



FRONTLINE DISPATCHES

December 2022

CONSERVATION NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

NORTH AMERICA



Disease hits one of Wyoming's prized bighorn sheep herds. [According](#) to the *Laramie Boomerang*, landowners near the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area found 37 dead sheep, mostly ewes and lambs, and biologists determined a type of pneumonia was the culprit. The sheep were part of the Devil Canyon herd, which is often used to supplement other populations, and the dead animals were more than 10% of the herd.



Will grizzlies return to Washington? State, that is. The National Park Service and US Fish and Wildlife Service are again considering reintroducing the bears to the North Cascades, [writes](#) the *Seattle Times*. The last confirmed sighting of a grizzly in the US portion of the North Cascades was in 1996; likely fewer than 10 bears remain there now. Environmental advocates support the idea, others fear the bears will threaten people, livestock and wildlife.



Indigenous communities are crucial to the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, established to guard lands for wildlife migration and survival. Now, 25 years after Y2Y was organized, protection has increased by 80%, to 14 million acres (5.6 million ha), mainly due to the support of Canadian provincial governments and at least 75 Indigenous territories, [according](#) to *High Country News*. These

Montana women, above, are examining the heart of a bison that was harvested during a ceremony on the Blackfeet Reservation in October 2018.



More than \$560,000 has gone into 45 conservation projects this year thanks to chapters of the Mule Deer Foundation—and this cash was [leveraged](#) to a total of \$8.8 million that will be spent on habitat conservation, wildlife research and management, and youth activities across the western US. (The crew above is making a fence more wildlife-friendly. [VIDEO](#): Watch this clever Wyoming mule deer buck do the fence limbo.)



To reduce the Jackson Hole Elk Herd, the US National Park Service issued 475 hunting permits for Teton National Park this year. Only antlerless elk could be harvested, and hunters

had to submit a lymph node from their elk to test for chronic wasting disease. (Hunters also had to carry bear spray.) At 11,000 animals, the Jackson Herd is one of the largest in the US; controversially, these elk receive supplemental winter feed. The full [story](#) is on FieldandStream.com.



Wildfires change deer-predator interactions. A recent Wildlife Society [study](#) found that in summer mule deer prefer recently burned landscapes over those that weren't burned, but in winter they tend to avoid burned areas. Recent burns, with less tree cover, get deeper snow, making forage harder to find; and snow may hinder deer's ability to escape from predators such as cougars.



More than \$90 million for wildlife—such as this “flying” bobcat. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation joined federal agencies and private partners in [announcing](#) nearly \$91 million in grants through the new America the Beautiful Challenge. Another \$50.7 million in matching grants raised the total to \$141.7 million for major conservation projects in 42 states and three US territories.



Take two aspirin and . . . no, that's not going to do it. Note the stub of antler sticking out of this elk's head, likely broken off while fighting another bull for mating rights. A photographer in Utah recently shot this [video](#), which appeared on OutdoorLife.com. ([Antlers and horns](#), the uses thereof, were the topic of a recent Conservation 101.)



Caribou in the Western Arctic continue to decline, [according](#) to Alaska Public Media. Last year the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, one of the world's largest, had shrunk by 24,000 animals to 164,000, making it only a third of its peak size, reached in the early 2000s. Alaska's Dept. of Fish and Game has found no cause for the decline and notes that fluctuations in caribou herds are not uncommon.



Lesser prairie chicken numbers have dropped by 90% in the past century. Now the US Fish and Wildlife Service has classified the bird as threatened in the northern part of its range (Kansas, Colorado and Oklahoma), [writes](#) the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, and endangered in the southern part of its range (Texas and New Mexico), which will bring stricter regulations—and likely challenges from farmers, ranchers and energy developers.

AFRICA



Lugard, Tsavo's famous 'super tusker,' died of natural causes last month. At about 53 years of age, Lugard was nearing the end of his life anyway, but investigators found that drought in Tsavo National Park hastened his death. Both of Lugard's enormous tusks were still on his carcass and were recovered. Per *Africa Geographic*, [Lugard](#) was the second giant to have died at Tsavo in a month, after the matriarch [Dida](#). The Tsavo Trust and

Kenya Wildlife Services Big Tusker Project monitors the park's iconic elephants to protect them from poachers.



In Zimbabwe, elephant problems escalate as both human and elephant populations grow and the debates over trophy hunting and ivory sales rage on. Elephant-range countries—Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia, Botswana—wish to sell ivory legally, to raise money for conservation, and expand hunting; Kenya, Senegal, Mali and others oppose the move. Both groups say they want to protect elephants. The BBC News recently [summarized](#) the controversy (again).



Even prehistoric ivory enters the controversy. A speaker at last month's meeting of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology argued that the growing trade in ancient ivory—now turning up more often as Arctic permafrost thaws—is helping drive the global ivory market that impacts living elephants. He urged scientists to speak out against the fossil ivory trade and avoid dealing with collectors who might be involved in it. The full [story](#) is on Science.org.



And let's not forget illegal rhino horn. The *Daily Maverick* [reports](#) that, according to the Wildlife Justice Commission, more harvested rhino horn from legal stockpiles is entering the black market; and despite conventional wisdom, the main driver of this is demand for ornamental carvings in China, not so-called "traditional medicine" seeking to provide aphrodisiacs and hangover cures.

EUROPE



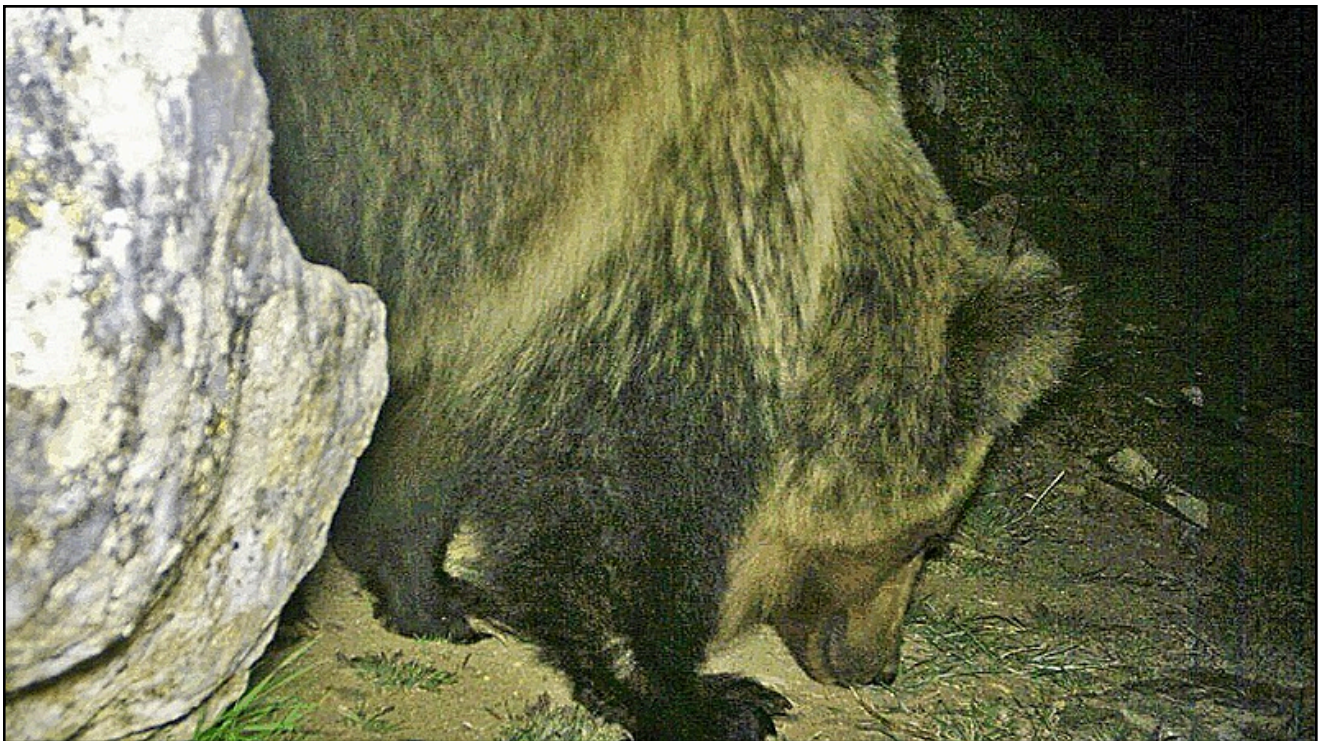
Shooting Dutch wolves with paintballs may make them less tame. Or so believes one provincial government after social media showed a wolf strolling past a family in Hoge Veluwe National Park. The paintballs should sting and drive wolves away, and also show park rangers which wolves have been hit. (There are about 20 wolves in the Netherlands.) The BBC News ran the [story](#) last month.



In Spain, the bears are back. During the 14th Century, Spanish bears lived as far south as the Mediterranean coast, but by the 1990s only some 50 remained, mostly in the wilds of Cantabria, northern Spain. Now, thanks to *Fundación Oso Pardo*, the Brown Bear Foundation, and a crackdown on poaching, the brown bear population stands

at more than 400 and grows by 30 to 40 animals yearly. They're still endangered, but on what *Geographical* [describes](#) as a “steady recovery.”

WORLD



That's no Yeti, it's a Tibetan bear spotted by a trail camera. A new report offers the first clear photographic evidence of the presence of these brown bears in Nepal. [According](#) to Mongabay.com, the photos put to rest stories from villagers about a Yeti-like creature prowling

Nepal's Himalayan region. Earlier studies have also shown, through genetic analysis, that hair and other fragments attributed to a Yeti, the “abominable snowman,” in fact are from bears.



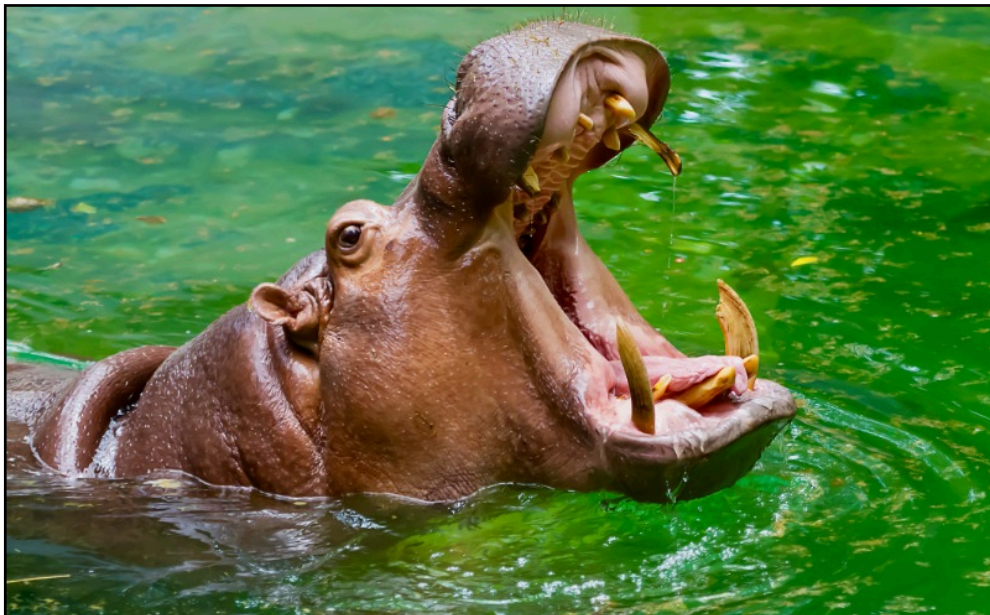
Do we share wildlife sightings—or keep them quiet? Posting animal photos on social media and on sites like [iNaturalist](#) can be an important part of “citizen science.” But sometimes sharing our sightings can put wildlife at risk—by, say, leading poachers to endangered species (like these dehorned northern white rhinos). When do we share what we’ve seen and when do we stay quiet? This [blog](#) on nature.org discusses the pros and cons.



A Cambodian official headed to a wildlife summit was arrested for monkey smuggling. Masphal Kry, a director in his country’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, was detained at New York’s JFK airport en route to Panama last month for the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) conference. Seven

other people were also indicted and charged with smuggling and conspiracy to violate the Endangered Species Act and the [Lacey Act](#), the US's oldest wildlife protection law. NatGeo.com broke the [story](#).

Next up: a shortage of monkeys for research labs. *Science* [writes](#) that the indictments above, which involved hundreds of endangered macaque monkeys, are likely to make the shortage of monkeys for drug-safety testing and vaccine research even worse. Animal-rights advocates want to ban monkey imports at least until more is known about where the animals come from (see below); and researchers themselves want the illegal trade halted and say that fewer monkeys should be used and that they should be bred in the US, not imported.



Technology for wildlife rescue? A startup called Conservation X Labs, in Washington, DC, says it has invented an inexpensive handheld DNA scanner that customs agents at airports, game wardens in the field and fisheries inspectors at sea can use—along with an enormous database called the Barcode of Life—to positively identify species. Is a shipment of lumber illegal oak from Russia or legal oak from the US? Is ivory from an elephant or walrus (illegal) or from a hippopotamus or fossil mammoth (legal)? The [NABIT](#)—Nucleic Acid Barcode Identification Tool—should know. Conservation X Labs hopes to launch a new era in conservation through advanced sciences: Bioengineering rhino horn, for example, might wipe out the black market for the real thing, while gene-editing could eradicate chronic wasting disease, avian flu and African swine fever.



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Conservation Frontlines and the free electronic distribution of its media are funded by the

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