



# the weekly anthropocene



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

By Sam Matey, March 3, 2021

**Midway Atoll.** On Midway Atoll, out beyond the Hawaiian Islands, thousands of Laysan albatrosses (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) are tending to their newborn chicks. One of them, [Wisdom](#), is a mother again, and at least 70 years old. Wisdom was first tagged in 1956 and was then estimated to be 5. Since then, she has outlived several mates and raised somewhere



between 30 and 35 chicks, and is the oldest known wild bird in history, having single-handedly greatly boosted the Laysan albatross population. Pictured is [Wisdom's latest chick](#), born February 1 2021, snuggling with its father, Akeakamai. Albatross parents form close pair bonds, and share incubating and feeding (with regurgitated squid) duties. Wisdom and Akeakamai have been raising chicks together since at least 2012. If all goes well, their latest chick will fly off into the sea in midsummer, returning to land years later to start a family of its own. A fascinating example of an individual animal forging a life in the Anthropocene!

**Social Media.** It's well known that social media (Facebook in particular) has become a hub of unethical and/or illegal activity, with both the fascist, white supremacist [1/6 Capitol riot](#) and [genocidal attacks](#) on Myanmar's [Rohingya people](#) being partially organized on Facebook. Now, [the BBC has discovered that](#) protected parts of Brazil's Amazon Rainforest, even patches of land in national forests or indigenous peoples' reserves, are being illegally sold for logging via Facebook Marketplace. Illegal land invaders have become brazen enough to openly advertise their attacks on the rainforest-and Facebook is refusing to take any action to limit it. Facebook, as well as Twitter and Google, have also been [disturbingly complicit](#) in the Indian government's crackdown on online climate activists. This is an extremely disturbing trend: the unparalleled communicative and mobilizing power of social media is increasingly being perverted for destructive ends.



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**Quebec.** In a new expression of the [worldwide rights-for-nature movement](#), the town of Minganie and the Council of Ekuanitshit (a First Nations group) have granted legal personhood to Quebec's [120-mile Magpie River](#) (pictured, known to the Innu people as the Muteshekau-shipu River). The effort, the first of its kind in Canada, was inspired by the successful case of the Whanganui River in New Zealand (although it may yet be challenged in court). The resolutions grant the Magpie River nine legal rights, including the right to flow, the right to maintain its biodiversity, and the right to be safe from pollution. Giving natural features legal rights might seem strange or counterintuitive, but when you consider that legal personhood has been given to corporations in the United States, trade unions in Italy, and Hindu idols in India, extending it to rivers seems only fair.



**Mississippi River.** In another example of the transformative, life-giving power of environmental regulations, a new study from Louisiana State University found that the Clean Water Act has done a superb job of reducing pollution in the lower reaches of the Mississippi River. [Analysis of a century's worth of water quality records](#) from St. Francisville, Plaquemine, New Orleans, and Belle Chasse, Louisiana, show [massive declines](#) in fecal bacteria, lead, and other pollutants since the Clean Water Act was enacted in 1972, while oxygen and pH levels stabilized at safer values in the same time period. Lead concentrations decreased by three orders of magnitude from 1979 to 2011, while fecal bacteria levels decreased by two orders of magnitude. Great news!

**Renewables Revolution.** The historic worldwide transition away from fossil fuels continues. [Bangladesh](#) announced that it was scrapping plans to build nine new coal-fired power plants, due to major financiers moving away from coal among other factors. New projections from Morgan Stanley estimate that [coal will disappear from the US power grid by 2033](#) (down from providing 20% of power today), with renewables rising to provide 39% of US electricity in 2030 and 55% in 2035. And in February, [South Korea announced](#) that it signed a \$43 billion deal to build an 8.2 gigawatt offshore wind farm by 2030 (the world's largest, if none bigger are built in the meantime!), in fulfillment of President Moon Jae-in's Green New Deal commitments. Excellent news!