



FRONTLINE DISPATCHES

CONSERVATION NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

April 2021

Asia / Africa / Europe / North America
Pacific / South & Central America / World

AFRICA



VIDEO: Africa's last free-roaming black rhinos thrive in community conservancies in Namibia's Erongo and Kunene regions, where wildlife conservation has become a way of life.

Part 2 of the docu-series “The Last Free Rhinos” gives us the perspective of the rural people who protect and take pride in their rhinos.

The African Rhino Specialist Group’s latest comprehensive [report](#) indicates that rhino poaching continued to decline across 14 countries through 2019, to 2.09 animals per day. This is a 43.5% drop since rhino-poaching peaked in 2015.

Diversifying the wildlife economy through communities: At Stellenbosch University in South Africa, the [African Wildlife Economy Institute](#) is building a new program of applied research on the ethical basis, governance and operation of the wildlife economy; and at Rwanda’s African Leadership University, the [School of Wildlife Conservation](#) is undertaking a major research initiative on the state of the wildlife economy continent-wide.



Mt. Kilimanjaro could become an ecological island, say researchers from Bayreuth University, Germany. Africa’s tallest mountain, in northern Tanzania, is nearly surrounded by wheat farms, sugar cane plantations, rice paddies, livestock and growing settlements. Wildlife corridors between national parks—Amboseli and Kilimanjaro, and Manyara and Tarangire—and from Mt. Kilimanjaro to Mt. Meru are being disrupted. The [report](#) appeared in *The Conversation* in February.

The African leopard is elusive, versatile and adaptable and has the greatest genetic diversity among the world's big cats. Writing in *Current Biology*, researchers have now [published](#) the first genomic data of leopard, expanding our understanding of population dynamics in apex species.



Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve is being destroyed. Established in 1896 and eventually covering more than 31,000 square miles (80,200 sq km), the reserve is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. But Tanzania is losing its “outstanding universal value” to development. An [article](#) in the Jan/Feb *Sports Afield Almanac* describes broken agreements with donor nations, huge development projects ([above](#): a uranium mine, extensive road construction and a powerplant), the conversion of many hunting blocks to agriculture and the creation of unsustainable national parks.



Tanzanian giraffes are threatened by poaching for meat and by habitat loss to clearing and farms. The [Masai Giraffe Project](#)—a partnership between Wild Nature Institute, the University of Zurich, Pennsylvania State University and Tanzania’s Wildlife Research Institute—has identified nearly 3,000 individual giraffes in the Tarangire ecosystem to determine where and why their numbers are stable, increasing or declining. The [report](#) (with Sonia Metzger’s photo) was in *The Conversation* in March.



PODCAST: African environmentalist [Allan Savory](#) speaks about paradigm shifts that could enable us to thrive in the future. Savory was a research biologist and game ranger in Northern Rhodesia (today Zambia) and later a farmer and game rancher in Zimbabwe. In the 1960s, he made a breakthrough in preventing the degradation of grassland ecosystems and then exported his methods to four continents.

NORTH AMERICA



VIDEO: Have den, will travel. In February, Colorado Parks and Wildlife reintroduced three rehabbed black bear cubs into the wild in an artificial hibernation den. The day-long process required all-terrain vehicles to get the large box and the insulating haybales out to a remote spot in the backcountry. The door to the den was lifted; the cubs can decide if they want to wander out into the wild or stay in their “mobile home” until spring.



Jaguar and ocelot spotted near the Mexican border. The *Arizona Republic* [reported](#) that the ocelot was photographed (above; AZ Game & Fish) in the Huachuca Mountains and the jaguar was seen in the Dos Cabezas Mountains. Only seven jaguars have been documented in the US since 1996. New [research](#) finds that habitat in the American Southwest could support up to 151 adult jaguars.

Monarch butterflies are dwindling. The *Mexico News Daily* [reported](#) that monarch numbers at wintering spots in Mexico are down by 26%. The Monarch Butterfly Biosphere saw four times

as much deforestation as the previous year, losing almost 50 acres (20 ha). *Science* magazine [says](#) pesticides and habitat loss are not entirely to blame—warmer fall weather is disrupting the breeding cycle and plants the butterflies rely on.

‘Dispersal event’ by a whitetail deer in Missouri, one of the longest on record, spanned 300 kilometres (186 miles). In *Ecology and Evolution*, the researchers—*Conservation Frontlines* contributors—[write](#) that this occurred during deer-hunting season; and that understanding how far deer travel is important for managing chronic wasting disease.



Bighorn sheep fight back against bacteria. A new [study](#) shows that bighorn sheep in California’s Mojave National Preserve are more resilient to a respiratory infection than originally thought, *Mirage News* [reports](#). A 2013 outbreak killed dozens and infected even more; biologists found that exposure to the bacteria is more widespread now, but fewer sheep have actually been infected.

Two multimillion-dollar initiatives to restore habitat were recently announced by Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and by the US Dept. of Agriculture. The [Call of the Uplands](#) campaign will pump \$500 million into conservation research, education, habitat protection and engagement across 9 million acres (3.6 million ha) of land. The National Parks and Public Land [Legacy Restoration Fund](#) will dedicate \$285 million to 500-plus infrastructure projects across national forests and grasslands as part of last year’s Great American Outdoors Act.

A cool \$1 billion will go to state wildlife agencies in 2021, [says](#) the US Fish and Wildlife Service, generated by the boom in sales of hunting and fishing gear and boat fuel in 2020. This is a \$121-million increase in [Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funding](#) in support of habitat and creating or improving opportunities for sportsmen and women.

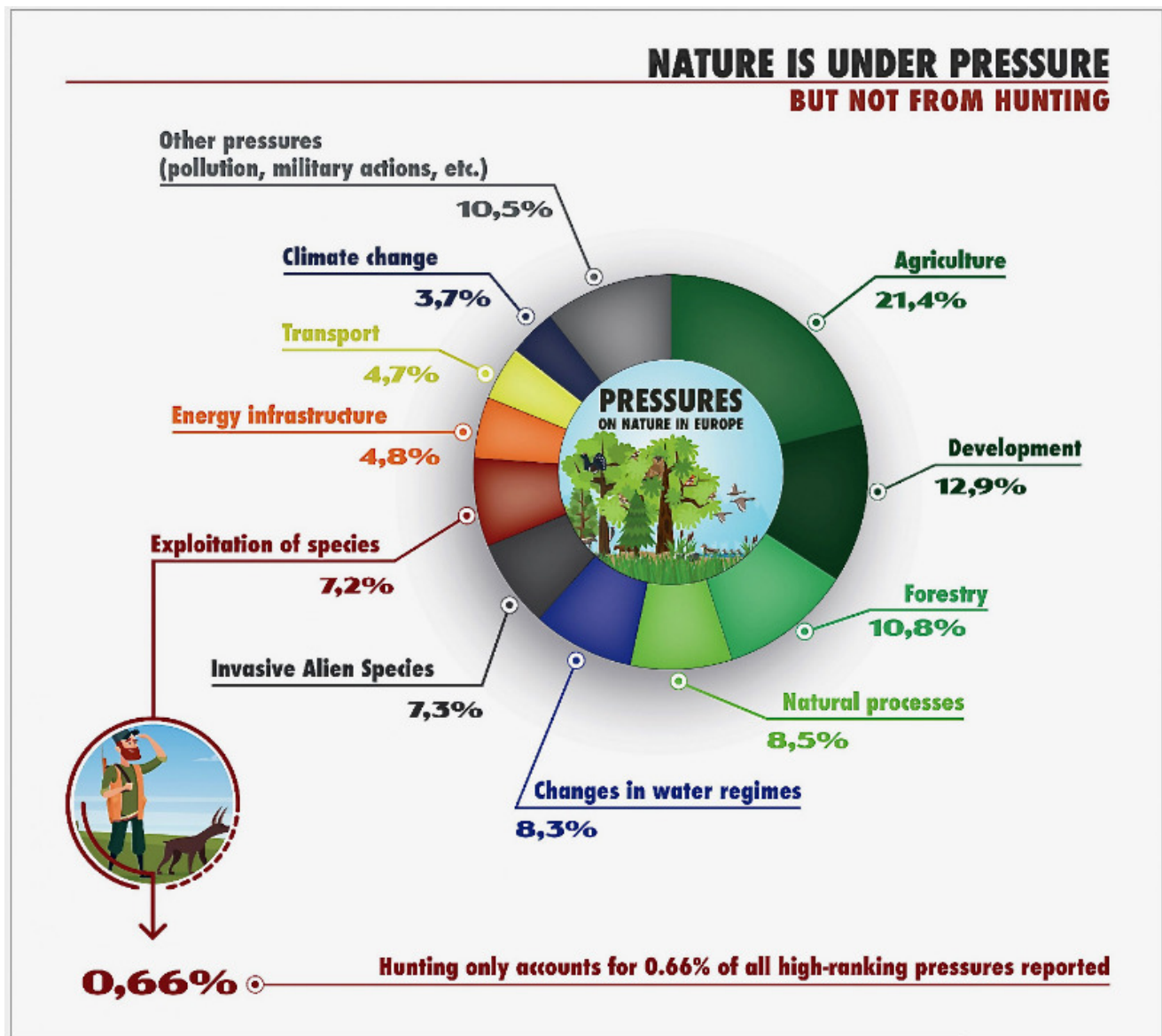


North America's largest mammals were not hunted to extinction by humans, a new *Science Daily* [article](#) suggests. Instead, populations of mammoths and other large animals fluctuated with climate change—drastic cold began the decline and extinction of these megafauna around 13,000 years ago. (Warpaintcobra image)

Watch and Learn: *How to Talk About Hunting*. This four-part [webinar](#) will begin on April 15 and registration is free. It will explore attitudes towards hunting and cover effective ways to connect with the public. The goal is to make hunters, conservationists and wildlife professionals “more effective proponents of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation.”

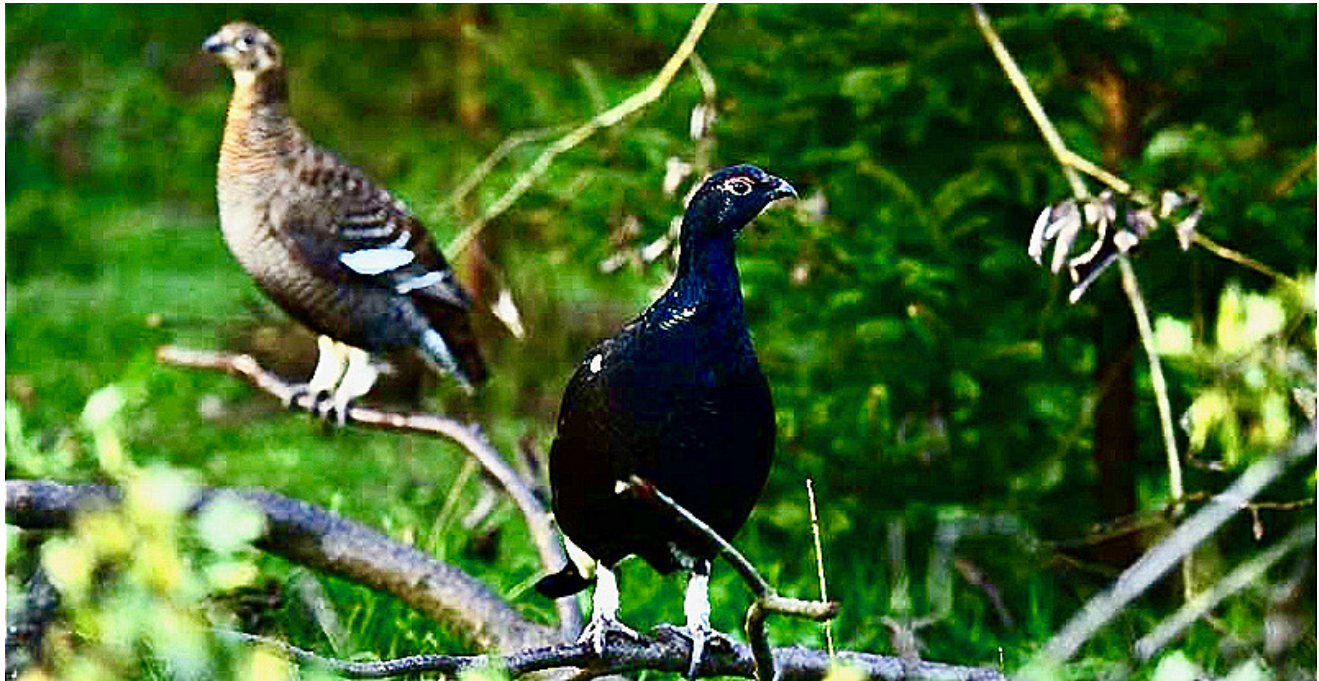
Scientists have cloned the black-footed ferret with cells from a wild ferret that died in the mid-1980s. The ferrets are critically endangered, with only 400 to 500 “significantly inbred” individuals in the wild, [according](#) to NatGeo.com. Cloning can introduce genetic diversity to help protect the species against diseases and other stressors.

EUROPE



Nature is stressed, but not by hunting. FACE, the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation, recently [fact-checked](#) the European Union’s 143-page 2020 [State of Nature Report](#). From a total of 5,596 habitat reviews, only three even refer to hunting. Lists of

pressures on wildlife other than birds refer to hunting in 0.17% of cases and, including birds, in 2.58% of cases; overall, hunting accounts for just 0.66% of all significant pressures on wildlife across the EU.



Poland's black grouse have crashed to an estimated 200 males remaining in a few isolated populations. FACE [reports](#) that, in response, the Polish State Forests joined a major cooperative project to conserve the species through predator management and a reintroduction program.

Germany is shirking its obligations to conserve fauna and flora, claims the European Commission. Under the European Habitats Directive, countries must designate Special Areas of Conservation and develop conservation objectives and measures to maintain or restore habitats. In February, the EC [referred](#) Germany to Europe's Court of Justice over the matter.

But Germany protects 324 species and 92 habitats under EU law. The country has 22,843 protected areas, 5,200 Natura 2000 sites (protecting 324 species and 92 habitats) and 17,643 sites designated under national laws, per the Biodiversity Information [System](#). The Federal Environment Ministry [says](#) the EC's demands go too far and would demand too much cost and effort.



Otters are rebounding across much of the UK after major mid-20th Century declines due to water pollution. The Woodland Trust [reported](#) in February that otters have returned to every county in England, with their strongest numbers in Wales, Scotland and Ireland.



More than half of Europe's forests are at risk from climate change-induced disturbances such as wind, wildfire and insects, finds a new [study](#) led by Germany's Max Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry. Large and old trees are especially threatened. The photo, from [ScienceDirect](#), shows premature leaf aging in a European beech.

CENTRAL & SOUTH AMERICA



The Black Jaguar Foundation plans to reforest 1 million hectares (2.4 million acres) along Brazil's Araguaia and Tocantins rivers in the Amazon and Cerrado biomes, [reported](#) Mongabay.com in February. The “green corridor”—2,600 kilometres, 1,615 miles, long (map)—will require planting about 1.7 billion trees on 24,000 privately owned lots. Some owners are not yet sold on the benefits.

In Bolivia, Chinese triads traffic in jaguar fangs, bones and genitalia, according to a recent Mongabay.com [story](#). Such poaching, driven by the traditional medicine market, is also rife in Suriname, where jaguar teeth and paste (made by boiling down the meat and smaller bones) are the main illegal commodities.



It's not the cow, it's the how. Restoring Brazil's overgrazed Cerrado requires holistic management and rotational grazing. A young chef turned farmer shows that intensive but sustainable grazing can regenerate grasslands by imitating the natural migrations of herbivores—rotating cattle quickly from one small plot to another, to trap more carbon in the soil and keep the land green. Mongabay.com covered the [story](#) in March. The concept came from Allan Savory, the Zimbabwean ecologist (and co-founder of the [Savory Institute](#)) mentioned above.

ASIA



China, home of the largest traditional medicine market, has revised its list of [National Key Protected Wild Animals](#) for the first time since it was published in 1988; 517 species were added for a new total of 988 wild animals now under official state protection.



The black-browed Babbler, last seen 170 years ago, was rediscovered in South Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo, in 2020, [according](#) to *BirdingASIA*. *Malacocincla perspicillata* was known only from a specimen at the Naturalis Biodiversity Center in the Netherlands. A few months earlier, scientists [described](#) five new songbird species and five new subspecies found on a single small island near Sulawesi, Indonesia, over a 6-week expedition.

WORLD

The Amazon rainforest now probably contributes to global warming, according to a new analysis. Rising temperatures, drought and deforestation are reducing the capacity of the world's largest rainforest to absorb atmospheric CO₂, to help offset emissions from burning fossil fuels; and parts of the tropical landscape now may be releasing more carbon than they store. The [findings](#) appeared on NatGeo.com last month.

What remains of Earth's wilderness? More than 25% of forests have been cleared and more than half of 12.6 million square kilometres (4.9 million sq mi) of wetlands have been drained.

The current rate of deforestation is 160,000 square kilometres (62,000 sq mi) per year, a loss of about 1% of forest annually. See graphic [representations](#) in *New Scientist*, February 17.

Biodiversity? Habitat? University of Adelaide, Australia, scientists, [writing](#) in *PNAS*, say that the relationship between genetic diversity and species survival is often wrong. They conclude that conservation should focus on habitat protection instead, noting that “Nature is being destroyed by humans at a rate never seen before” and that an estimated one million species are threatened with extinction.

The rescue plan: Expand protected areas globally to at least 30% of land and sea by 2030. A February *New Scientist* [article](#) explains the 30x30 Plan; see also [HuntFish 30/30](#). As *Outdoor Life* [noted](#) on February 18, alongside the US Administration’s order to protect 30% of the nation’s lands, a buy-in by hunters, anglers, farmers, Native American tribes and other stakeholders would be a “massive win for fish and wildlife.”



The lowly clam can filter out 38% of the nitrogen that runs into the sea from fertilizer and 51% of the nitrogen from wastewater. *Anthropocene* [reports](#) that, based on studies in Long Island

Sound, in the northeastern US, shellfish can cleanse other pollutants too, as well as provide food, create aquatic habitat and buffer coastal zones against extreme weather.

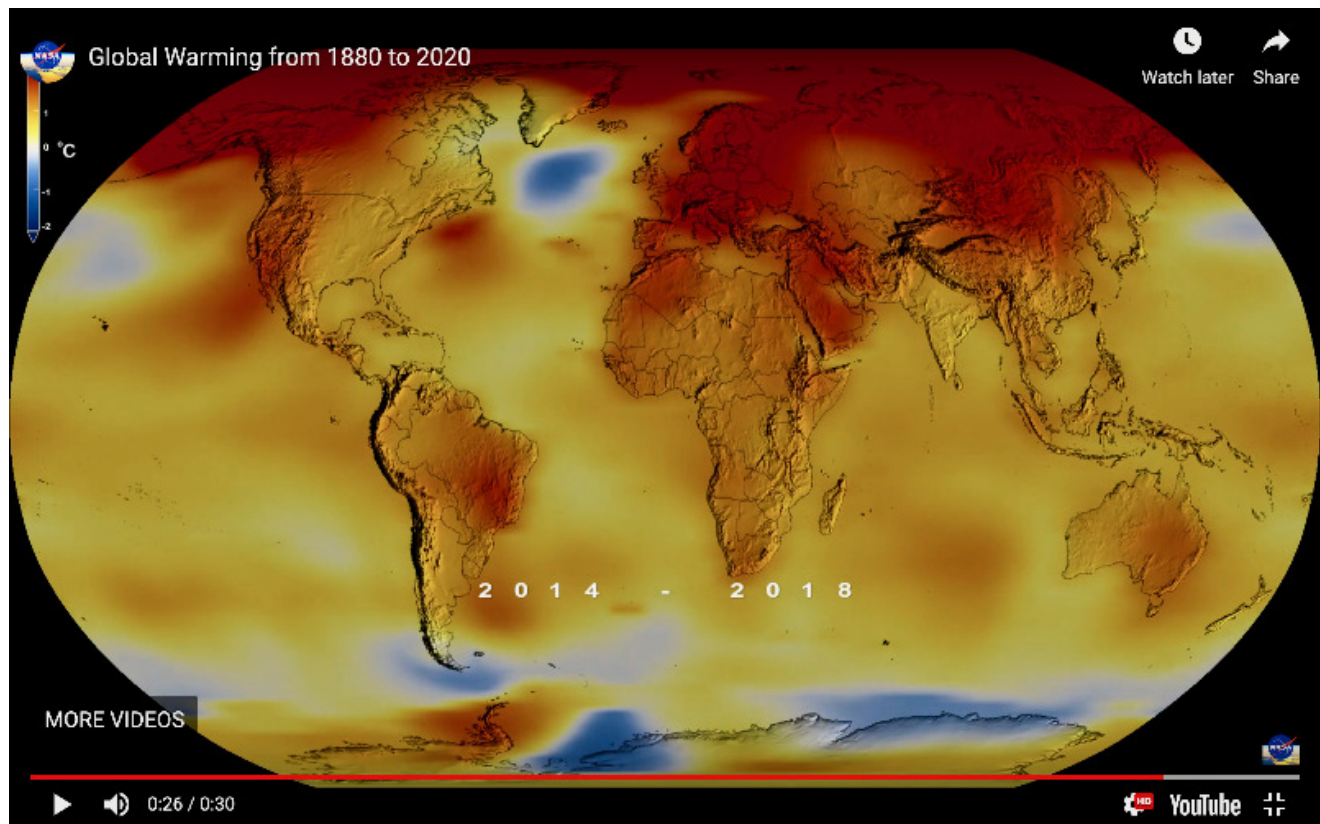
Birders—and all conservationists—should buy coffee grown under mature trees. Shade-grown coffee provides critical habitat for birds (and other wildlife), but most consumers aren't aware that "most of the shade coffee in Latin America has been converted to intensively managed row monocultures devoid of trees or other vegetation." Cornell and Virginia Tech ornithologists released the [news](#) in early March.



Conservation Successes: Up to 32 birds and 16 mammals have been saved since 1993 and extinction rates would have been up to four times higher without action. In February, the *New Scientist* [reported](#) its top 10 conservation success stories: the California condor, the black stilt, the tiger, mountain gorilla, Indus river dolphin, Antarctic blue whale, European bison (above), Javan rhino, giant panda and Hainan gibbon.

Facebook fights climate disruption. Fortune.com [reported](#) in late February that Facebook will expand its online [Climate Science Information Center](#) to counter climate misinformation. Modeled on FB's COVID-19 Information Center, the site was first launched in September.

Climate-change denials are widespread on FB; and in October *The Guardian* [reported](#) that climate-disinformation FB ads were viewed 8 million times in the first half of 2020.



VIDEO: Climate warming is ‘extremely likely due to human activities’ finds NASA, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration, reporting that a review of scientific journals shows that 97% or more of climate scientists agree.



The UK is now halfway to net-zero greenhouse-gas emissions and the news made the front page of *The Times* on March 18. A new [analysis](#) in *CarbonBrief* shows that the country's CO2 emissions in 2020 were 51% below 1990 levels—halfway to the 2050 net-zero target. The milestone came after an estimated 11% drop in greenhouse gas emissions in 2020, largely due to the pandemic.



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