Briefly

GOOD NEWS IN TROUBLED TIMES

Campaign success as UK government bans use of bee-killing pesticide

The ban of a neonicotinoid pesticide that is highly toxic to bees has been upheld by the UK government, refusing emergency use in England. The pesticide, Cruiser SB, is used on sugar beet to tackle a disease spread by aphids and has previously been allowed as an emergency measure to protect crops, despite a general ban on its use in the EU and the UK. The move, which is a vital step in efforts to protect UK wildlife, comes after continued campaigns by environmental organizations, including a sector-wide effort from the Pesticide Collaboration. These NGOs call for alternative, nature-friendly measures to be used instead. The Labour government plans to outlaw the emergency use of three neonicotinoid pesticides so they are no longer legally obliged to assess applications brought by farmers who want to use them.

Source: RSPB (2025) rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/news/campaign-success-as-uk-government-upholds-ban-on-emergency-use-of-bee-killing-pesticide

Polka dot glass prevents bird deaths

In the USA, up to 1 billion birds die each year from window collisions, and the skies of Chicago are particularly affected, as the city is located in a critical migratory corridor. McCormick Place Convention Center in Chicago is the largest convention centre in North America, and is largely covered with glass. For years the building has been the cause of huge numbers of bird deaths, and in October 2023 at least 1,000 birds died on a single day, after colliding with the building. Following a public petition, the Center collaborated with Feather Friendly, a company that installs bird-friendly window deterrents, to apply a polka dot film to its windows. The pattern on the film disrupts the reflection of the glass, making it easier for birds to detect and avoid. According to data recorded during the autumn migration period, bird collision deaths at McCormick Place dropped by as much as 95% in 2024. It is hoped this success could encourage others to adopt similar measures to protect migratory birds.

Sources: Good Good Good (2025) goodgoodgood.co/articles/bird-window-collision-polka-dot-glass

Bluesky's science takeover

According to a recent online poll, 70% of *Nature* readers are now using Bluesky, a social media platform that works a lot like X (formerly Twitter) and whose popularity has soared in recent months, in particular since the USA election in November 2024. Although the survey is not statistically representative of the scientific community at large, it echoes widespread disillusionment with X and enthusiasm for Bluesky among researchers. Of c. 5,300 readers who responded to a question about X, 53% said they previously used but have now left the platform. In January 2025, Bluesky had > 27 million users. It is broadly similar in functionality and user experience to X, which for a long time was a go-to platform for scientists to discuss and disseminate their work. In the survey, 55% of respondents to the question 'What do you use Bluesky for?' said it was a mix of research-related activities: to connect with other scientists, keep up to date with research or researchers, and promote their own research. Positive terms used by respondents to contrast the platform with X included more pleasant, more supportive, friendlier and safer.

Source: Nature (2025) nature.com/articles/d41586-025-00177-1

Is the North Sea bouncing back?

The North Sea's chalk reefs, sea grass meadows and shallow waters are home to a huge array of wildlife, including internationally important seabird colonies, but centuries of overfishing, pollution, oil and gas exploration and the climate crisis have led to dramatic declines. In the 1930s, wealthy visitors flocked to Scarborough for bluefin tuna fishing, but by the 1950s, the tuna had largely disappeared, highlighting the ecosystem's deterioration. Overfishing of herring resulted in a 97% decline in biomass by the 1980s, and North Sea anglerfish and cod populations are shrinking. However, recent signs of recovery offer hope. Species including bottlenose dolphins, humpback and minke whales, grey seals and bluefin tuna are returning, raising cautious optimism. Although the North Sea remains one of the most pressured marine environments, the rebound of these species demonstrates the resilience of nature when given the chance to recover.

Sources: The Guardian (2025) theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/09/north-sea-bouncing-back-glory-days-grey-seals-minke-whales-bluefin-tuna-aoe

Endangered seabirds return to Pacific island after century-long absence

Endangered Polynesian storm petrels *Nesofregetta fuliginosa* have returned to Kamaka Island in French Polynesia for the first time in > 100 years, after a team of conservationists used drones to remove invasive rats eating the birds' eggs and chicks. Scientists attracted the birds back to the island using solar-powered speakers playing bird calls recorded from a neighbouring island. The birds began exploring the island just 3 weeks later, and monitoring cameras show regular visits, although nesting has not yet been confirmed. The project demonstrates successful collaboration between international conservation groups and local communities, with the local Mangareva community's knowledge and support proving crucial to the operation's success. The birds' return could benefit the entire island ecosystem, as seabirds bring nutrients from the ocean that help sustain both terrestrial and marine life. It is estimated there are c. 250-1,000 storm petrels remaining in the wild.

Source: Mongabay (2025) news.mongabay.com/2024/12/endangered-seabirds-return-to-pacific-island-after-century-long-absence

Turning traps into hope

Wildlife snaring is common across Africa, driven by a combination of poverty, demand for bushmeat, and organized wildlife crime. Snares, which are cheap and easy to set, often trap unintended species, including elephants, lions and wild dogs. The Endangered Wildlife Trust recently removed 3.5 t of snares from a protected area in the Lowveld region of South Africa, along the boundary of Kruger National Park. These snares had been stockpiled over 5 years after being removed during routine patrols by anti-poaching teams. Rather than being discarded, the snares are being repurposed through a partnership with Down2theWire, a local initiative that transforms confiscated poaching materials into handcrafted jewellery. This project raises awareness of the harm caused by snaring and generates funds for conservation efforts, reinvesting profits into anti-poaching initiatives, supporting rangers, education programmes and community-driven conservation. The collaboration highlights the potential for sustainable solutions in wildlife protection.

Source: The Endangered Wildlife Trust (2025) ewt.org/snares-repurposed-conservation

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INTERNATIONAL

Carbon-rich peatlands are dangerously under protected

A new study reveals that peatlands, crucial carbon stores covering 3% of the Earth's surface, are dangerously underprotected, posing a significant risk to the global climate. Peatlands store 600 billion t of carbon, more than all of the world's forests combined, but only 17% are within protected areas (compared to 38% of tropical forests and 42% of mangroves). Human activities are a major threat, with c. 25% of peatlands under pressure from agriculture and resource extraction. When drained or disturbed, peatlands release vast amounts of carbon dioxide, contributing to global warming. Conserving and restoring peatlands is essential to keeping global heating below internationally agreed targets, but most countries do not have comprehensive peatland strategies to support their national climate plans. The new study also highlights that c. 27% of global peatlands are located on Indigenous Peoples' lands, where they are often well-managed. Strengthening Indigenous land rights is thus a key strategy for improving peatland conservation.
Sources: Conservation Letters (2025) doi.org/g8443f & *Wildlife Conservation Society* (2025) peatlands.earth

Overfishing has halved shark and ray populations since 1970 . . .

An analysis published in *Science* reveals overfishing has caused populations of chondrichthyan fishes (sharks, rays and chimaeras) to decline by > 50% since 1970. To determine the consequences, a team of researchers developed an aquatic Red List Index, which shows the risk of extinction for chondrichthyans has increased by 19%. The study also highlights that overfishing of the largest species in nearshore and pelagic habitats could eliminate up to 22% of ecological functions. The widespread documented declines are expected to have significant consequences on other species and aquatic ecosystems, as sharks and rays are important predators and their decline disrupts ocean food webs. Despite the alarming trends, the team emphasized positive progress regarding the appreciation and conservation of sharks and rays, with bright spots of hope for chondrichthyans in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the USA and parts of Europe and South Africa.
Sources: Science (2024) doi.org/pdm9 & *Simon Fraser University* (2024) sfu.ca/sfunews/stories/2024/12/new-study-finds-overfishing-has-halved-shark-and-ray-populations.html

. . . and high fertilizer use halves pollinator numbers

The longest-running ecological experiment has shown that using high levels of common fertilizers on grassland halves pollinator numbers and drastically reduces the number of flowers. Bees were most affected, with over nine times more individuals in chemical-free plots compared to plots with the highest levels of fertilizer. Fertilizers create conditions that allow fast-growing grasses to dominate, crowding out other grasses and flowers. It is assumed that having a greater diversity of flowers leads to a greater diversity of pollinators, which often have specialist requirements in terms of the blooms they like to visit. The research was carried out in Rothamsted, UK, on strips of grassland called Park Grass, which have been studied since 1856. The average fertilizer use on grassland in the UK is c. 100 kg per ha. The highest amount in the experiment was 144 kg per ha, which resulted in the greatest pollinator declines (of 50% or more). The study illustrates the problem farmers face: to increase flowering plant and pollinator species the land needs to be less fertile, reducing yields.
Sources: npj Biodiversity (2025) doi.org/g83wjs & *The Guardian* (2025) theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/20/uk-agriculture-farming-fertilisers-yields-biodiversity-study-park-grass-pollinators-bees-wildflowers-aoe

Speed reductions for ships could reduce collisions with whales

A study has for the first time quantified the risk of whale–ship collisions worldwide for four geographically widespread ocean giants that are threatened by shipping: blue, fin, humpback and sperm whales. Researchers found that global shipping traffic overlaps with c. 92% of these species' ranges, but that only c. 7% of areas at highest risk of collisions have any measures in place to protect whales from the threat. These measures include speed reductions for ships in waters that overlap with whale migration or feeding areas. Managing only 2.6% of the ocean's surface in this way would reduce risk at all known collision hot spots. Climate change is predicted to accelerate the risk, as melting arctic sea ice will bring ships into novel areas, putting whales at risk as they shift their range northward, tracking preferred sea surface temperatures and food at the edge of the sea ice.
Sources: Science (2024) doi.org/pcfx & *British Antarctic Survey* (2024) bas.ac.uk/media-post/whale-ship-strikes-could-be-reduced-by-making-2-6-of-ocean-surface-safer

Global wildlife trade is an enormous market

Over the last 22 years, people in the USA legally imported c. 2.85 billion individual animals of almost 30,000 species, making the country one of the world's biggest wildlife importers. Some of these wild animals become pets, including reptiles, spiders, clownfish, primates and tigers, and many end up in zoos and aquariums. Thousands of macaques are imported for medical research every year, and globally the fashion trade imports c. 1-2 million crocodile skins annually. The taxa with the largest number of imported species are birds—4,985 different species are imported each year, followed by reptiles, with 3,048 species, led by iguanas and royal pythons. Captive breeding plays an increasingly dominant role to limit the effect on wild populations, but over half of individuals from most groups (e.g. amphibians or mammals) still come from the wild, and there is no data on the impact of the wildlife trade on most wild populations. Sustainable wildlife trade is possible, but it relies on careful monitoring to balance wild harvest and captive breeding.
Sources: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (2025) doi.org/g8×7k2 & *The Conversation* (2025) phys.org/news/2025-01-global-wildlife-enormous-imports-billions.html

Wind turbines impair bats' access to water bodies

Bats depend on open bodies of water such as small ponds and lakes for foraging and drinking. Access to water is particularly important for survival in increasingly hot and dry summers, when female bats are pregnant and rear their young. Research has now shown that access to drinking sites is hampered by wind turbines in agricultural landscapes, as many bat species avoid the turbines and nearby water bodies for several kilometres. Using acoustic detectors, a team analysed the spatial behaviour of bats in three functional guilds: open space foraging bats (that hunt above fields or forest canopies), narrow space foraging bats (that hunt in dense vegetation, e.g. below the forest canopy) and edge space foraging bats (specialized in foraging in transition zones such as forest edges). The results clearly showed that bats specialized to forage in the open space and in dense vegetation avoided water bodies located near wind turbines.
Sources: Biological Conservation (2025) doi.org/pdmm & *Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research* (2025) izw-berlin.de/en/press-release/wind-turbines-impair-the-access-of-bats-to-water-bodies-in-agricultural-landscapes.html

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EUROPE

Good news for Artic foxes in Fennoscandia ...

Arctic foxes were almost hunted to extinction in Sweden, Norway and Finland, but projects to breed and feed them may be helping the species return for good. In Fennoscandia, intensive hunting for the animal's prized pelt pushed the fox to the edge of extirpation by the early 20th century. When legal protection was introduced from the 1920s onwards, populations were already too small and fragmented to rebound. Climate change has worsened its plight, by disrupting the cycles of lemmings, its rodent prey, and enabling the red fox to encroach on its habitat. As a last resort to save the local population, the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research has been breeding Arctic foxes in captivity since 2005. When the pups reach 9-months old, they are released into the wild. Over 18 years, 465 captive-bred foxes have been released at nine locations across Norway, where they're expected to bolster wild populations. Releases bring risks, as introducing foxes from the same breeding lines can reduce genetic diversity, and scientists are now focusing on improving genetics in wild populations through targeted releases.
Source: BBC Future (2024) bbc.co.uk/future/article/20241210-the-arctic-fox-captive-breeding-programme-in-norway-and-sweden

... but 27,000 farmed salmon escape in Norway ...

Global seafood company Mowi offered a reward of NOK 500 (GBP 36) to fishers who caught escaped salmon after c. 27,000 fish went missing from a farm off the Norwegian coast. The world's largest farmed salmon producer said 25% of its 105,000 salmon escaped from a cage in Troms, northwest Norway, after the outer ring of a pen was damaged during stormy weather. Escaped salmon pose huge environmental problems, threatening wild salmon by reducing genetic diversity, increasing infection from sea lice and intensifying competition for spawning grounds. Two-thirds of wild Atlantic salmon stocks in Norway are believed to have genetic interference with escaped farmed salmon. The country exports 1.2 million tonnes of farmed salmon a year, and last summer wild salmon numbers dropped to a historic low, resulting in the closure of 33 rivers to salmon fishing.
Source: The Guardian (2025) theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/11/seafood-firm-bounty-escaped-salmon-norway

... and an illegal shipment of whale meat is found in dog food in Finland

According to officials in Finland, c. 36 t of illegally imported whale meat was discovered in dog food in the country after a tip-off from Swedish customs officials. The minke whale meat was reportedly shipped from Norway in 2022 and used to feed working sled dogs in Finland because it was seen as a cheap source of food. It is thought customs officials discovered the export of the meat because of abnormalities in customs documents for a specific cargo shipment. Finnish law explicitly prohibits the import of whale products, and prosecutors are considering filing charges. The minke whale is one of the species most severely affected by the whaling industry. Norway continues minke whale hunting and during its 2024 hunting season > 400 individual whales were killed at sea. This latest attempt to make a profit from the meat highlights a falling demand, with very few people in Norway now eating whale meat.
Source: Whale and Dolphin Conservation (2025) uk.whales.org/2025/01/03/huge-illegal-shipment-of-whale-meat-found-in-dog-food

Pine marten project achieves 100 translocations in the UK

A decade-long conservation project to restore pine marten populations across Britain has reached a major milestone. A collaboration between Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) and Forestry and Land Scotland has seen pine martens from the latter's forests boost populations in Wales, Gloucestershire and Devon, with > 100 animals successfully translocated. For each translocation, the pine martens were safely and ethically captured, handled and transported under licence from NatureScot. Pine martens were once on the brink of extinction because of habitat loss and historical persecution, but the project has strengthened populations in parts of Britain and helped provide renewed security for the animals. Hunting and woodland clearance restricted the species to just the Scottish Highlands and tiny pockets of Wales and northern England by the 20th century. Since work began to establish the feasibility of translocations in 2014, VWT and Forestry and Land Scotland have worked together to identify healthy, thriving populations from forests across Scotland that could help create sustainable populations in previously depleted regions.
Source: BBC News (2025) bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd7d3gvg1720

Restoration is helping native raptors thrive in Scotland

A report by WildLand Cairngorms, an organization that works to rehabilitate some of Scotland's most precious landscapes, indicates that its efforts are having a positive effect. Since 2019, WildLand Cairngorms has been working on a tagging and monitoring initiative for hen harriers, golden eagles and goshawks on their estates in Cairngorms National Park. During 2022–2023 the team recorded a 100% survival rate for hen harrier nests. Golden eagle numbers have also increased, from four breeding pairs in 2021 to seven in 2023. And in 2021, two pairs of goshawks, previously persecuted to extinction in the UK, bred successfully. Over the past 5 years, experts have been able to track the raptors, boosting understanding of their movements and what is needed to support their long-term survival. Data reveal the birds have travelled extensively across the Highlands, with some golden eagles being tracked as far as the Inner Hebrides.
Source: Positive News (2025) positive.news/environment/restoration-is-helping-native-raptors-thrive-in-scotland-report-shows

Colombian tree frog found in UK highlights invasive species threat

A small tree frog hitchhiking in a bunch of roses from Colombia to Sheffield, UK, inspired a study into invasive species. The lead author realized that if a small vertebrate can arrive alive in a flower shipment from Colombia to the UK without being noticed at customs, it must be even more difficult to detect tiny agricultural insect pests or their eggs. The UK is vulnerable to pests and diseases arriving through the horticulture trade, particularly as climate change brings warmer, more humid conditions suitable for insects and diseases. The study analysed records of pests found in ornamental plants at customs in the Netherlands during 2017–2018, and those reported to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the UK during 2021–2023. In both cases > 80% of pests intercepted were insects. However, the researchers also found that European snakes, geckos and Italian wall lizards had made their way to northern Europe undetected among imports of ornamental olive trees, and that other reptiles, spiders and fungi were also hitching rides around the world.
Sources: BioScience (2025) doi.org/g8z7zm & *The Guardian* (2025) theguardian.com/environment/2025/jan/17/colombian-tree-frog-sheffield-florist-invasive-species-threat

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AFRICA

First footage of chimpanzee population in western Nigeria

The SW/Niger Delta Forest Project shared the first ever camera-trap footage of a chimpanzee in the Nigerian lowland forest, part of a rare population that was recently confirmed as a different subspecies. The chimpanzee population in western Nigeria has developed unique genetic characteristics over time because of its isolation, along with environmental factors, leading to significant evolutionary changes and genetic divergence from other chimpanzee subspecies. The video was captured in the 3,300 ha Ise Forest Conservation Area, which is located in Ise-Ekiti, Ekiti State, south-western Nigeria. The footage highlights the vital work that SW/Niger Delta Forest Project has undertaken to restore the severely degraded forest and protect its wildlife through collaborative partnerships between NGOs, the Ekiti State Government and the Ise community. The Conservation Area also provides jobs for people in the local communities, with 98% of project staff being Indigenous.

Source: Tusk (2025) tusk.org/news/first-ever-footage-of-chimpanzee-population-in-western-nigeria

Spotted hyaena seen in Egypt for the first time in 5,000 years

A spotted hyaena *Crocuta crocuta* has been recorded in south-eastern Egypt, marking the first documented sighting of the species in the region for thousands of years. The individual occurred c. 500 km north of the hyaena's known range in neighbouring Sudan. The lone individual was tracked and killed in late February 2024, roughly 30 km from the Sudanese border, after it had predated two goats belonging to local herders in Wadi Yahmib in the Elba Protected Area. Researchers suggest that changes in climate may have opened new migration routes and that a natural weather cycle known as the Active Red Sea Trough may have increased rainfall and plant growth in the region, creating better conditions for prey animals and making it easier for the hyaena to travel. The record challenges existing knowledge of the spotted hyaena's range and highlights the impact of regional climate changes on wildlife movements.

Sources: TRAFFIC (2024) doi.org/n4nv & *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (2025) discoverwildlife.com/animal-facts/spotted-hyena-egypt

Vanishing prey: a wild dog crisis

A study has revealed that dwindling prey populations are forcing African wild dogs *Lycaon pictus* to expend unsustainable amounts of energy during hunts, jeopardizing their survival and reproduction. The study compared wild dog packs in two distinct Zambian ecosystems; one in the well-protected South Luangwa National Park, where prey remains abundant, and another in the Greater Kafue Ecosystem, where decades of poaching have significantly reduced prey populations. To conduct the study, researchers attached lightweight accelerometers to the radio collars of 16 packs of wild dogs in the two ecosystems. The results showed that in prey-depleted areas the energetic costs of hunting are higher and the benefits lower. When prey was scarce, wild dogs were forced to travel much greater distances daily, using more energy but capturing smaller meals. In contrast, wild dogs in the well-protected area with abundant prey exhibited lower energetic costs and very high hunting success. This directly translates to higher survival and reproductive rates. African wild dogs are categorized as Endangered on the IUCN Red List, with < 6,000 individuals remaining.

Sources: PNAS (2025) doi.org/g83f4v & *Africa Geographic* (2025) africageographic.com/stories/painted-predators-vanishing-prey-a-wild-dog-crisis

Leopards can be identified by their roar

Each leopard has its own unique roar through which it can be identified, according to a recent study. In the first large-scale paired camera trap and autonomous recording survey for large African carnivores, researchers were able to identify individual leopards by their vocalizations with 93% accuracy. It highlights the benefits of combining technologies and has been hailed as an important first step towards using bioacoustics in leopard conservation. Because leopards are solitary, nocturnal creatures that live across huge expanses of terrain, it can be difficult to gather reliable data on the species. There is little scientific research about the sawing roar of a leopard—a repeated low-frequency pattern of strokes, often audible from at least 1 km away, used primarily to attract mates and defend territories. Using bioacoustics to study leopards would enable researchers to monitor much larger areas. The research team studied a 450 km² area of Nyerere National Park, Tanzania, placing microphones next to 50 pairs of camera traps so they could identify each leopard and then extract the audio.

Sources: Remote Sensing in Ecology and Conservation (2024) doi.org/g8wq8p & *EurekAlert!* (2024) eurekalert.org/news-releases/1069051

Collective effort begins to map seagrasses in the Western Indian Ocean

A new research collaborative, the Large-Scale Seagrass Mapping and Management Initiative, is working on mapping seagrass meadows along multiple African countries in the Western Indian Ocean. Seagrass meadows fringe every coastline in the region, from the waters of Lamu County in Kenya, down the East African coast to Maputo in Mozambique, over to the island coastlines of Madagascar, the Seychelles and beyond. Yet despite the prevalence of this crucial ecosystem, the region does not have a unified seagrass map, developed using a single method and field-verified for accuracy, hindering seagrass conservation and management. Through partnerships with local research institutions, this project aims to develop ambitious, national seagrass maps and elevate seagrass ecosystems as a nature-based solution to climate change. The maps should help inform effective conservation and management efforts, including providing countries with robust data allowing them to include seagrass as part of climate mitigation and adaptation targets.

Source: Pew Trusts (2025) pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2025/01/06/collective-effort-begins-to-map-seagrasses-in-the-western-indian-ocean

Study in Kenya highlights complexity of tree-planting schemes

Tree planting is central to climate mitigation and biodiversity conservation goals, and in Kenya alone there are plans to plant 15 billion trees by 2032. But tree-planting schemes must account for complex local issues and preferences. Adding trees and shrubs to farmland (agroforestry) can boost biodiversity, carbon storage, soil health, food production and income. But many tree-planting schemes overlook diversity and promote a narrow range of species. Researchers interviewed 620 smallholder farmers in the Kakamega Forest landscape in western Kenya to examine the factors that enable or prevent farmers from increasing tree and shrub diversity on their land. The farmers were generally positive about increasing the diversity of trees on their farms; key barriers were their concerns about attracting harmful wildlife, decreasing soil fertility, small farm sizes, lack of time and knowledge, and certain cultural beliefs about planting trees.

Source: University of Exeter (2025) news.exeter.ac.uk/faculty-of-environment-science-and-economy/kenya-study-highlights-complexity-of-tree-planting-schemes

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AMERICAS

Climate change: magnolias feeling the heat in Honduras ...

A new report has revealed the dramatic impact that rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns could have on threatened tree species in Pico Bonito, the largest national park in Honduras. It raises the alarming prospect that threatened trees could be pushed to the brink of extinction as they struggle to adapt to a changing climate. The worst-case scenario for two of the trees on which the study focused is that they could be pushed towards extinction by the end of the century. Displaced from much of their current range and increasingly confined to higher altitudes, the species would face a struggle for survival. For other species, the outlook is less bleak. Among the target trees predicted to thrive as temperatures rise is the Critically Endangered *Eugenia coyolensis*. Found only in Honduras, it prefers warmer and more arid conditions, so is likely to increase in abundance and range. Studies have shown Honduras is among the countries worst affected by climate change in recent years, which has been emphasized by a spate of severe hurricanes.

Source: Fauna & Flora (2025) fauna-flora.org/news/magnolias-and-other-threatened-trees-feeling-the-heat-in-honduras

... and anurans will suffer in the Amazon and Atlantic Rainforest

A research team has completed the most comprehensive survey of the predicted effects of drought and global warming on anurans. The findings include a prediction that between 6.6 and 33.6% of anuran habitats will become arid by 2080–2100, depending on the level of greenhouse gas emissions going forward. Frogs and toads may experience twice the rate of water loss in some arid regions, and the combination of drier weather and higher temperatures may double the reduction in anuran activity compared with the expected impact of warming alone. Biophysical simulations showed, for example, that anurans will spend less time active in tropical regions, including the Amazon and part of the Atlantic Rainforest, under all climate scenarios throughout the year. Whilst warming and drought alone will decrease activity hours by 3.4 and 21.7% respectively, the combination of both will decrease activity hours by 26%.

Sources: Nature Climate Change (2024) doi.org/g8pmxt & *EurekAlert* (2025) eurekalert.org/news-releases/1070461

Major port construction begins at key mangrove site

Conservation groups in Panama are trying to halt the construction of a new port in the Pacific province of Chiriquí, which they say could destroy breeding grounds and nurseries for marine species. The project requires dredging a riverbed and increasing maritime traffic of cargo ships, cruise ships and yachts. The Puerto Barú project, located outside the town of David, would create a new port on Panama's north-west coast, increasing trade and tourism. But the port is located deep in a series of channels and lagoons covered in mangroves that support rays, sharks and other species of conservation concern that may not survive construction or the increased maritime traffic. The mangroves are considered an Important Shark and Ray Area, a designation given to places vital to the survival of at least one shark or ray species. The Critically Endangered Pacific smalltail shark is present in the bay, as is the hawksbill turtle, Bryde's whale, pantropical spotted dolphin and various sawfish species, among others. More than 50 conservation groups have organized a 'No to Puerto Barú' campaign, but an initial injunction to stop construction was denied in court.

Source: Mongabay (2025) news.mongabay.com/2025/01/in-panama-major-port-construction-begins-at-key-mangrove-site

Rabbit lost to science for 120 years rediscovered in Mexico

The Omiltemi cottontail rabbit *Sylvilagus insonus*, a species lost to science since the early 1900s, has been rediscovered in the Sierra Madre del Sur, a mountain range in Mexico. An expedition team spent 5 years searching for the rabbit, finding it in seven of the 10 areas they visited. The expedition team initially focused on forests near Chilpancingo, the species' first recorded location, but found no signs of the rabbit. They later shifted their efforts to nearby high-elevation conifer forests and interviewed local people, many of whom were familiar with the rabbit and reported it being used as a food source. A new biosphere reserve, Sierra Tecuani, covers the current known range of the Omiltemi cottontail rabbit, but there are no special conservation measures to protect the species. The team aims to learn more about the species' behaviour, ecology and reproduction, and work with local communities and authorities on conservation efforts.

Source: Re:wild (2025) rewild.org/press/found-small-enigmatic-rabbit-with-black-tail-lost-to-science-for-more-than

Good news for birds: piping plovers had a record nesting year in 2024 ...

For the second year in a row, more nesting piping plovers *Charadrius melodus* have been recorded on Massachusetts beaches than at any time in the last four decades. In 2024, 1,196 nesting pairs were recorded, a 1.5% increase on 2023 and a 500% rise since the Coastal Waterbird Program began, according to preliminary data. In 2024, pairs of plovers nesting at sites protected by the programme produced 1.24 fledglings per pair, roughly the same as the 1.25 chicks in 2023, which is considered to be a sustainable reproductive rate. The sparrow-sized shorebird feeds along sand and gravel beaches on the North American coast. It is listed as threatened on the USA state and federal endangered species lists, and as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List, but several years of data show that the species is making a comeback in Massachusetts. Long-term investment in coastal communities and implementation of a combination of wildlife management, science-based conservation, policy development and education have enabled the Coastal Waterbird Program to protect 17% of the total Atlantic Coast population of the species.

Source: Mass Audobon (2025) massaudubon.org/news/press-room/2024/piping-plovers-enjoy-another-record-nesting-year-in-2024

... and free-flight lessons help teach macaws to survive in the wild

A pioneering project to reintroduce blue-and-yellow macaws *Ara ararauna* to north-western São Paulo state, Brazil, has obtained excellent results. Macaws born in captivity were trained in free-flight techniques before being introduced into the wild. Traditionally, in psittacine reintroduction projects, captive chicks are only released into the wild at 2 or 3 years of age, but with no experience in finding food or defending themselves against predators, many end up dying. For the method to work, the birds must be trained at a young age, between 90–120 days old. Once the chicks can fly they are encouraged to jump between two points to be fed. Gradually, the distance is increased. As well as encouraging longer flights, the training includes an increasingly scarce food supply, forcing the macaws to look for food in the wild and breaking their ties with humans. Two years after the initial release of six macaws in 2022, all are still alive and showing great adaptation.

Source: Mongabay (2025) news.mongabay.com/2025/02/in-sao-paulo-free-flight-lessons-help-teach-macaws-to-survive-in-the-wild

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ASIA & OCEANIA

Turtles: scientists develop portable eDNA test to help detect rare species . . . Scientists have developed a first-of-its-kind, portable environmental DNA (eDNA) test to help detect the world's rarest turtle, the Yangtze giant softshell turtle *Rafetus swinhoei*. Two individuals are currently known to exist, one wild turtle in Viet Nam and one captive male in China (> 100 years old). Additional individuals need to be found so the turtles can be bred in captivity to rescue the species. The new test will help determine if there are others living in unexplored and understudied lakes, reservoirs and large bodies of water. The test, currently being used in the field, can also be adapted to help find other elusive and threatened species. It has been suggested eDNA methodology is one of the most cost-effective approaches for species detection, enhancing traditional survey methods. However, unlike the new test, most eDNA methods require transporting samples to specialized laboratories, leading to long lag periods between sample collection and result reporting.
Source: Wildlife Conservation Society (2025) newsroom.wcs.org/News-Releases/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/24087.aspx

. . . and over 1,100 dead turtles wash ashore in southern India
Over 1,100 dead olive ridley turtles *Lepidochelys olivacea* washed ashore on beaches in southern India in January 2025, most near the state capital of Chennai. Every year, olive ridley turtles gather off India's coast to breed. Female turtles come ashore to lay their eggs on the beaches where they hatched, whilst the males remain in the water. Typically, between 100 and 150 turtles nest on Chennai's beaches annually, so the stranding of > 1,000 turtles was unusual. An initial autopsy of one carcass revealed lung lesions, and many dead turtles had bulging eyes. Both observations indicate the turtles probably died from suffocation and drowning. It is possible they gathered near nesting beaches to breed and became entangled in a fishing net when surfacing for air, causing them to drown. Following media coverage of the crisis, the Tamil Nadu government caught 24 trawler boats operating illegally in Chennai's waters, and created a special task force to monitor boats and ships in the area.
Source: Mongabay (2025) news.mongabay.com/short-article/2025/01/over-1100-dead-olive-ridley-turtles-wash-ashore-in-southern-india

Good news in Cambodia: thriving biodiversity in Virachey National Park . . . The first comprehensive biodiversity survey of Virachey National Park, Cambodia, has revealed the vast array of species relying on the remote protected area, a critical step in strengthening the protection of this ecosystem. First established in 1993, Virachey National Park is a relatively understudied protected area in north-east Cambodia. As an extension of the Annamite Mountain range, the park is a key habitat for endemic flora and fauna not found in wider Cambodia and, despite relatively high levels of historic logging, remains a key biodiversity refuge. Led by Fauna & Flora, in collaboration with Cambodia's Ministry of Environment and communities local to the Park, the survey confirmed the presence of many threatened species, such as the red-shanked douc langur, Sunda pangolin, clouded leopard, dhole and sun bear. A number of species were also recorded for the first time in Cambodia, including the Critically Endangered large-antlered muntjac, two bat species, a glass lizard, gecko, flamboyant edible mushroom and three plant species: an orchid, an arum and a ginger.
Source: Fauna & Flora (2025) fauna-flora.org/publications/virachey-national-park-biodiversity-survey-report-cambodia-2024

. . . and hope for the Mekong giant catfish
Six Critically Endangered Mekong giant catfish *Pangasianodon gigas*, one of the largest and rarest freshwater fish in the world, were caught and released in Cambodia in December 2024. These catches, a testament to decades of conservation work and community engagement, offer new hope for the survival of a species that has become increasingly rare in much of its native habitat. Mekong giant catfish can reach lengths of nearly 3 m and weigh up to 300 kg. The first two giant catfish were incidentally caught on 6 December in the Tonle Sap River near Phnom Penh, and subsequently tagged and released. On 10 December, four further individuals were caught and released at several locations along the Mekong and Tonle Sap Rivers. Two large specimens weighed 120 and 131 kg, respectively, and measured > 2 m. Each fish was fitted with an identification tag for long-term tracking and research. The species' survival hinges on sustained conservation and habitat protection.
Source: Khmer Times (2024) khmertimeskh.com/501608052/the-appearance-of-6-rare-mekong-giant-catfish-in-cambodia-offers-new-hope-for-species-survival

Wildlife monitoring technologies used to spy on women
Technology is increasingly used in conservation to monitor wildlife and natural habitats, but researchers studying a forest in northern India found some are being misused by local government and male villagers to keep watch on women without their consent. A report reveals how forest rangers in Corbett Tiger Reserve deliberately fly drones over local women to frighten them out of the forest and stop them collecting natural resources, despite it being their legal right to do so. Women surveyed for the study, who previously found sanctuary in the forest away from male-dominated villages, said they feel watched and inhibited by camera traps, so talk and sing much more quietly, increasing the chance of encounters with potentially dangerous wildlife like elephants and tigers. The study highlights that understanding the various ways local women use forests is vital for effective forest management.
Sources: Environment and Planning F (2024) doi.org/pcfz & *University of Cambridge* (2024) cam.ac.uk/research/news/wildlife-monitoring-technologies-used-to-intimidate-and-spy-on-women-study-finds

Tiger population in India doubles in a decade thanks to conservation efforts
India's tiger population doubled in 12 years, thanks to efforts to protect the cats from poaching and habitat loss, ensuring they have enough prey and reducing human–wildlife conflict, according to a recent study. The population grew from c. 1,706 in 2010 to 3,682 in 2022, making India home to roughly 75% of the global tiger population. The study found that some local communities living near tiger habitats have also benefited from the increase because of revenue from ecotourism. The study was based on data collected by Indian government-supported institutions, and although conservationists welcomed the study, they emphasized that tigers in India would benefit if source data were made available to a larger group of scientists.
Sources: Science (2025) doi.org/g83n7n & *Phys.org* (2025) phys.org/news/2025-01-india-tiger-population-decade-credits.html

All internet addresses were up to date at the time of writing. The Briefly section in this issue was written and compiled by Emma Sinnett, Julia Hochbach and Martin Fisher. Contributions from authoritative published sources (including websites) are always welcome. Please send contributions by e-mail to oryx@fauna-flora.org.

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