Briefly

SPOTLIGHT ON BEARS

Rocky Mountain grizzly bears remain protected . . .

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) has decided to uphold federal protections for grizzly bears across the northern Rocky Mountains, even though Montana, Wyoming and Idaho petitioned to remove them from the Endangered Species Act. Although populations in some areas have rebounded, the FWS determined that delisting them at this time would be premature in the face of ongoing threats, including habitat fragmentation, climate change and negative interactions with people. Conservationists have praised the FWS decision and highlighted the importance of habitat connectivity to ensure the species' long-term survival. Grizzly bears are ecosystem engineers, aerating the soil and dispersing seeds when they dig for roots and bulbs. Their droppings also spread plant seeds, and they influence prey behaviour. By keeping elk and deer herds moving, grizzlies prevent these grazers from overconsuming vegetation in any one area.

Source: Happy Eco News (2025) happyeconews.com/2025-grizzly-bear-protection-status

. . . but Slovakia approves sale of brown bear meat to public

The government of Slovakia has approved a controversial plan to cull c. 350 brown bears, c. 25% of the country's estimated population, in response to a rise in human–bear encounters, including a fatal attack in April. The decision has sparked backlash from conservationists and opposition politicians who argue that brown bears are a protected and near-threatened species under EU law and should only be killed in exceptional circumstances. In a move to prevent waste and use a consumable resource, the Slovak authorities have announced that meat from culled bears will be sold to the public, provided it meets legal and hygiene standards. Critics have condemned the plan as reckless and scientifically unfounded. Bear meat is rare in Europe and carries health risks such as the potential for Trichinella infection. Environmental groups have urged the European Commission to intervene, stressing that non-lethal measures should be prioritized over widespread killing.

Source: BBC (2025) bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4gkpy3x3ndo

Rare polar bear footage in Norway

Scientists have captured exceptionally rare footage of polar bear mothers and new cubs emerging from their maternal dens in Svalbard, Norway. The research combined satellite collar data and time-lapse cameras deployed at 13 den sites over six seasons. Family groups emerged in early March and remained near their den for c. 12 days, although this varied from 2 to 31 days. Cubs rely heavily on their mothers while they transition from the warm den to the frozen Arctic environment. Researchers noted the bears abandoned their dens sooner than expected, and some switched dens, highlighting the need for flexible conservation measures. By linking collar-recorded temperature and movement data with camera observations, the team created predictive tools to infer den emergence from collar data alone, without the need for direct camera observations. This will help to scale up monitoring across the Arctic.

Sources: Journal of Wildlife Management (2025) doi.org/p8m7 & *Mongabay* (2025) news.mongabay.com/2025/04/rare-polar-bear-cub-footage-offers-crucial-conservation-insights

Human–bear coexistence: drones can help keep the peace . . .

In the USA, grizzly bears have reclaimed parts of their historical range thanks to legal protection and conservation. In some areas, populations have rebounded to the extent that grizzlies move into areas of human habitation, where they can come into conflict with people. Hazing can address this by deterring bears without harming them. In Montana, a specialized bear manager tested and compared hazing methods such as shotguns loaded with non-lethal ammunition or dogs trained to detect and deter bears. Given inconsistent results with dogs, they turned to technology: a drone equipped with a thermal camera, which can be flown over inaccessible terrain while operators remain at a distance. This proved effective: the drone's distinctive buzzing sound startled the bears into moving away quickly. Over time, data showed older bears needed fewer drone interventions, suggesting they learnt to avoid humans and their properties after repeated negative encounters.

Sources: Frontiers in Conservation Science (2025) doi.org/p76f & *Earth* (2025) earth.com/news/keeping-the-peace-how-drones-can-help-humans-and-bears-coexist

. . . Indigenous knowledge shapes solutions for living with polar bears . . .

Polar Bears International has partnered with Indigenous knowledge keepers in Churchill, Manitoba, to explore how Indigenous practices can inform harmonious coexistence with polar bears. Using a community-centred approach, researchers invited Swampy Cree, Sayisi Dene, Métis and Inuit Elders and youth to recount past, present and future ways of living alongside polar bears. The project was co-designed with an Elder, ensuring Indigenous worldviews were embedded throughout. Storytelling and hands-on validation—via sticky notes, maps and arts-based presentations—made the research culturally relevant and accessible. Podcasts captured voices and memories, evoking traditional communal radio listening and cultural revival. Key findings show that respectful coexistence is a cultural way of life. Fusing knowledge across generations, communities enhance safety, share protocols on bear alerts and attractant management, engage youth and shape sustainable tourism.

Sources: Communications Earth & Environment (2025) doi.org/p75p & *Polar Bears International* (2025) polarbearsinternational.org/news-media/articles/indigenous-knowledge-shapes-new-solutions-for-coexistence

. . . and community-led conservation supports Malayan sun bears

Researchers have assessed community attitudes towards sun bears near Dampa Tiger Reserve in India. They conducted surveys in seven villages, with c. 700 participants. Findings revealed that age, education level and occupation shaped attitudes, with younger and more educated individuals being more supportive of sun bear protection. In contrast, gender and village location had little influence. Over time, awareness campaigns led to improvements; hunting incidents declined, communities reported less dependency on forest resources, and many adopted alternative farming techniques. This suggests that long-term, community-based educational outreach can shift public perception and foster sustainable coexistence with wildlife, supporting both biodiversity and local livelihoods. The work highlights the importance of considering social factors in conservation.

Source: European Journal of Wildlife Research (2025) doi.org/p75q

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INTERNATIONAL

Vibrant ecosystem discovered on newly exposed seabed

In January 2025, a massive iceberg calved from Antarctica's George VI Ice Shelf, unveiling a previously concealed section of the ocean floor. Seizing the opportunity, scientists aboard the research vessel *Falkor (too)* explored the newly exposed seabed in the Bellingshausen Sea. They discovered a vibrant and diverse ecosystem teeming with life, including giant sea spiders, octopuses, icefish, corals, sponges, anemones and deep-sea jellyfish. Notably, some sponges found at a depth of nearly 230 m were exceptionally large, indicating that this community has been active for decades, perhaps centuries, thriving in complete darkness, sealed off from sunlight by thick ice. This challenges existing assumptions about life beneath ice-covered regions. Typically, deep-sea ecosystems rely on nutrients descending from sunlit surface waters. However, the isolation of this area implies alternative nutrient sources, possibly from ocean currents or glacial meltwater.
Source: National Geographic (2025) nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/thriving-marine-ecosystem-found-antarctic-iceberg

Pollinator news: climate change affects chocolate production…

A study has highlighted significant threats to global cocoa production as a result of declining pollinator populations and rising temperatures. Conducted in Brazil, Ghana, and Indonesia, the research found that natural pollination rates are low, with only c. 17% of cacao flowers being pollinated naturally. Hand-pollination increased yields by c. 20%, indicating that many cocoa trees are under-pollinated in natural conditions. The study also revealed that higher temperatures lead to lower cocoa yields, suggesting that climate change poses a significant risk to cocoa production. Researchers recommend sustainable farming practices aimed at enhancing pollinator habitats and regulating farm temperatures. Strategies include reducing pesticide use, maintaining leaf litter, providing moderate shade, and adopting agroforestry systems that integrate cacao cultivation with surrounding forests.
Sources: Earth Environment (2025) doi.org/p76p & *Mongabay* (2025) news.mongabay.com/short-article/2025/02/pollinator-decline-climate-change-threaten-chocolate-production/

… and wars, street lights and microplastics add to threats

Bees and other pollinating insects are facing a growing array of threats: a recent report identified 12 emerging dangers including warfare, microplastics, light pollution and chemical exposure. Crop diversity is reduced in conflict zones such as Ukraine, limiting the availability of varied food sources for pollinators. Microplastics have been found in most European beehives, indicating widespread environmental contamination. Artificial light disrupts nocturnal pollinators, air pollution impairs pollinator health and agricultural practices contribute additional stressors. Antibiotics used in farming can infiltrate hives, altering bee behaviour and diminishing their foraging efficiency. Moreover, combinations of pesticides, even within legal safety limits, can interact synergistically, posing heightened risks. These compounded threats threaten pollination services essential for crop production and ecosystem stability. To mitigate these risks, the report advocates for stronger environmental regulations, pollution reduction, and creation of habitats rich in flowering plants.
Source: The Guardian (2025) theguardian.com/environment/2025/may/20/bees-threats-war-microplastics

International ant trade booming

In April 2025, Kenyan authorities arrested two Belgian teenagers for attempting to smuggle > 5,000 live ants out of the country. The ants, including queen ants of the species *Messor cephalotes*, were concealed in test tubes and syringes designed to sustain them during transit. The duo intended to supply the growing exotic ant pet market in Europe and Asia. They pleaded guilty to wildlife piracy charges, highlighting a shift in wildlife trafficking from large mammals to smaller and lesser-known species. The Kenya Wildlife Service reported that such insect trafficking has been ongoing for years, with smugglers using specialized containers to evade detection. This incident has prompted calls for stricter enforcement and sustainable alternatives, such as controlled insect farming projects that support local livelihoods while preserving biodiversity. Ants are ecologically important, particularly in savannah ecosystems, where they contribute to seed dispersal, soil aeration, and serve as a food source for a variety of animals.
Source: The Guardian (2025) theguardian.com/environment/2025/apr/24/kenya-teenage-smugglers-ants-two-belgian-lornoy-david-seppe-lodewijckx-wildlife-piracy-trade

Satellite to measure carbon storage in trees globally

The European Space Agency has launched a pioneering satellite designed to measure the carbon stored in Earth's forests. This satellite, equipped with an antenna measuring 12 m in diameter, can penetrate forest canopies to assess the woody biomass beneath. This enables scientists to more accurately estimate the amount of carbon dioxide sequestered in trees, a critical factor in understanding and mitigating climate change. Traditional methods of measuring forest carbon storage have relied on ground-based assessments, which are limited in scope and accuracy. The new satellite offers a comprehensive, global perspective, allowing for consistent monitoring of forests worldwide. By analysing repeated radar scans, the satellite can construct detailed images of forest structures, providing insights into the distribution and density of biomass. This technological advancement is particularly significant for monitoring vast and dense tropical forests, such as those in the Amazon, Congo and Indonesia.
Source: BBC (2025) bbc.co.uk/news/articles/crldwjj6d6no

First global crocodile attack mitigation survey launched

Worldwide, around eight crocodilian species may attack humans and their domesticated animals when encountered in their habitats. This occurs in at least 66 countries across the tropics and subtropics, and such attacks are often the chief obstacle to crocodilian conservation. This challenge will be addressed by a new Working Group of the IUCN Species Survival Commission Crocodile Specialist Group. The Living with Crocodilians Working Group has launched the first global survey of actions designed to reduce crocodile attacks. The aim is to address the need for expert advice on which interventions are effective across a wide range of circumstances. The survey seeks information on currently implemented approaches and perceptions of their effectivity, by region, water body and crocodilian species. It is for people living in areas where crocodilian attacks occur, particularly those with experience of trying to mitigate or respond to such attacks. The Working Group will draw on the survey results to develop a resource of recommended interventions. The survey can be accessed at bbk.ac.uk/research/networks/living-with-crocodilians.
Source: Dr Simon Pooley, Birkbeck, University of London (2025) E-mail s.pooley@bbk.ac.uk

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EUROPE

Mosquito-borne disease threatens blackbirds in the UK

A mosquito-borne disease known as Usutu virus has been detected in the UK, spreading across southern England since its initial identification in 2020. This virus, primarily affecting blackbirds, has been linked to a c. 40% decline in their population within Greater London. The common house mosquito *Culex pipiens* is responsible for transmitting Usutu, which poses a low risk to humans. Originating in southern Africa, Usutu virus reached Europe c. 30 years ago. In the UK, it has been found as far west as Dorset and as far north as Cambridgeshire. The spread is attributed to climate change, as higher temperatures, extended summers and increased rainfall create favourable conditions for mosquito proliferation. While blackbird numbers remain stable in many rural and northern areas, the virus's presence raises concerns about potential future outbreaks and the introduction of other mosquito-borne diseases.

Source: BBC (2025) bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj3x6vo5ly6o

Wolf protection downgraded

The Standing Committee of the Bern Convention has voted to downgrade the conservation status of wolves in Europe, from strictly protected under Appendix II to protected under Appendix III. This decision, the first of its kind in the Convention's history, grants member states more leeway to authorize the culling of wolves in response to increasing reports of livestock attacks. Critics argue that this change lacks a solid scientific basis and is driven by political pressure from agricultural and hunting interests. A public opinion survey across 10 EU Member States also found that most people, even in rural areas, believe that wolves should remain strictly protected. Wolves help to regulate populations of wild herbivores and maintain healthy ecosystems. Conservationists fear that relaxing protection measures could reverse population recoveries and destabilize fragile habitats. Calls continue for member states to adopt non-lethal strategies, such as the use of livestock guardian animals, better fencing and improved husbandry practices. The decision has sparked debate over the balance between rural livelihoods and environmental responsibility.

Source: Born Free Foundation (2025) bornfree.org.uk/news/european-parliament-votes-to-downgrade-wolf-protection

Lizards at home on railway tracks

A study conducted by the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin has revealed that sand lizards *Lacerta agilis* are thriving along railway tracks in Brandenburg, Germany. Researchers tagged c. 80 lizards with small transmitters to monitor their movements over several seasons. They found that these lizards have compact home ranges, often moving only a few meters along the railway embankment. This suggests that the railway environment provides all the necessary resources for the lizards, including food, basking spots, shelter and egg-laying sites. The study also highlighted the importance of track ballast to the thermophilic sand lizards. During summer, the ballast stones absorb heat during the day and retain warmth at night, offering a warm refuge for the lizards. These insights are crucial for conservation efforts, as sand lizard populations are declining across Germany. Understanding their habitat preferences and movement patterns allows for more effective planning of railway projects and mitigation measures to protect these reptiles.

Sources: Salamandra (2025) *61, 240-255* & *Phys.org* (2025) phys.org/news/2025-05-sand-lizards-home-railway-tracks.html

Borealis Mud Volcano discovered in the Barents Sea

Scientists have discovered the Borealis Mud Volcano in the Barents Sea, c. 400 m beneath the surface. It is the second of its kind found in Norwegian waters, located c. 70 nautical miles south of Bear Island. It is characterized by a 300 m wide crater and a 2.5 m high central cone measuring 7 m in diameter that emits methane-rich fluids. The surrounding seabed is covered with extensive carbonate crusts, indicating that methane has been seeping from the site for thousands of years. These crusts provide a stable substrate for various marine organisms, including anemones, tube-dwelling worms, sea slugs and sparse colonies of octocorals. Additionally, the carbonates offer shelter and feeding opportunities for fish populations, including the endangered Atlantic redfish. The Borealis Mud Volcano serves as a natural sanctuary for these species, offering refuge from human activities like bottom trawling. Researchers emphasize the importance of preserving such ecosystems to maintain marine biodiversity and to understand the interactions between geological processes and marine life.

Source: University of Oslo (2025) mn.uio.no/geo/english/research/news-and-events/news/2025/underwater-mud-volcano-barents-sea.html

No fin whale hunt in Iceland this year

In a significant development for marine conservation, Iceland's largest whaling company, Hvalur hf., has announced it will not hunt fin whales during the 2025 season. This decision follows a prolonged period of declining demand for whale meat, particularly in Japan, which has traditionally been the primary export market. The economic downturn and reduced profitability have rendered the hunt financially unviable. The announcement marks a notable shift, as Hvalur hf. had been granted a 5-year license in December 2024 to hunt 209 fin whales annually during 2025–2029. However, the company has opted to forgo the hunt this year, citing unfavourable market conditions. This move is seen by some conservationists as a potential turning point in the global effort to end commercial whaling. Yet although this development is welcomed by environmental groups, they caution that unused quotas could be carried over into future years, and other species such as minke whales may still be targeted. Therefore, vigilance and continued advocacy are essential to ensure the protection of whale populations and the eventual cessation of commercial whaling.

Source: Whale and Dolphin Conservation (2025) uk.whales.org/2025/04/11/breaking-no-fin-whale-hunt-in-iceland-this-year

Eurasian pygmy owl population discovered in Spain

The Eurasian pygmy owl *Glaucidium passerinum*, Europe's smallest owl, has been confirmed in Catalonia, Spain, for the first time, marking a significant range expansion. In early 2023, researchers recorded its distinctive call in Val d'Aran, Catalonia, using automated audio recorders. Subsequent field verification in January 2025 confirmed the species' presence, with the local government of Val d'Aran officially announcing the discovery. This owl measures 15–19 cm in length and is typically found in the boreal forests of Northern and Central Europe to Siberia. Its diet primarily consists of small mammals and birds, and it nests in tree cavities, often those excavated by woodpeckers. While the species is generally sedentary, some individuals may move south during harsh winters. The recent sighting in Spain follows previous reports of the owl in the French Pyrenees in 2015 and in Aragon, Spain, in 2021. Experts suggest that increased survey efforts and potential changes in prey availability may contribute to these new observations.

Source: BirdGuides (2025) birdguides.com/news/eurasian-pygmy-owl-population-discovered-in-spain

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AFRICA

Research discoveries: new population of rare chameleon in Madagascar . . .
Conservationists supported by the Conservation Leadership Programme (CLP) have discovered a new population of the Belalanda chameleon *Furcifer belalandaensis* in south-western Madagascar. Previously known from only two villages, this Critically Endangered species now has a third known habitat, offering renewed hope for its survival. Madagascar is home to nearly half of the world's chameleon species, many of which are endemic and face threats from habitat loss, deforestation and climate change. The discovery underscores the importance of integrating scientific research with community engagement and emphasizes the critical role of local and international collaboration. Efforts are underway to raise awareness amongst local communities and implement conservation strategies that balance conservation with sustainable development. By combining field research with community-based initiatives, conservationists aim to ensure the long-term survival of the Belalanda chameleon.
Source: Fauna & Flora (2025) fauna-flora.org/news/conservation-award-winners-discover-new-population-of-vanishingly-rare-chameleon-in-madagascar

. . . **new killifish species in Kenya** . . .
In March 2025, researchers announced the discovery of *Nothobranchius sylvaticus*, a new killifish species found in ephemeral swamps within Kenya's Gongoni Forest. It is the first forest-dwelling endemic killifish ever recorded. The discovery was confirmed using a combination of principal component analysis of morphology and DNA sequencing. A comprehensive phylogenetic study revealed that its lineage diverged from its closest relatives over 7 million years ago, implying the Gongoni Forest is at least as old. This tiny forest covers just 8.2 km² and represents part of the East African Mosaic: a patchwork of savannah and forest running from South Africa to Somalia. The new species is marked by distinctive iridescent blue scales, a red-lobed grey head, golden-spotted fins and a red tail edged in black. Because it relies on seasonal wetlands within an isolated habitat, it is considered threatened with extinction.
Sources: Zootaxa (2025) doi.org/p8js & *Mongabay* (2025) news.mongabay.com/2025/03/researchers-find-new-killifish-species-in-kenya

. . . **Critically Endangered marine species off the coast of Tanzania** . . .
An expedition to Latham Island, a remote islet off Tanzania's coast, has unveiled a marine ecosystem of high ecological value. Led by the Wildlife Conservation Society in collaboration with Tanzanian and international partners, the comprehensive survey documented a thriving seabird population, with large numbers of masked boobies, brown noddies, sooty terns and great crested terns. Beneath the surface, researchers identified Critically Endangered marine species such as the bowmouth guitarfish and scalloped hammerhead shark. The coral reefs surrounding Latham Island are notably resilient to climate change and are ecologically connected to Zanzibar's reef systems. Data from the expedition have been integrated into global databases to help identify climate-resilient reefs worldwide. The findings are pivotal in informing plans to establish Tanzania's first offshore Marine Protected Area, aiming to safeguard this biodiversity hotspot and ensure sustainable resource use.
Source: Wildlife Conservation Society (2025) newsroom.wcs.org/News-Releases/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/24334/In-Remote-Tanzania-Research-Expedition-Uncovers-Critically-Endangered-Species-and-Paves-the-Way-for-Countrys-First-Ever-Offshore-MPA.aspx

. . . **and chimpanzees communicate by striking stones against trees**
A 5-year study has revealed that wild chimpanzees in Guinea-Bissau engage in a behaviour termed stone-assisted drumming. Adult males strike stones against tree trunks, resulting in accumulations of stones at the base of these trees. This behaviour appears to serve as a form of communication, producing loud, low-frequency sounds that travel long distances through dense forests. Notably, this stone-assisted drumming differs from traditional chimpanzee drumming, whereby individuals typically drum on hollow buttress roots using their hands or feet. In the observed behaviours, chimpanzees often emit loud vocalizations, known as pant-hoots, before engaging in stone throwing, followed by a period of silence. This sequence contrasts with conventional drumming patterns and suggests a distinct communicative purpose. The study indicates that this behaviour is culturally transmitted within chimpanzee communities.
Sources: Biology Letters (2025) doi.org/g9mbb5 & *Phys.org* (2025) phys.org/news/2025-05-year-chimpanzees-stones-trees-communication.html

Bleak future for Karoo succulents as desert expands in South Africa
The Succulent Karoo, a biodiversity hotspot in South Africa and Namibia, is under severe threat from desertification driven by climate change, overgrazing, mining and poaching. This semi-arid region, home to over 6,000 plant species—many of which are succulents and found nowhere else—is experiencing prolonged droughts, rising temperatures and shifting sands that are killing vegetation and transforming ecosystems. Human activity has significantly worsened the crisis. Decades of overgrazing and land degradation from mining have left the soil exposed and vulnerable. Since 2019, illegal trade in rare succulents, particularly the *Conophytum* genus, has surged to meet international demand, leading to mass poaching and pushing many species toward extinction. To preserve genetic diversity, conservationists are promoting cultivation of threatened species in controlled environments such as nurseries and botanical gardens.
Source: Mongabay (2025) news.mongabay.com/2025/03/desert-creep-in-south-africa-spells-bleak-future-for-succulent-resplendent-karoo

In Côte d'Ivoire, women lead the way in forest conservation
In Côte d'Ivoire's Haut-Sassandra region, women are pivotal in forest conservation. The area, once rich in tropical forests, has seen natural forest cover plummeting by > 79% during 2001–2013 because of illegal logging and agricultural expansion. To combat this, the NGO SOS-Forêts, supported by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives, launched the Conservation Champions programme in 2024. This initiative has trained 110 women from local villages, equipping them with skills in sustainable resource management, forest governance and compliance with legal regulations. Economic empowerment is central to the programme, with oyster mushroom cultivation providing alternative livelihoods and reducing reliance on wood resources. Six mushroom beds have been established, contributing to food security and income diversification. Additionally, the women have collectively reforested 15 ha of land, with two plots registered under a women's cooperative and four more in the process, marking significant progress in land tenure and sustainable forest management.
Source: BirdLife International (2025) birdlife.org/news/2025/03/22/in-cote-divoire-women-lead-the-charge-in-forest-conservation

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AMERICAS

Vast marine sanctuary created in the South Atlantic Ocean

In May 2025, Argentina established Patagonia Azul Provincial Park, a vast marine sanctuary in Chubut province, spanning c. 729,000 acres. This marks Chubut's first marine provincial park, aimed at safeguarding one of the South Atlantic's most biodiverse regions. Patagonia Azul encompasses > 60 islands and islets, kelp forests and rugged coastal habitats. These areas serve as critical feeding, breeding and migratory zones for a diverse array of marine life. The Park is home to > 50 seabird species, including Magellanic penguins, giant petrels and imperial cormorants, and marine mammals such as seals and whales. The creation of the park is a significant achievement, providing legal protection to a vulnerable ecosystem threatened by industrial fishing. To promote sustainable tourism and community engagement, a scenic coastal road now connects key attractions from Cabo Dos Bahías to Bahía Bustamante.
Source: BBC Wildlife (2025) discoverwildlife.com/environment/patagonia-azul-provincial-park-argentina

Climate change: Colombian coffee farmers switch to cacao cultivation . . .

Colombian coffee smallholders are increasingly replacing coffee with cocoa because rising temperatures are making low-altitude coffee cultivation less viable. In regions such as Risaralda and the Sierra Nevada, average temperatures have surpassed the Arabica threshold of 24 °C, leading to increasing problems with pests and diseases, and declining yields. Global coffee and cocoa prices have surged, partly driven by reduced yields in West Africa caused by hotter, drier conditions and diseases. This shortfall has also accelerated diversification in Central and South America, where initiatives are assisting farmers in transitioning to cocoa production and adopting agroforestry systems. In eastern Colombia's Orinoquía, a 5-year pilot aims to convert 3,000 ha to sustainable cocoa, train producers, integrate shade trees, reduce cadmium levels and enhance market access. Such integrated, climate-adaptive models offer hope for resilient livelihoods and more secure supply chains, even as both commodities continue to face weather-driven volatility.
Source: Mongabay (2025) news.mongabay.com/2025/04/colombian-coffee-farmers-make-switch-to-cacao-as-climate-warms-and-prices-soar

. . . and Hawai'i passes landmark tourist fee

In May 2025, Hawai'i enacted a pioneering 'green fee' to address the environmental impacts of tourism and climate change. The legislation introduces a 0.75% increase to the existing hotel tax, affecting visitors staying in hotels, short-term rentals and cruise ships. This is projected to generate c. USD 100 million annually for climate resilience and biodiversity conservation projects, such as restoring coral reefs and native forests, and removing invasive grasses that exacerbate wildfire risks. With a resident population of 1.4 million and c. 10 million visitors annually, Hawai'i's ecosystems and infrastructure face significant strain. The devastating Lahaina wildfire in 2023 underscored the urgency of enhancing environmental protection. Public support for the fee is strong, with many tourists expressing willingness to contribute to the preservation of Hawai'i's natural beauty.
Source: Conservation International (2025) conservation.org/blog/hawai-i-passes-landmark-green-fee-to-fight-climate-change

Traffic noise increases aggression in Galápagos yellow warblers

A new study reveals that male Galápagos yellow warblers exhibit increased aggression when exposed to traffic noise. Researchers conducted experiments on 38 male warblers across Floreana and Santa Cruz islands. They played recordings of rival bird songs, both with and without accompanying traffic sounds, to observe behavioural responses. Birds residing near roads displayed heightened aggression, such as approaching speakers and flying overhead, suggesting readiness for confrontation. In contrast, those farther from roads showed less aggression when exposed to the same stimuli, indicating traffic noise may mask territorial songs and prompt birds to adopt more physical displays to defend their territory. Even on Floreana Island, with only c. 10 vehicles, the warblers' behaviour was affected, highlighting that even minimal traffic noise can influence wildlife. Additionally, birds adjusted their songs by increasing duration and raising minimum frequencies to overcome low-frequency traffic noise interference. These findings underscore the impact of human-induced noise pollution on wildlife behaviours, even in remote areas.
Sources: Animal Behaviour (2025) doi.org/p8j4 & *Eco Watch* (2025) ecowatch.com/galapagos-yellow-warblers-behavior-traffic-noise.html

First-ever release of captive-bred hooded grebes into the wild

Argentina has carried out the first-ever release of captive-bred hooded grebes *Podiceps gallardoi* into the wild. This Critically Endangered species, discovered only in 1974, has suffered severe population declines because of habitat degradation, invasive species and climate change. With wild birds failing to reproduce in recent years, ex situ breeding provides a lifeline. The initiative involves collecting the second egg, which is typically abandoned by the parents, from wild nests. These eggs are then incubated and the chicks raised in captivity. The first juveniles have now been released into the Santa Cruz River estuary, to boost the wild population. This effort is part of the broader Hooded Grebe Project, launched in 2010 by Aves Argentinas and partners, which combines field research, predator control and habitat protection to safeguard the species.
Source: BirdLife International (2025) birdlife.org/news/2025/05/05/first-ever-release-of-captive-bred-hooded-grebes-into-the-wild

Study assesses how to reduce conflict between jaguars and people

A recent study led by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has identified effective, low-cost strategies to mitigate conflicts between jaguars and livestock farmers across Latin America. The research, encompassing 248 cattle ranches from Mexico to Argentina, evaluated methods such as LED lights, electric fencing, cowbells, donkey guards, strategic water placement and hunting bans. These interventions significantly reduced livestock losses, with some ranches reporting up to a 100% decrease in jaguar attacks. In Paraguay's Chaco region, WCS Paraguay assessed nine ranches, some housing up to 18,000 cattle. The implementation of combined deterrents, including cowbells and donkey guards, led to a 79% reduction in predation. These measures not only protect livestock but also prevent retaliatory killings of jaguars. By promoting coexistence of people and top predators, these findings offer a sustainable path forward for both wildlife conservation and agricultural productivity in regions where human–jaguar interactions are prevalent.
Source: Wildlife Conservation Society (2025) newsroom.wcs.org/News-Releases/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/24561/More-Cowbells-New-Study-Assesses-How-to-Reduce-Conflict-Between-Jaguars-and-Communities.aspx

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ASIA & OCEANIA

Geotagging project launched to protect Kashmir's iconic chinar trees

Kashmir's iconic chinar trees, known for their vibrant red and gold autumn leaves, are under threat from urban development, climate change and alleged illegal felling. These majestic trees, introduced by Mughal emperors centuries ago, have long symbolized the region's cultural heritage and natural beauty, but their numbers are declining. Recent reports of ancient chinars being cut down have sparked public outrage. Officials claim the trees were only pruned, but photos and eyewitness accounts suggest mature trees were felled. Experts warn that increasing summer heat and decreasing snowfall are stressing these slow-growing trees. To preserve the species, the Jammu and Kashmir government has launched a geotagging project, assigning a QR code to each chinar and recording its location, height, girth and age. These data help monitor the trees' condition and deter illegal logging. So far, c. 29,000 trees have been tagged, with an estimated 6,000–7,000 left.
Source: BBC (2025) bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvgee5ywq2vo

New Zealand mountain Taranaki Maunga declared a legal person

In January 2025, New Zealand's Parliament passed a law granting Taranaki Maunga, a sacred mountain on the North Island, legal personhood. This means the mountain is recognized by law as having rights and responsibilities, similar to a person or a company. It can be represented in court and have its interests defended, ensuring decisions about the mountain must consider its protection and well-being. This legal status acknowledges the cultural and spiritual importance of Taranaki Maunga to the local Māori tribes, Ngā iwi o Taranaki. The law also established a governance body, Te Tōpuni Kōkōrangi, with equal representation from Māori iwi and government members, to act on behalf of the mountain. This approach follows earlier examples such as the Whanganui River and Te Urewera Forest, recognizing natural features as living entities with legal rights. This recognition honours Māori cultural values and strengthens the role of Indigenous communities in protecting the environment.
Source: Mongabay (2025) news.mongabay.com/short-article/2025/02/taranaki-maunga-new-zealand-mountain-declared-a-legal-person

New name for Javan rhinoceros

A recent study has reclassified the Javan rhinoceros, proposing a new scientific name: *Eurhinoceros sondaicus*. This change reflects significant anatomical and ecological differences between the Javan rhinoceros and its close relative, the Indian rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis*. The research highlights how millions of years of evolution have shaped distinct adaptations in these species. The Critically Endangered Javan rhinoceros, now confined to Java's Ujung Kulon peninsula, has a slender skull, shorter nose and teeth suited for browsing leaves. Notably, females are hornless, a trait unique among living rhinoceroses. In contrast, the Indian rhinoceros is larger, with a robust skull, taller teeth adapted for grazing, and characteristic deep skin folds. The Javan rhinoceros tends to be solitary, whereas the Indian rhinoceros often forms temporary groups. Naming *Eurhinoceros sondaicus* as a distinct genus recognizes its evolutionary history and ecological specialization.
Sources: ZooKeys (2025) doi.org/pkvk & *Science Daily* (2025) sciencedaily.com/releases/2025/03/250313130938.htm

Rare musk deer caught on camera in Viet Nam

A rare and elusive species, the dwarf musk deer, has been photographed in Viet Nam's Cao Bang province for the first time in almost 30 years. Captured by camera traps set by Fauna & Flora and local forest protection officials, this marks a significant rediscovery of a species once feared extinct in the region. Native to the Annamite Mountains on the Laos–Viet Nam border, the large-antlered musk deer is categorized as Endangered on the IUCN Red List because of intense poaching and habitat loss. These deer are hunted for their musk glands, which are highly valued in traditional medicine and perfumery. Despite legal protections, the threat from illegal snaring remains widespread in Southeast Asia's forests. The recent camera-trap images were collected in a protected area known for its rugged terrain and rich biodiversity. This rediscovery highlights the importance of continued conservation work and enforcement against wildlife crime. The sighting confirms the species' continued presence in remote areas and reinforces the need for urgent conservation action to safeguard its remaining habitat.
Source: Fauna & Flora (2025) fauna-flora.org/news/rare-musk-deer-caught-on-camera-in-cao-bang-province-vietnam

DNA analysis of Japanese wasp larvae reveals diverse diet

The wasp species *Vespula shidai* is traditionally cultivated for its edible larvae, known as hachinoko, in central Japan. Utilizing DNA metabarcoding to analyse the gut contents of larvae from both wild and human-reared nests, researchers discovered that they consume a remarkable 324 species, encompassing insects, arachnids, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish. Both wild and reared colonies predominantly feed on birds and mammals, but wild nests exhibited a broader variety, suggesting that access to nutrient-rich vertebrate carrion is important for the wasps' development. Conversely, reared wasps appear less dependent on such carrion, potentially impacting local scavenger ecosystems. Both wild and reared nests consumed high numbers of insects, indicating reared wasps could still contribute to insect population control.
Sources: Journal of Insects as Food and Feed (2025) doi.org/p8m6 & *Phys.org* (2025) phys.org/news/2025-05-dna-analysis-japanese-wasp-larvae.html

New Caledonia bans deep sea mining

New Caledonia has imposed a 50-year ban on deep sea mining within its territorial waters. The ban, passed unanimously by its Congress, is a precautionary measure to protect fragile marine ecosystems. Deep sea mining involves disturbing the ocean floor to extract metals like cobalt and nickel, which are in high demand for so-called green technologies. However, this activity can cause long-term damage to biodiversity, with recovery times spanning decades or centuries. The Pacific Island nations of Fiji, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea have all expressed support for moratoriums or bans, citing similar concerns. Internationally, over 20 countries have called for a pause on seabed mining until more is known about its long-term effects.
Source: Radio France Internationale (2025) rfi.fr/en/environment/20250502-new-caledonia-bans-dangerous-seabed-mining-for-half-a-century

All internet addresses were up to date at the time of writing. The Briefly section in this issue was written and compiled by Amy Dennett and Julia Hochbach, with an additional contribution from Simon Pooley. Contributions from authoritative published sources (including websites) are always welcome. Please send contributions to oryx@fauna-flora.org.

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