



the weekly anthropocene



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

By Sam Matey, October 21, 2020

Bridges for Primates: Hainan. The Hainan gibbon (*Nomascus hainanus*) is the most critically endangered primate in the world. After years of poaching and habitat destruction, only 30 or so individuals survive (ye gods!) and they all live in the Bawangling National Nature Reserve, on the Chinese island province of Hainan. In summer 2014, a typhoon struck the island, carving gaps in the



forest canopy. As the tree-dwelling gibbons would be incredibly vulnerable to inbreeding depression if their already-small population was divided into inaccessible fragments, this was a serious conservation concern. In response, professional tree climbers installed a two-rope bridge across a 15-meter gap. Researchers eventually documented 52 crossings among a group of 8 gibbons, meaning over a quarter of the entire species used the bridge! This could help keep habitat fragments connected until the forest has a chance to regrow, and is an excellent example of proactive, innovative conservation fit for the world of the Anthropocene. Great news! For more (including a video!), see <https://tinyurl.com/HainanGibbonBridges>.

Bridges for Primates: Java. A few hundred miles due south of Hainan, another critically endangered primate is also getting a bridge assist. The lemur-like Javan slow loris (*Nycticebus javanicus*, pictured) is greatly imperilled by habitat loss and poaching for the illegal pet trade, and being arboreal and nocturnal are often cut off from key feeding trees by expanding farms. Researcher Anna Nekaris, while conducting the first long-term studying of the Javan slow loris, hit on the idea of installing more long irrigation pipes between forested areas, which would benefit



the local farmers while providing the lorises with a safe, elevated travel path. Now, over 20 have been installed, and they've been wildly successful, with lorises using them as early as twelve days after installation and farmers warming to the overall conservation program. Great news! For more, see tinyurl.com/JavanSlowLorisBridges.



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Guatemala. The Wildlife Conservation Society has released 26 captive-reared young scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*) into the wild in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve. These birds were collected from wild nests' late-laid eggs (which normally do not survive) raised in safety, and released as strong adults. "This year our field staff faced a 'perfect storm' of fires, invasions into the area, and COVID," said Jeremy Radachowsky, regional director for WCS. "The fact that they are able to persevere with the release of these chicks gives us hope in times of darkness." This is another great example of modern conservation: wildlife now need active interventions like this! For more, see tinyurl.com/26ScarletMacaws.

World Energy. On October 13th, the International Energy Agency published its landmark World Energy Outlook in 2020 report. Notably, the report raised its projections for renewable energy growth, stating ""For projects with low-cost financing that tap high-quality resources, solar PV is now the cheapest source of electricity in history." The IEA now expects coal to never recover from its decline in 2020, and for renewables to overtake coal as the world's biggest source of electricity in 2025. The renewables revolution continues! For more, see <https://tinyurl.com/SolarCheapestEnergy>.

Russia. Something has devastated the waters off Russia's remote Kamchatka Peninsula. Local surfers suffered corneal burns, and shortly afterwards sea life from octopuses to seals began washing up dead en masse. Scientists now suspect a massive, toxic algal bloom, likely linked to climate change. For more, see tinyurl.com/KamchatkaDieOff.