, the Red List now covers 120,372 species, of which 32,441 are threatened with extinction (i.e. Vulnerable, Endangered, Critically Endangered, or Extinct in the Wild). Notably, this is not nearly all species in the world (estimates for that number range into the millions) but just those that have been scientifically assessed, from tigers to Tasmanian devils. One key takeaway is from off the waters of New England: the North Atlantic Right Whale (*Eubalaena glacialis*) has been found to be Critically Endangered. It's estimated that there were less than 250 adults alive at the end of 2018, and there have been several more deaths from fishing gear entanglement and vessel strikes since then. Another key takeaway is the massive threat to almost all lemurs, across their homeland of Madagascar. 103 of the 107 assessed lemur species were found to be threatened with extinction, and 33 species-over a third-were found to be Critically Endangered. If you're interested in doing something to help, this writer worked on lemur conservation efforts in Kianjavato, Madagascar, for much of summer 2019, and can attest that the Madagascar Biodiversity Partnership (madagascarpartnership.org/ and facebook.com/madagascarpartnership/) does heroic and effective reforestation and community conservation work to protect critically endangered lemurs, and are continuing on with COVID-19 precautions. For more, see tinyurl.com/RedList2020.



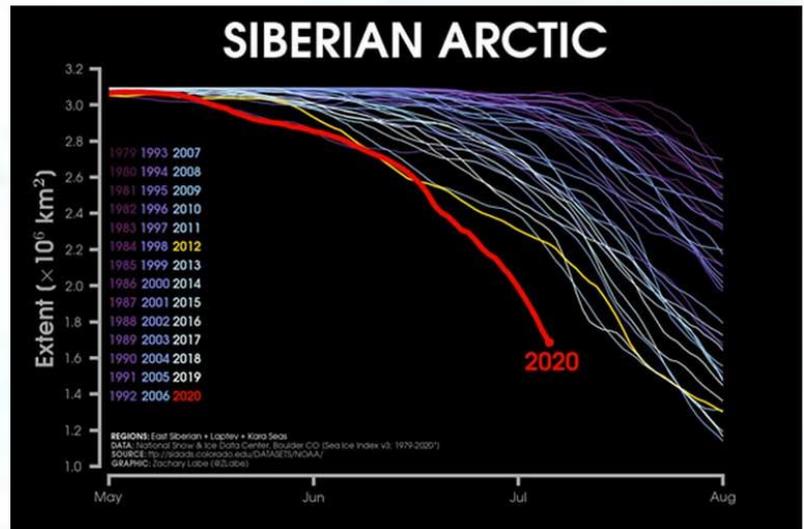
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Siberia. The titanic, unprecedented Siberian heatwave continues, complete with such attendant horrors of the Anthropocene climate crisis as 100-degree Fahrenheit temperatures above the Arctic Circle, massive wildfires, and now record-low Arctic sea ice extent for this time of year (pictured). For more on this climate disaster, see tinyurl.com/BurningSiberia.



Brazil. At long last, the delinquent Brazilian government is being strong-armed by its courts and international opinion to take some baby steps towards resolving the escalating crises of COVID-19, deforestation, fires, and attacks on indigenous peoples currently unfolding in the Amazon rainforest. On July 3rd, a Brazilian court ruled to expel 20,000 gold miners from Yanomami Park Indigenous Territory, where they had been illegally mining on the territory of the Yanomami people, exposing them to COVID-19 (there have been five deaths and 168 confirmed cases among the Yanomami so far), and killing two Yanomami men who came across an illegal landing strip. Fortunately, this is likely to be followed up on, as the powerful ex-military Brazilian Vice President Hamilton Mourão has committed to obeying the judgment and removing the miners. And on July 8th, after considerable pressure from international investors and the European Union, the Brazilian government finally decreed a 120-day ban on setting fires in the Amazon. (Yes, before this it was *legal* to set pieces of Earth's greatest rainforest on fire if one felt like it). Peak blaze season, August through November, is nearing, and this year, in the midst of global heating, could be catastrophic if fire-setting is unchecked. While these steps are good, they're still nowhere near addressing the big problems. Deforestation rates have climbed for the fifteenth straight month, reaching the highest level since 2007. It's clear why: the 12-month deforestation rate has risen an astonishing 96% since vocally pro-logger and anti-indigenous peoples President Jair Bolsonaro took office in January 2019. (Shortly after receiving this unwelcome data, Bolsonaro now appears to have fired the top Amazon deforestation satellite researcher: see tinyurl.com/AmazonResearcherFired) Scientists have warned that the Amazon may be approaching a tipping point in which it is forced into a drier, savanna-like ecosystem. This would be a tragic loss, and must be stopped by any means necessary. As climate policy-related dramas unfold around the world, from the United States to the EU to China to Australia, it's worth keeping an eye on developments in Brazil. For more, see tinyurl.com/AmazonDanger and tinyurl.com/YanomamiMining.



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United States. Democratic nominee for President Joe Biden has released an incredible new clean energy plan, a four-year \$2 trillion investment in the renewables revolution that serves a both a beefed-up climate change plan and a Keynesian economic stimulus package for recovery from the COVID recession. It includes plans for 100% carbon emissions-free electricity across America by 2035, federal investments in zero-emissions public transport for every American city of over 100,000 people, construct 1.5 million new sustainable housing units, create a new Advanced Research Projects Agency on Climate to invest in innovation and rapid commercialization of next-gen clean energy tech, create 250,000 jobs immediately to plug oil and gas wells and restore abandoned mines, create a new land conservation and climate resilience-focused Civilian Conservation Corps, among much else. This is absolutely incredible-there is now a very strong chance that a President running on a comprehensive climate plan that actually meets the needs of the moment could win in November, and a decent shot at a Congress that would pass it into law. If American voters can get Biden and the Democrats over the finish line, everything will change-and it might be remembered someday as the beginning of the end of the climate crisis. Check it out at joebiden.com/clean-energy/-it's nothing less than a blueprint for a better America and safer world!



California. The California Air Resources Board has enacted a first-in-the-world policy requiring all truck manufacturers to sell more zero-emission vehicles in California. Mandated ZEV targets will gradually increase starting 2024, until by 2045, every new truck sold in California will be zero-emissions. This will have the immediate local benefit of reducing air pollution, plus the long-term worldwide benefit of contributing to the fight to stabilize Earth's climate. The amazing thing is, the zero-emission vehicles market is now advancing so rapidly it's entirely possible that the vast majority of trucks will be carbon emissions-free well before 2045! Superb news. For more, see tinyurl.com/CaliforniaCleanTrucks.

Pakistan. Pakistan has nominally had a national park system for decades, but they had no real protection, existing only as "paper parks." Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan wants to change that, with a new "Protected Areas Initiative" creating nine new national parks and announcing full investment in protecting six pre-existing ones, supporting them all with the launch of Pakistan's first National Parks Service. Great news! For more, see tinyurl.com/PakistanParks.