



the weekly anthropocene

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



By Sam Matey, July 8, 2020

United States (1). In absolutely excellent news, this week saw the downfall of a major fossil-fuels pipeline and potentially mortal blows to two more. First, after years of work by activists and local communities, Dominion and Duke Energy announced on July 5th that they were no longer trying to build the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. This terrible idea of a pipeline would have cost \$8 billion and sliced through 600 miles of West Virginia, Virginia, and North Carolina, crossing the Appalachian Trail in the process, all to carry fracked gas to be exported and burned. This is already huge, perhaps the biggest victory yet against natural gas, the fastest-growing fossil fuel industry in the US. Then, on July 6th, very next day, a federal judge ruled that due to massive flaws in their environmental permitting process, the already-built Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) had to shut down and be emptied of oil by August 5th, and that a full and complete new environmental review is to be conducted. DAPL carried crude oil from North Carolina to Illinois, crossing and imperiling the lands of the Standing Rock Sioux people without their consent in the process. This is a major strike against it, and it's quite likely this fossil fuel zombie project never rises again! *Then*, on the same day, the Supreme Court issued a ruling on the pipeline permitting process that will mean a lengthy delay for the long-gestating Keystone XL pipeline, planned to link tar sands oil from Canada to pipelines to Houston for export and threatening the Sandhills ecosystem and Ogallala aquifer along the way. Biden has already pledged to stop KXL if elected, so this could be the last stand of that no good, very bad idea. In short, this has been exhilarating week for the fight against the fossil fuel industry in America. As renowned climate activist Bill McKibben summarized the situation on Twitter: "I'm no lawyer, but here's my take on last 24 hrs. 1) Atlantic Coast pipeline: dead. 2) DAPL pipeline: in huge trouble, unless Trump's donors can persuade a court to overrule. 3) KXL pipeline: blocked for long enough that if Biden wins it's all over. Such deep thanks to all who fight." This is a great sign that we can bury this destabilizing and no-longer-needed industry once and for all! Spectacular news! For more, see tinyurl.com/TwoPipelinesDown, tinyurl.com/KXLDelayed, and tinyurl.com/StoppingPipelines.

United States (2). The Democrats of the US House of Representatives have unveiled a comprehensive



HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
CLIMATE CRISIS

new climate plan, from Speaker Pelosi and the Democrats of the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis (logo pictured). It's a beauty. The 547-page "Solving the Climate Crisis" action plan details over 120 specific pieces of legislation that if enacted would get the United States to reach net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2050 (across all sectors, from agriculture to waste treatment!), avoiding an estimated 62,000 deaths from fossil fuel pollution and saving \$8 trillion in health and climate impacts. Some highlights include a bill to mandate sales of only 100% electric cars from 2035, ensuring zero emissions from electricity generation (i.e. 100% clean energy) by 2040, expanding broadband



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networks and ensuring they're resilient to sea level rise and other threats, expanding clean energy and climate resilience in foreign aid, ending fossil fuel drilling offshore and on public lands, creating a National Climate Adaptation Program to build resilience in local communities, investing in climate stewardship practices from crop rotation to no-till agriculture on America's farmlands, invest in domestic manufacturing of renewables technology, stop tax breaks to big oil and gas companies, cracking down on methane leaks from oil and gas infrastructure, investing in a just transition for fossil fuel workers and environmental justice for historically polluter-burdened communities, and much, much more. The only point where it falls short is that it does not call for a ban on all fossil fuel extraction in America (though this would likely be a side effect of the plans to move all infrastructure and vehicles to clean energy), but this is a political necessity: fracking-heavy Pennsylvania and perhaps even oil-obsessed Texas are swing states in 2020, and must not be alienated.

As an American, there is an overwhelming sense of pride and comfort in reading this plan. The Republicans may have gone into full-on autocratic insanity mode, but there is a segment of American leadership that, for the first time, has a fully comprehensive plan that would actually work to address the greatest threat humanity faces in the 21st century: the climate crisis. We're not just fighting to avert more years of Trumpian insanity-this is a path forward for transformative, positive change, building a nation that can take on the climate crisis. This is what we're working towards when we're voting for Biden. If we get a Democratic President and Senate in 2020 to go with this House, and get this plan-or even most of it-into law, America will become a leader in ending the climate crisis and forging a better Anthropocene. For more, see tinyurl.com/DemocratClimatePlan. For the full plan (worth a skim!), see tinyurl.com/SolvingtheClimateCrisis.

Botswana. In deeply disturbing news, hundreds of elephants-possibly up to 400 in total-have been found dead in Botswana's Okavango Delta region, and nobody knows why. Poison is a disturbingly likely candidate, especially as elephant poaching in Botswana has risen over the past few years. For context, Botswana is home to more elephants than any other country in the world, with the current population estimated at 135,000. However, new Botswanan President Mokgweetsi Masisi, who came into office in 2018 and replaced dedicated conservationist Ian Khama, has reversed the ban on elephant hunting and weakened anti-poaching efforts. Masisi's government has also slow-walked taking and testing samples to try to find out what killed these elephants. However, none of the elephants found dead have had their tusks removed, which would seem to make poaching a somewhat unlikely suspect. One expert on African wildlife diseases, speaking anonymously to conservation journalism site Mongabay, hypothesized that anthrax, a new pathogen, or a new emergence of a previously minor pathogen could be to blame. We won't know until comprehensive testing can be done. For more (warning: disturbing images of dead elephants) see tinyurl.com/400Elephants.



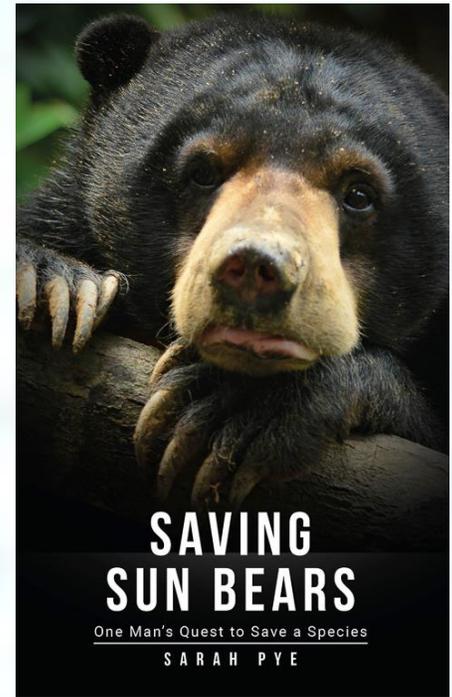
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Book Review: Saving Sun Bears. Recently, The Weekly Anthropocene was honored with a review copy of “Saving Sun Bears,” (pictured) a powerful new book from Signal 8 Press. The book is Australian author Sarah Pye’s chronicle of the life and work of Dr. Wong Siew Te (pictured, below), a Malaysian wildlife biologist who has dedicated his career to protecting the world’s smallest bear: the sun bear, *Helarctos malayanus*. Sun bears are often overshadowed by their more famous cousins, but are fascinating creatures: superb tree climbers, omnivorous, native to Southeast Asia’s rainforests, victims of poaching for the illegal pet, food, and bile trades, and possessed of eight-inch-long tongues. *Saving Sun Bears* gives a comprehensive account of the biology and conservation status of the sun bear through the story of Dr. Wong, the preeminent researcher of and advocate for the overlooked, under-studied, and imperiled species.



The book grips the reader from the beginning, starting *in medias res* with an account of Dr. Wong’s sun bear research, then carries us through the saga of his career. Dr. Wong grew up in Peninsular Malaysia as a child who loved animals, went to college to become a biologist, and became one of the first biologists ever to make an in-depth study of sun bears in Borneo. He discovered their critical role in the rainforest ecosystem as a disperse of the seeds of the Bornean fig trees, *Ficus* spp. He also discovered the critical importance of the ficus trees’ mast years, when they would disperse vast quantities of fruit in one year and little in others, creating a boom-and-bust cycle for wildlife like sun bears-and multiplying the effects of poaching in bad years.



The book concludes with Dr. Wong’s struggle to establish the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre (BSBCC), in the Malaysian Borneo state of Sabah, to rescue cubs from the pet trade, rehabilitate them to their wild behaviors, promote sustainable ecotourism, educate local communities, and eventually release them back into the wild. (The centre is now home to 43 rescued bears). The stories of individual cubs, stolen from their mothers, rescued by BSBCC, and painstakingly encouraged to reclaim their heritage skills of foraging, nest-making, and climbing, drive the reader to tears and cheers with their emotional resonance. *Saving Sun Bears* is an incredible story of a remarkable man, a true hero of the Anthropocene, and the incredible creatures he works to save. Check it out.

For daily updates on the incredible story of Wong Siew Te and the sun bears, check out the website of his Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre at www.bsbcc.org.my/. (You can book a Zoom safari of the sun bear center with him!).