



the weekly anthropocene



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

By Sam Matey, November 18, 2020

Tristan da Cunha. Tristan da Cunha is a group of remote, volcanic islands in the South Atlantic Ocean that constitute a British Overseas Territory. Its one settlement, Edinburgh of the Seven Seas, has only about 250 people. Now, the community has chosen to preserve the 700,000 square kilometers of ocean surrounding their homeland (an larger than Texas!!!) as a new Marine Protected Area. This should protect the local wildlife, ranging from blue sharks to albatrosses to kelp forests, from illegal fishing. Spectacular news! For more, see tinyurl.com/TristandaCunhaMPA.

Hurricanes. 2020's Atlantic hurricane season is the most active on record. After Hurricane Eta killed over 160 people and devastated swathes of Nicaragua and Honduras in early November, Hurricane Iota, the first-ever 30th named storm in a year, had reached Category 5 status in the Caribbean as of November 16th and looked likely to strike Honduras once more. As NOAA put it, "This remains a catastrophic situation for northeastern Nicaragua with an extreme storm surge of 15-20 ft forecast along with destructive winds and potentially 30 inches of rainfall, and it is exacerbated by the fact that it should make landfall in almost the exact same location that category 4 Hurricane Eta did a little less than two weeks ago." (See nhc.noaa.gov/#iota for more). This week, a new study in *Nature* confirmed that climate change is providing the ocean heat necessary for these kind of superstorms to rapidly intensify, staying more powerful for longer as they move inland (see tinyurl.com/HurricanesIntensifying). This kind of "double punch" back to back climate disasters have become a disturbing hallmark of climate unfairness in the Anthropocene—for example, Mozambique was hit by two powerful and devastating cyclones, Idai and Kenneth, in March-April 2019.

Myanmar. In the forests of Myanmar, scientists have discovered a new primate species. The Popa langur (*Trachypithecus popa*, pictured). The species is critically endangered, with an estimated 200-260 individuals left spread across two habitat blocks: one 10-square mile area in Mount Popa National Park and one area split between Panlaung-Pyadalin Cave Wildlife Sanctuary and an adjacent limestone concession. Conservation NGO Fauna & Flora International will work on conservation and research projects to protect and learn more about the Popa langur. For more, see <https://tinyurl.com/PopaLangur>.





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Renewables. A new report published by the International Energy Agency on Tuesday found that renewable energy endured COVID-19 to set new growth records. Some of the eye-popping statistics include that **90% of all new electricity generation built in 2020** is projected to be renewable, with only 10% for gas and coal. Solar capacity has increased 18-fold since 2010, and wind power capacity has increased 4-fold. By 2025, renewables are expected to supply one-third of the world's electricity, and overtake coal's five-decade reign as the top world electricity supplier. Spectacular news! For more, see <https://tinyurl.com/RenewablesRevolution2020>.

Around the same time, **San Francisco** announced that it would ban natural gas hookups in new buildings (except for restaurants) starting June 2021, joining dozens of other California in relying exclusively on healthier, less polluting, and better for the climate electric stovetops and heat. (See tinyurl.com/SanFranGasBan). On November 13, the **Arizona** Corporation Commission passed new rules requiring state electric utilities requiring Arizona electricity providers to phase out their coal and gas power plants, cut their carbon emissions in half by 2032 and 75% by 2040, and use exclusively carbon-free electricity (from renewables and/or nuclear power) by 2050. For more, see tinyurl.com/AZCleanPower. Even amidst the pandemic, political crises, and climate disasters ranging from wildfires to hurricanes, renewable energy had its best year yet in 2020-and it's only getting better. The number one solution to climate change is moving on up!

McPlant. In recent years, the field of plant-based meat (food with a near-identical protein structure and taste to cooked animal flesh, but derived from plants like soybeans and mung beans) has taken off dramatically. Led by rising corporate stars (and UN 2018 Champions of the Earth) Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods, plant-based patties, sausages, and nuggets started showing up in supermarkets worldwide and in restaurants including Burger King, Dunkin', Pizza Hut, Carl's Jr, Little Caesar's, and Denny's-with Subway and KFC starting limited trial ones. Now, the great-granddaddy of American fast food has finally joined the trend, with McDonald's announcing on November 9 that it would begin serving a "McPlant" burger in 2021. (Beyond Meat later said they consulted on the creation of the new burger, though McDonald's has not yet confirmed this). This is a great step forward for healthier, cleaner and lower-emission protein sources. Hopefully, a decade or so from now, the wave of companies offering a plant-based meat menu item will be echoed by companies offering an all-plant based menu! For more, see tinyurl.com/McPlant2021.

