In this issue of Red Panda Network eNews, learn why red pandas have been identified as an umbrella species and how it’s more important than ever to stop wildlife crime. Also, celebrate Earth Day 2020 red-panda-style and check out some red panda rockstars!

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Highlights Need to Stop Illegal Trade of Red Pandas and Other Wildlife
As humanity continues to endure COVID-19, RPN bolsters efforts to stop the illegal red panda trade and to protect pangolins.

We love introducing more people to red pandas. They are incredibly intelligent, whimsical, and cute animals. But as red panda popularity has risen, so has poaching; whether they’re killed for their furs, or captured to be sold as exotic pets, an issue we wrote about in our No Panda Pets article.

When you hear “poaching,” the first thing you might think of is the loss of animal lives. But the consequences of animal poaching can have unexpectedly far-reaching impacts beyond the loss of life. It’s suspected that the recent coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak may have been caused by animal-to-human transmission from a wild animal market in Wuhan, China. Although it’ll take time for experts to determine the exact cause for the breakout, this wouldn’t be the first time a disease outbreak may have been caused by the illegal hunting, capture and sale of animals; the Ebola virus outbreak epidemic of 2014, the Swine Influenza pandemic in 2009, and the Nipah virus outbreak of 1999 representing just a few of the more recent examples.

What is RPN doing to fight back against poaching?

Stopping the illegal wildlife trade is a hard problem to solve, and something the Red Panda Network has been working on for years. In 2016, we announced an anti-poaching network, consisting of our Forest Guardian team and other local stakeholders. Our Forest Guardians are our troops on the ground. They are paid to monitor red panda habitats and help educate their communities, and are essential to two core tenets of our anti-poaching efforts - education and patrolling.

Community-based conservation and education

Many people don't understand how serious an issue poaching is. Not only does poaching hurt animals, but it also creates a “serious threat from habitat destruction and degradation” according to a report from TRAFFIC that can impact hundreds of other species. And as we’ve seen with some of the disease outbreaks in the past, there can be a human cost as well.
Educating the communities and law enforcement helps us better partner with them to identify and protect red pandas and other animals. In December 2019, we conducted a two-day anti-poaching training session with 43 of our Forest Guardians. This training covered the scope of the illegal red panda trade problem, the efforts made by various Nepalese authorities to stop illegal red panda trade, and also strengthened our relationship with the law enforcement officers in each district making it easier for Forest Guardians to report poaching activities for investigation.

**Patrolling to stop poaching**

Our Forest Guardians actively patrol red panda habitats. In 2019, our anti-poaching networks patrolled over 130km of forests in Eastern Nepal. Patrolling red panda habitats helps us fight back against poaching in a few ways:

- Patrolling helps us collect vital information. Our Forest Guardians look for signs of poaching, collect data on these illegal activities, and report them to the respective government officials. This helps us understand how much poaching occurs, and then determine the best approach for fighting back against it.

- Patrolling allows us to protect animals by removing traps. We also set up cameras in areas where we notice frequent poaching activity, which helps us remove traps more quickly, and in some cases even identify poachers for prosecution.

- Finally, patrolling enables our Forest Guardian team to take an active role in enforcing anti-poaching laws. Stopping poaching is a team effort. In cases where we’re able to capture footage of poachers in action, our Forest Guardians work closely with local law enforcement to identify, track down, and arrest poachers.

Continue reading article

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**Planet Earth & Red Pandas Need Each Other**

We are looking forward to celebrating the 50th anniversary of Earth Day with you. This year's theme is 'climatic action' which feels so important:

"The enormous challenge — but also the vast opportunities — of action on climate change have distinguished the issue as the most pressing topic for the 50th anniversary."

The Eastern Himalayan forests where red pandas live are the lungs of South Asia. As a flagship and umbrella species, red panda conservation helps to protect this bio-diverse ecoregion and combat global climate change.

Celebrate Earth Day 2020 with this free gift when you [donate](#) or [symbolically adopt a red panda](#)!
Receive this free Earth Day t-shirt when you donate or adopt!

Donate

Shelter from the Storm: How Red Panda Protection Can Help Other Species in Decline
Red pandas aren’t the largest in their class, but these nocturnal Asian mammals -about the size of a house cat- are big indicators of the health of their habitat.

Listed as “endangered” on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, red pandas are what conservationists call an “umbrella species.” That means that, ideally, conservation efforts put into place to protect them also will protect other animals within their geographical area.

Native to the Himalayas, red pandas can be found in a disjunct range comprising Bhutan, Nepal, India, China and Myanmar. Within this territory, Red Panda Network (RPN) continues to set up the Panchthar-Ilam-Taplejung (PIT) Red Panda Protected Forest in Eastern Nepal.

RPN believes that establishing this uninterrupted stretch of land measuring 11,500 square kilometers will also benefit other threatened and critically endangered animals on the Red List, such as the clouded leopard (“vulnerable”), the Assam macaque (“near threatened”) and the Chinese Pangolin (“critically endangered”).

The red panda is the ideal umbrella species because the basic requirements for its conservation results in the protection of many other species at the ecosystem level.
Throughout the 20th century, conservationists informally used umbrella species to outline the size and boundaries of wildlife reserves, and the formal idea that one species could be used to protect others within its range didn’t take hold until the 1980s and 1990s, according to Tim Caro, a behavioral/evolutionary ecologist and conservation biologist at UC Davis. Caro has written extensively about the umbrella-species concept.

Recently, ecologists have begun to re-evaluate this theory. A 2018 study found that conservation interventions in Wyoming on behalf of the greater sage-grouse negatively impacted two other birds in the area, the Brewer’s sparrow and the sage thrasher.

In their paper looking at the usefulness of the umbrella species as a conservation tool, Jean-Michel Roberge and Per Angelstam concluded that some multi-species approaches, ones that included a “dream team” of focal species and took into account a variety of habitat needs and terrain characteristics, used in conjunction with other conservation methods could be the most actionable.

Carefully selecting that “dream team” is key to efficiently and cost-effectively preventing the extinction of threatened species, as the authors of a November 2019 study discovered. Researchers from the University of Queensland and various conservation groups compared the Australian federal government’s list of animals prioritized for conservation funding to the list of animals whose management their investigation found had most benefited other species within their ranges.

They determined that the Australian government could increase the protection of threatened terrestrial plants and animals from 6% to 46% by choosing more efficient umbrella species, such as the purple clover and the koala.
Claire Dubiel

Claire is an avid red panda enthusiast. Friends and family have known about her obsession for years and up until this past summer you would be able to see Claire driving around with the Texas state license plate 'RED PNDA'. Her infatuation with ringed tailed creatures began long before seeing her first red panda at the San Diego Zoo in 2006. No, it all began seeing families of raccoons pass through her family's backyard on their way to the park across the street. When she finally set eyes on an animal she has never seen before going out on a walk with his zookeeper, it was destiny. "His name was Fuji and he changed my life", says Claire. Is it a fox? No. Is it a raccoon? No. It's the most adorable and precious creature in the animal kingdom, the Red Panda!
She bought her first red plushie at the San Diego Zoo store, named her Mei Mei meaning "little sister" in Chinese, and thus her red panda collection began. Over the years her red panda collection exploded as Claire visited more zoos across the country, driving out their stock of red panda related merchandise, and families and friends eventually figured out to gift anything red panda themed for birthdays and holidays. “About 10% of my wardrobe has a Red Panda on it”, Claire states proudly. Now, those friends and family are afraid to gift something red panda because they are afraid she already owns it, which is a valid concern. “I feel if red pandas become popular like sloths, otters, corgis, and avocados, I wouldn’t be able to keep up anymore, because I’d go broke. But I don’t see why they haven’t struck it big in the media.”

Claire’s biggest regret in life is not making photocopies of her red panda ranger packet that got lost in the mail when she was in 3rd grade. Now, she is in her early 20s and continues to give to the Red Panda Network every month through direct donation and enrollment in Amazon Prime Smile. She fully intends to give her firstborn the Latin name for the red panda genus as a middle name, Ailurus. Now, there is an illustrated children’s book published and available on the Red Panda Network's gift store called Fuji Takes a Walk written by his trainer, Janell Roesener, about the same red panda in the San Diego Zoo that inspired it all.

Thank you, Claire, for your inspiring love for red pandas and incredible dedication to their conservation. We are truly honored to have you as a member of our Panda Guardian team!

Holly MacCormick

“I'll never forget my first glimpse of a red panda. I was admiring the birds, animals, and exotic plants at the Minnesota Zoo when I rounded a corner and saw an animal unlike anything I’d ever seen before—a red panda. I adore animals, yet I hadn’t known this gorgeous creature existed. How many other natural wonders was I unaware of?

That feeling of awe, delight, and curiosity stuck with me. To me, red pandas are a reminder that nature contains so many extraordinary things yet to be discovered. I wish everyone could experience the feeling I had when I saw a...
red panda for the first time, even if only briefly.

I volunteer for Red Panda Network (RPN) not only because of the incredible work they do in the field of red panda conservation, but also because of the way they do it. RPN researched different approaches to conservation and found that involving and educating the local (and global) communities who coexist with red pandas is the most effective way to save this important and awe-inspiring species.

Since I started volunteering in October of 2018, I’ve had some incredible experiences with the RPN team. These experiences have deepened my knowledge and appreciation of red pandas and the natural world around me in unforeseen and wonderful ways. I recently joined RPN at the 2019 WCN Expo in San Francisco where we met a conservation icon—Dr. Jane Goodall. Our faces in this photo say it all.

I’ve gained so much by volunteering for RPN—the opportunity to do something good for others, a chance to give back, and the feeling that I’m helping an animal and community I care deeply about. I’ve also made some incredible friends in the process. If you haven’t volunteered or contributed to conservation efforts before, I highly recommend it. The red pandas, all living things, and this glorious ecosystem we call home need you.”

Holly is an incredibly talented writer and is a member of RPN's Writing and Communications volunteer team. She is also a passionate conservationist and a dedicated member of our recurring donor team—the Panda Guardians! Thank you for all of your support and commitment to red panda conservation, Holly!

Photo L to R: RPN Development Manager, Terrance Fleming; RPN Country Director, Ang Phuri Sherpa; Jane Goodall; RPN Writing and Communications Volunteer, Holly MacCormick; Development Associate, Mark Hougardy

Read more spotlights

Red Panda Network is committed to the conservation of wild red pandas and their habitat through the education and empowerment of local communities.