

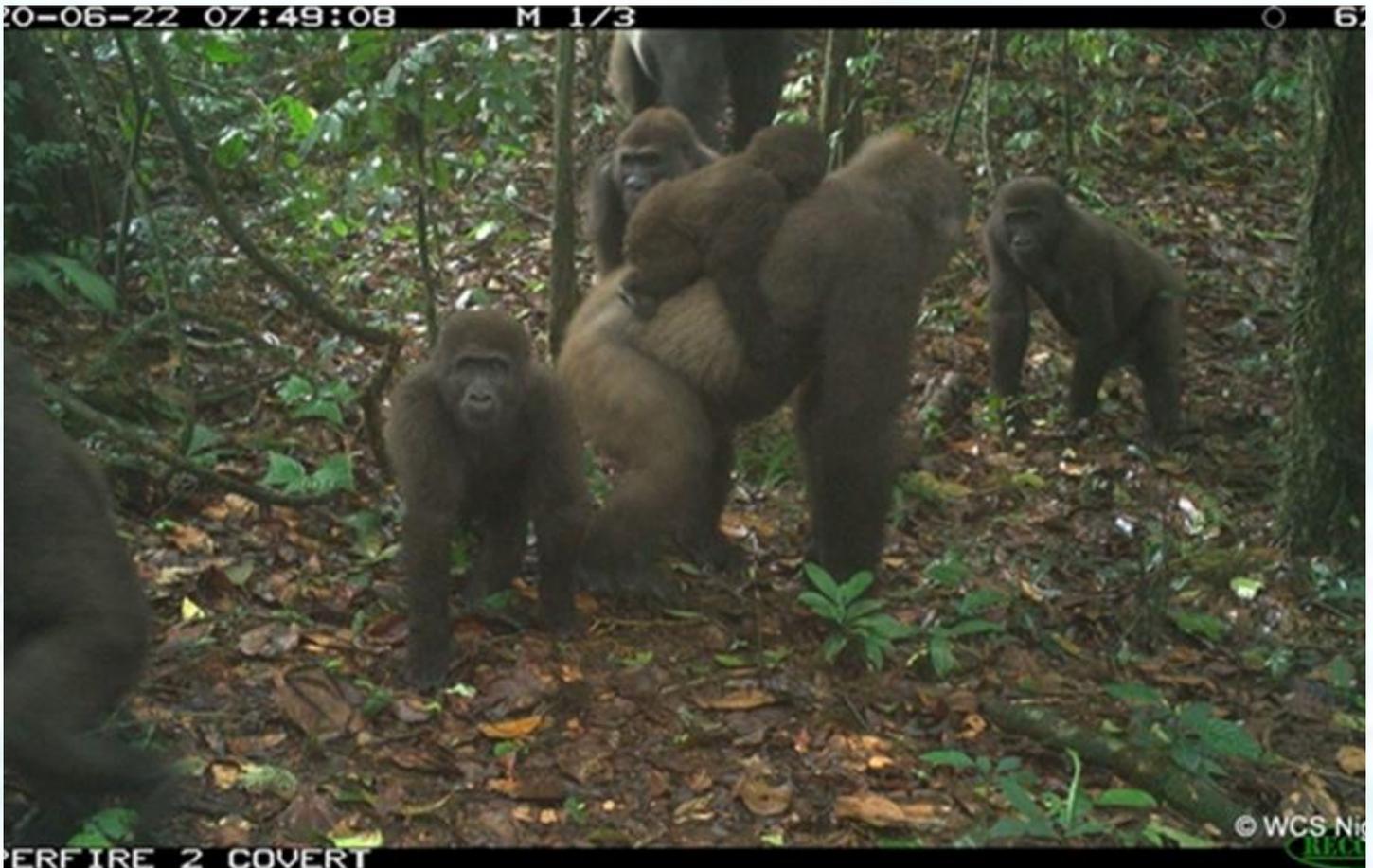


# the weekly anthropocene

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



By Sam Matey, July 22, 2020



**Nigeria.** The Cross River gorilla (*Gorilla gorilla diehli*) is the rarest and most imperiled subspecies of gorilla, with only about 300 thought to be hanging on in the remote forested hills of the Cameroon-Nigeria border region. Now, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has released camera-trap photos taken in Nigeria's Mbe Mountains that show a group of over six Cross River gorillas, with several infants (pictured, above). This is the largest group of Cross River gorillas ever photographed, and one of the first new images of any Cross River gorillas in years. The gorillas look to be in good health, and the presence of infants is highly encouraging for the future of the species. Notably, the gorillas are protected on land owned by the local communities, not the government. Inaoyom Imong, the director of WCS Nigeria's Cross River Landscape said: "It is extremely exciting to see so many young Cross River gorillas – an encouraging indication that these gorillas are now well protected and reproducing successfully, after previous decades of hunting." Local head chief Otu Gabriel Ocha of the Kanyang I village said "I am very happy to see these wonderful pictures of Cross River gorillas with many babies in our forest. This shows that our conservation efforts in partnership with WCS are yielding fruits. I hope that we can continue these efforts so that we can pass the heritage to future generations." Spectacular news! For more, see [tinyurl.com/CrossRiverGorillaBabies](https://tinyurl.com/CrossRiverGorillaBabies).



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**Bolivia.** An endangered bird species known as the Apolo cotinga, palkachupa, or *Phibalura boliviana* (pictured) has been found to have a behavior that will likely greatly aid its survival in the Anthropocene. Previously thought to live only in the isolated Apolo region of Bolivia, it has now been discovered in the Teoponte organic coffee plantations, greatly increasing its range at a stroke. Teoponte is already an amazing conservation leader: they grow their coffee in an agroforestry system under the shade of forest trees, and had already registered 235 bird species on their land, 16% of all bird species in Bolivia. Great news! For more, check out [tinyurl.com/Palkachupa](https://tinyurl.com/Palkachupa).



**Portugal.** In another step forward in the great renewables revolution, a major Portuguese energy utility has announced that Portugal will close its last coal plants in 2021, two years earlier than the previous planned closure date of 2023. Major reasons given were the falling cost of renewables and the rising penalty for CO2 emissions in the European Union carbon market. This makes Portugal the third European nation this year to announce early closure of its polluting coal industry remnants, after Austria and Sweden shut down their last coal plants in 2020. All three will join Belgium, which exited coal in 2016, as European nations free from the burden of an air-polluting, asthma-polluting, and climate-destroying fuel source. Next, France, Slovakia, the UK, Ireland, and Italy all plan to end the use of coal entirely by 2025 or earlier! It is truly extraordinary that such great progress is being made even in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. For more on the Portugal story, see [tinyurl.com/PortugalDitchesCoal](https://tinyurl.com/PortugalDitchesCoal). For two truly superb and deeply encouraging articles on the massive strides made by renewables worldwide in the last few months, please check out [tinyurl.com/RenewablesEpochalShift](https://tinyurl.com/RenewablesEpochalShift) and [tinyurl.com/worstyeareverforfossilfuels](https://tinyurl.com/worstyeareverforfossilfuels).

**Cotton.** Amazingly, scientists at CSIRO (the Australian government's research agency) have found a way to genetically modify cotton to express different colors naturally (pictured), as it grows. This could be a big step forward for the fashion industry, as chemical dyes are a major pollutant. The same team is also working on a long-term project to develop a stretchy, wrinkle-free cotton to replace synthetic fabrics. For more, check out [tinyurl.com/ColoredCotton](https://tinyurl.com/ColoredCotton).





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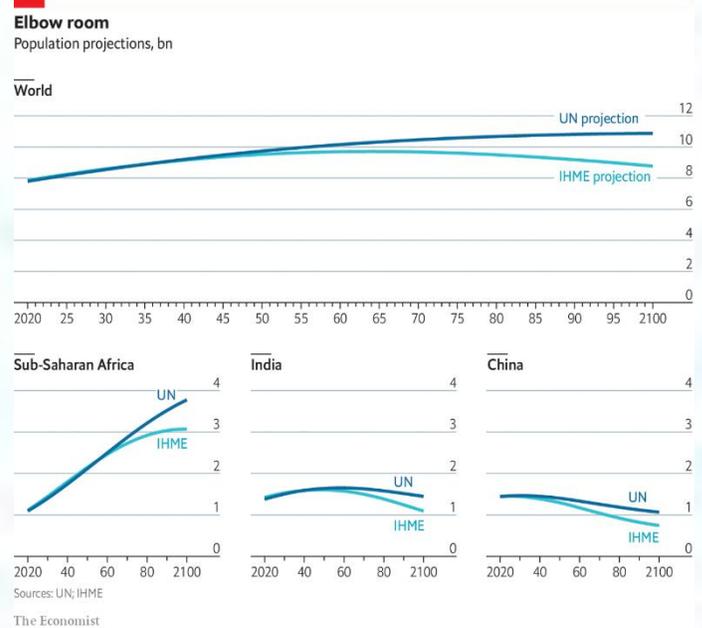
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**World Population.** A landmark modeling study in *The Lancet* has found that due to increases in education and access to contraception, the world population of humanity is projected to grow much more slowly than previously expected, even declining by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The headline findings are that the world population of humans is projected to peak at 9.7 billion in 2064, and decline to about 8.9 billion by 2100—a massive shift from the previous gold-standard UN projection, which estimated that the world population would be at 10.9 billion and still growing by 2100.

23 countries, including Japan, Italy, Spain, South Korea, Thailand are projected to decrease in population by 50% or



more by 2100 as their citizenry ages. China, notably, is projected to decline in population from 1.4 billion in 2017 to 732 million in 2100, a lasting consequence of the one-child policy. Nigeria is projected to grow its population immensely, likely resulting in increased economic and geopolitical heft, while the US is projected to maintain steady growth—but only if it continues its historical relatively open immigration policies. Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole is projected to grow from 1.03 billion people in 2017 to 3.07 billion in 2020. The report also forecasts a massive shift in the global age structure, with an estimate 2.37 billion people over 60 compared with just 1.7 billion under 20 by 2100. This trend, if it occurs, could be really excellent news for a lot of reasons. First, it will reduce total demand for energy, food, water, and land, likely meaning that it will be easier to give everyone a high standard of living without severe environmental degradation. It will also likely result in better-paid labor as the working-age cohort shrinks, and will almost certainly require rich nations with shrinking populations to accept large numbers of immigrants from countries with growing populations, like sub-Saharan Africa, to maintain their tax and labor base, thus opening new opportunities and increasing cultural diversity. Dr. Richard Horton, editor-in-chief of *The Lancet*, said “This important research charts a future we need to be planning for urgently. It offers a vision for radical shifts in geopolitical power, challenges myths about immigration, and underlines the importance of protecting and strengthening the sexual and reproductive rights of women. The 21<sup>st</sup> century will see a revolution in the story of our human civilisation. Africa and the Arab World will shape our future, while Europe and Asia will recede in their influence. By the end of the century, the world will be multipolar, with India, Nigeria, China, and the US the dominant powers. This will truly be a new world, one we should be preparing for today.” For more on this fascinating research, check out [tinyurl.com/WorldPopulationForecast](https://tinyurl.com/WorldPopulationForecast) and [tinyurl.com/Peakin2064](https://tinyurl.com/Peakin2064).