The Christian Science Monitor Weekly

"The object of the Monitor is to injure no man, but to bless all mankind."

– MARY BAKER EDDY

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Safety, balance, tolerance, and coexistence

In this week's cover story, writer Michael Benanav brings readers to India, where conservationists are celebrating the triumphant resurgence of big cats.

Both in India and around the world, leopards and tigers are considered majestic and beautiful creatures. But they are also predators. In India's Uttarakhand state, the increase in wild cats has come with a parallel surge in violent attacks on people. This unintended consequence has sparked a spate of new questions about safety, balance, tolerance, and coexistence.

On its face, this story is a uniquely Indian one. But it is a tale told the world over, as communities confront the realities of initiatives designed to restore ecological balance by returning animals that had been under threat to the wild.



BY NOELLE SWAN
EDITOR, WEEKLY EDITION

In the United States, rewilding efforts have brought gray wolves to Colorado, red wolves to North Carolina, and grizzly bears to the North Cascades in Washington state. In South Africa, conservationists have restocked the Loskop Dam Nature Reserve with several animals whose numbers have been dwindling, including the southern white rhino. In Europe, several decades of conservation measures have led to explosions in populations of carnivores, including bears, lynx, wolves, and wolverines.

Such efforts are often fueled by a desire to right an ecological wrong. But an ecosystem is not a vacuum. Reintroducing animals to the wild often means that people must, once again, learn to live with them. The tension is particularly acute with carnivores that can pose threats to people and livestock. But even herbivores can present challenges. The reintroduction of beavers, for instance, can spark backlash from farmers and homeowners who worry about potential flooding.

At their root, these stories are about the interconnectedness of all living things. In the past, humanity has confronted such challenges with brute force – hence the near extinction of so many species. But with rewilding efforts, there is recognition that another way is possible. Of course, the conflicts that arise in their wake cannot be ignored. Balance must be sought.

Michael's story from Uttarakhand is rich with personal details of what it is like to live with leopards and tigers. As Sanjay Sondhi, a founder of Titli Trust, a nonprofit that works on reducing human-leopard conflict, says in Michael's story, "There are no easy answers, but the solution must be coexistence. You can't eliminate leopards or people." ▪

ISTANBUL

In Turkey, authoritarian president faces burgeoning protests

By Fariba Nawa / Special contributor

As hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in Istanbul March 29 for the largest demonstration against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in over a decade, one young woman explained why the mood was so fervent.

This is Turkey's last chance to save its weakening democracy, says Dilara, a psychology student who preferred not to give her full name.

"We are here for our freedom," she says. "We don't want to become Iran or Iraq. We're trying to save our country."

The protests first broke out March 19, when police arrested the popular mayor of Istanbul and Mr. Erdoğan's chief rival, Ekrem İmamoğlu. The opposition leader was charged with corruption, just as he was about to be nominated as the presidential candidate for the Republican People's Party (CHP) in elections due in 2028.

The protesters were demanding he be freed, and that the elections be brought forward.

WHY WE WROTE THIS
FREEDOM

A new wave of popular protest is gathering strength in Turkey, where President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is showing increasing signs of authoritarianism. But past demonstrations have not been enough to make him back down.

In a letter read out to the roaring crowds of demonstrators, Mr. İmamoğlu accused Mr. Erdoğan of being "afraid of his opponent."

"If young people are on the front line," the letter adds, "it's because they are the ones who feel most anxiety about the future. This is not about Ekrem İmamoğlu, it is about our country ... about justice, democracy and freedom."

Wide range of protesters

That message appears to be gathering a broader range of adherents than previous waves of popular protests against Mr. Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian style of government.

Since he first won office 22 years ago, the president has enjoyed solid support from socially conservative Muslim women voters, who have appreciated his positive attitude toward headscarves. But among the protesters were many women wearing such scarves.

One was Zeynep, a university student who withheld her last name for security reasons, waving a Turkish flag and a balloon reading "Erdo-Gone."

"My religion is not Erdoğan," she says. "He used religion to cheat our people."

Though the first weeks of protests were largely peaceful, nearly 2,000 people have been arrested. "Our rights are being held captive. We cannot express ourselves, or we go to jail," says Serra Aktay, a law student who was also at the festive rally. "I want my country to be fair, to have a democracy, when I graduate."

The demonstrations, now due to be held on a weekly basis according to CHP leaders, recall mass anti-government protests staged 12 years ago, which attracted over a million people but eventually petered out.

The new generation of students, which has known no other leader than Mr. Erdoğan, may be willing to fight longer and harder because

it puts little trust in his leadership, say some political observers.

Though Mr. İmamoğlu's arrest was the spark for the current protests, the list of popular grievances against the ruling Justice and Development Party has grown in recent years to include weakening respect for human rights and rising inflation and unemployment – signs of an ailing economy.

"I think it makes a tremendous amount of sense that people, especially the youth, are angrier" than they were in 2013, says Lisel Hintz, a Turkey expert at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. "The political and economic climates are exponentially worse," she points out.

Fundamental issues at stake

Mr. Erdoğan, meanwhile, has dismissed the protests as "a show" and asked the country to trust its justice system to try Mr. İmamoğlu.

"I think the government is counting on the protesters exhausting themselves or fragmenting from within," Dr. Hintz suggests, as has happened in the past.

But the fundamental nature of the grievances being expressed could lend strength to the protests, believes Gönül Tol, a Turkey expert and senior fellow at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

This movement may have a better chance of success, she argues, because "These protests are addressing a much larger issue with a wider agenda. They are trying to defend democracy and their right to vote."

If the government appoints its own mayor and keeps Mr. İmamoğlu in jail, she predicts, the opposition movement could grow. But Mr. Erdoğan may not want to risk the chaos and economic downturn that continued mass protests would bring, Dr. Tol says.

On the other hand, "Erdoğan has some cards to play," she points out. "He can use some of the tactics that he used in 2013. He can unleash his own counter protests and unleash more police brutality."

That is a fear shared by Ceylan Akça, a parliamentarian from the Kurdish-led People's Equality and Democracy Party aligned with the opposition. "Based on previous examples, I would say it's very unlikely for the president to take a step back," says Ms. Akça. "That's how authoritarianism works, always the iron fist." ▪

COLUMBUS, GA.

Will Trump's push to cut waste hit Social Security? The view from Georgia.

By Patrik Jonsson / Staff writer

As the Trump administration vows to cut fraud and waste in the Social Security system, Teresa Casey, a Trump voter, says she is finding out what that means for beneficiaries like her.

The former convenience store clerk is now on disability, administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA). But a few months ago, the checks stopped coming. "Someone made a huge mistake," she says.

So when she stopped by the low-slung SSA building on the outskirts of Columbus, Georgia, to clear it up, her life balance seemed at stake. Ms. Casey is one of a growing number caught in the middle of a national debate over federal efforts to streamline government – and whether gains in efficiency might come at a cost to people who rely on federal services.

"This isn't about politics now," says Ms. Casey. "This is my life."

Come September, this SSA office lease will be terminated, one of 26 planned Social Security office closings across the United States this year, according to The Associated Press. This coincides with new efforts to combat fraud at the agency, which will force people to come in person or use an online portal to verify their identity, rather than being able to call in.

Walk-ins at the Columbus office were banned as early as Jan. 1, before Mr. Trump took office. But the new cuts are expected to add pressure on an agency already struggling to keep to its mission of handling monthly payments to 74 million Americans and issuing Social Security numbers for the 10,000 new U.S. citizens born every day.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Many Americans say government needs to become more efficient. Will feelings shift when the streamlining affects programs they rely on? Administrative changes to Social Security are bringing this question to the fore.

The cuts are likely to affect people like Ms. Casey in particular. While Social Security retirement benefits are largely automated, disability recipients must frequently reapply for benefits. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has suggested that only "fraudsters" would complain about a missed check.

"If you think she is cheating, come spend some time at her house," says James Knox, Ms. Casey's ex-husband, who took time off his job at an art supply plant to drive his former wife to the office. Severe health challenges have left her unable to drive or work, he adds.

Ms. Casey says she first voted when Donald Trump ran for office, but that loyalty is being tested by a sense that her life is tied to the administration's actions.

What Americans expect from government

The effort to curb the Social Security Administration and its activities is part of a broader reshaping of government. And the idea of reducing government waste is generally supported by Americans, whose favorable views of the federal government and its workers have waned in recent years.

But no matter the veracity of the Trump administration's fraud allegations, changes in how Social Security recipients are served could challenge those views on what the government should and can do.

"I'm afraid a lot of people are about to find out all the ways that they've taken the federal government for granted," says Jacob Malcom, who resigned his Washington position as the U.S. Department of Interior's deputy assistant secretary for policy and environmental management in protest of cuts made by the new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). "That includes anyone who relies on Social Security."

The cancellation of a 1,600-square-foot lease here in Columbus – home to Fort Benning, blues singer Ma Rainey, and Coca-Cola's inventor – is just one part of broader federal closings and worker reductions across the country.

While both Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton took on government waste, Americans have grown increasingly critical of civil servants. In 2018, some 61% of Americans had a "great deal" or "fair amount" of confidence in career civil servants. A 2022 poll showed that those feeling that confidence had dropped to 52%, according to the Pew Research Center.

Mitchell Scacchi of the conservative Pacific Legal Foundation suggests in an online post that low-level bureaucrats are now seen as an "unconstitutional fourth branch of government" whose in-house judgments cost Americans hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity each year.

"This administration is committed to cutting waste, fraud, and abuse," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said at a recent briefing. (Critics say the administration is exaggerating how much Social Security fraud exists, which government auditors have found to be about 1% of payouts.)

The White House has repeatedly stated that legal recipients of

Social Security services and benefits have nothing to worry about. But, as Ms. Casey attests, stark cuts – including a proposed 10% chunk of the SSA's workforce – have a different feel than chopping funding to agencies like the U.S. Institute of Peace. According to the National Institute on Retirement Security, almost 9 in 10 Americans say that Social Security "should remain a priority" for the nation regardless of budget deficits.

The strength of a long-term promise

But the agency has already lost some of its ability to do the work. Between 2010 and 2023, it lost 17% of its customer service budget, while the number of beneficiaries rose by 22%, according to Pamela Herd, a social policy professor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

"Social Security is a clear promise to Americans that if they pay into the system, they will get benefits from that system," says Professor Herd. "At this pace, I don't know how they can fulfill that promise."

DOGE's fast-moving effort is likely contributing to problems like the kind reported by Ms. Casey, she says. "Yes, we need to improve ... but that doesn't change the basic fact that we can't have a functioning government if we don't have a civil service," says Dr. Malcom, the former Interior official. "But if what you want is to accelerate the decline of the U.S. government, then this is a fantastic way to do it."

Back in Columbus, Jerry Don Manning arrives at the SSA office in a truck with a license plate that reads "TEX MAN." The retired businessman says he is "100% supportive" of efforts to root out fraud and reduce the debt. He believes that "they're smart enough to make the right cuts" to a workforce that has become incompetent and inefficient, particularly after the pandemic. At the same time, some Americans may be in for dramatic changes.

"I think we'll feel a little bit of pain now but a lot of gain down the road," he says.

Could the cuts to Social Security become a bigger problem if he applies for benefits?

He ponders the question and the implied risks. "In my view," he says, "that is a possibility – but not a probability." He is willing to take that risk. ▪

YARMOUK CAMP, SYRIA

In Syria, Palestinians' war-shattered camp is a ruin. But it's home.

By Taylor Luck / Special correspondent

As soon as the dictator was out, Samer Jalbout was on the move. Within 24 hours of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's fall in early December, Mr. Jalbout was en route from Idlib in northwest Syria, heading back to the Yarmouk refugee camp outside Damascus.

The father of three had not been there since pro-Assad forces drove his family out seven years ago. He returned to a concrete wasteland. Now, day after day, Mr. Jalbout and his brother Youssef slowly restore – cinder block by cinder block – the bombed-out family compound where they were born and later raised families.

"This is the first time I have relaxed in 14 years," when Syria descended into civil war, Samer Jalbout says. "We are home and no longer live in fear."

An outsider might wonder why thousands of Palestinians in Syria are rushing back to a refugee camp, destroyed nearly beyond recognition, to live in exposed half-buildings with no water or electricity.

"The rest of the world sees this destruction," Mr. Jalbout says, piling concrete into a wheelbarrow and raising a cloud of dust. "But to us this is home. This is everything." More than a physical place, the 68-year-old camp is central to Syrian Palestinians' sense of belonging, they say, their last physical tie to a Palestine they have never seen.

Against the odds, they are proving that you can return home, livable or not.

Yarmouk, covering less than a square mile, was founded in 1957 for refugees driven from northern Palestine by the 1948 Mideast war. The United Nations-administered camp's population grew to some 120,000 before the civil war, making it one of the largest Palestinian refugee camps in the world. Strategically located on the southeastern edge of Damascus, between the capital and the Shiite-revered Sayeda Zainab shrine, the camp saw some of the civil war's most vicious combat. Various rebel militias aligned with Hamas, the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al-Nusra, and later the Islamic State seized parts of the camp and made it a base from which to launch attacks against Mr. Assad's forces in Damascus.

WHY WE WROTE THIS
COMMUNITY

Palestinians flocking back to the Yarmouk refugee camp outside Damascus, Syria, say it's more than a physical place. It's central to their sense of belonging, their last physical tie to a Palestine they have never seen.

Residents recall vividly the brutal siege imposed by the Assad regime from 2013 to 2018, during which little food was allowed into the camp. Residents ate grass for weeks, and 128 people died from starvation.

In 2018, the regime retook the camp from the militias and forced evacuations, allowing only a handful of families to return in 2020.

Now thousands are flocking back. As of late February, some 5,000 families, around 25,000 people, had returned to Yarmouk camp, community leaders estimate.

Nidal Abu Mahmoud left the apartment he had rented in a nearby Damascus neighborhood to restart his family business, selling vegetables from two stands in the camp.

"There is no electricity, cars have difficulty with the roads, there are no schools or pharmacies, and you have to walk a mile out of the camp just to get bread," he says, in between serving a handful of customers after Friday prayers. "It's a difficult life here."

So why, then, are people returning?

He smiles.

"Because Yarmouk is a second Palestine," he says. "This camp is our last tie to our homeland. If we give up on the camp, we are giving up on our right to return."

Syria's "Gaza"

According to U.N. estimates, 60% of the camp's buildings, roads, and water networks are completely destroyed; the other 40% are barely usable.

The camp's 16 U.N.-run schools, three health centers, and one youth center are either completely destroyed or severely damaged and out of service. A sliver of the camp that is connected to power lines gets an hour of electricity a day.

Safed Street, once lined with dozens of workshops and blacksmiths, is littered with rubble.

"This was the economic center of the camp," says community leader Qassem Abdulkader. "Most of these buildings can't even be saved."

The only signs of life are lines of laundry and blankets that returnees have hung where walls once stood.

Even the influx of people has done little to alleviate the sense of desolation and emptiness. Wild dogs roam and howl. The camp goes completely dark at night; few dare venture out past sunset.

"It looks like Khan Yunis and Jabalia," says one passerby, referring to two Gaza cities. "But this is not Gaza. This is Syria. This is Yarmouk."

Maintaining a right of return

Returning to this camp-turned-wasteland was an existential urge, residents say. "This camp is the physical address for the right of return of Palestinians to Palestine," says Mr. Abdulkader. "Our parents and grandparents didn't surrender it; neither can we."

The Jalbout brothers consider themselves fortunate. Government soldiers stripped their building of steel and ceramic tiles, but the family's compound is structurally sound. Many neighboring buildings have collapsed.

They hope that two rooms they have cleared on the ground floor – which once housed an automotive garage and a grocery – can again be rented out. On the second floor, one room is for Samer Jalbout; his wife, Nisreen; and his daughter, Thirayaa, to live in; the second is for Youssef.

Three cushions and a portable gas stove sit on the bare concrete floor. Two blankets do service as an outer wall, though they offer little shelter from wind and rain.

"Our situation has changed 100%," Mr. Jalbout says, his smile caked in concrete dust. "Now we can express our identity and our religion. We can relax and just be. Before we couldn't live openly as Palestinians."

Omar Khalil, a former bus driver for a U.N. school, has renovated his third-floor apartment. He affixed a door to the ground floor entrance, to prevent wild dogs from getting in, and patched the walls with cinderblock so that his daughter, a university student, can study in peace. "There is nothing like having your own roof over your head," says Mr. Khalil. "After years of displacement, we finally feel centered."

"This is our place, our land, our memories," his wife, Nisreen Jamal, says. "Despite the destruction, we see it as heaven." ▪

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

74

Percentage of surveyed European Union citizens who say that membership in the bloc is beneficial to their country, a record high since the question was first posed in 1983. They cited the EU's role in guarding peace and security as critical benefits.

107 BILLION

Dollars, revenue reported by Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD last year, up from about $83 billion in 2023. Seen as a rising star in the EV world, it overtook Tesla's 2024 revenue of about $97.7 billion while touting cheaper models and faster charging stations.

1

Year, the length of time that five members of Venezuela's opposition party have been hiding in Argentina's embassy in Caracas from President Nicolás Maduro's government forces, as of March. The administration has accused the inhabitants of treason and conspiracy.

72

Hours' worth of food and other supplies the European Commission recommends its citizens have on standby, per guidance released in late March. As tensions in Europe rise, countries are investing in conflict-readiness initiatives.

18

Percentage of current or prospective college students surveyed in the United States who believe four-year colleges charge fair prices. Still, 86% believe the money invested pays off 10 years, at most, after graduation.

124

Years that a single light bulb has been shining in a firehouse in Livermore, California. The Centennial Bulb has only been unplugged a few times in all those years.

– Nate Iglehart / Staff writer

Sources: Reuters, The Associated Press, Buenos Aires Times, CNN, Gallup, The Washington Post

EDUCATION CURRENTS

What will happen to grad school? Research universities face tough choices.

By Ira Porter / Staff writer

American colleges and universities are facing hard decisions this spring after the Trump administration cut billions in research dollars.

The White House announced hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to prominent research powerhouses such as Columbia University, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Pennsylvania. Columbia was threatened with the loss of $400 million in grants and contracts due to the school's response to protests of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. Several dozen other schools are being investigated for perceived antisemitism.

Cuts have come in many forms, including billions of dollars being slashed from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). For academia, the billions cut from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) might hurt the most.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Universities are reckoning with cuts of billions of dollars in grants by the White House. Their research can lay the groundwork for what the private sector delivers to the marketplace. Their loss could have lasting consequences.

Research from institutions like NIH affects the sciences, business, education, health care, and more. It lays the groundwork for what the private sector then picks up and delivers to the marketplace. Money used from those grants helps establish labs to conduct research, augment career training and development, fund conferences where information is shared, and pay salaries of small, medium, and large research operations, including the work of master's degree and Ph.D. students at universities.

"American higher education is the absolute envy of the world.

And America's elite institutions of higher education contribute so much, to not just American society but to the world, that it's really a self-inflicted wound for the federal government to be going after these kinds of institutions," says Morgan Polikoff, professor of education at the University of Southern California.

Universities and students have three choices, Dr. Polikoff says. They can file lawsuits, capitulate to government demands for changes, or resist, protest, and vote.

The case of Columbia

In late March, Columbia's trustees opted to make concessions. The university agreed to many Trump administration demands, including adopting a formal definition of antisemitism, adding three dozen special security officers with the power to remove people from campus, and banning masks at demonstrations. It also appointed a senior vice provost to conduct a "thorough review" of its regional studies programs, "starting immediately with the Middle East," according to an unsigned letter from the trustees.

"We have worked hard to address the legitimate concerns raised both from within and without our Columbia community, including by our regulators, with respect to the discrimination, harassment, and antisemitic acts our Jewish community has faced in the wake of October 7, 2023," the trustees wrote. "All of these steps have been underway and are intended to further Columbia's basic mission: to provide a safe and thriving environment for research and education, while preserving our commitment to academic freedom and institutional integrity."

It is unclear whether the grant money will be restored, though Secretary of Education Linda McMahon told CNN in a March 30 interview that she and Columbia's interim president, Katrina Armstrong, have had "great conversations" and "are on the right track now to make sure the final negotiations to unfreeze that money will be in place."

President Donald Trump has made good on his threats to punish and investigate colleges. Sixty colleges and universities, including Yale University, American University, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst, are being investigated over alleged antisemitism on campus. Advocacy groups and politicians have praised his actions. "Columbia let antisemitism run amok," Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman, a Democrat, wrote March 7 on the social media platform X. "Now, Columbia pays for its failure and I support that."

The Trump administration has also pulled $175 million in funding from Penn, his alma mater, for allowing a transgender athlete to participate in women's swimming. That action is in keeping with the president's promise to protect female athletes, and falls in line with his executive order banning trans athletes from participating in women's sports.

Perhaps no university has been threatened with the loss of more funding than Johns Hopkins. It stands to lose $1 billion in awarded grants from USAID and NIH, and announced that more than 2,000 employees globally will be let go in May.

UMass Chan Medical School, in Worcester, Massachusetts, rescinded offers to prospective graduate students at its Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences because of loss of funding. Iowa State University also rescinded offers. Vanderbilt University paused graduate school admissions. Harvard instituted a hiring freeze.

USC's Rossier School of Education still offered 11 candidates admission into its Ph.D. program for this coming year, but not before thinking twice about it. "We have not rescinded any offers, but I can tell you that we did discuss it," says Dr. Polikoff.

"I think there's a tremendous sort of anti-science, anti-intellectual thrust behind this. There's some concept that universities are somehow not American enough for the current administration," says Dr. Judith Feinberg, a professor at West Virginia University and nationally recognized doctor for her clinical research on HIV.

Lasting consequences

The loss of research projects, many worry, could have lasting consequences.

"As I'm thinking about admitting students, I often have to think about not just 'Do I have research needs on a particular project?' but 'Do I really want to be bringing someone into this field?'" Dr. Polikoff says. "'Can I, in good conscience, say that you will be able to get a good job after, and that this is a good investment for you?' It starts to get harder and harder," he adds.

One of the problems with the administration's current actions is that it leaped ahead of other steps, Dr. Polikoff says. For instance, he says he believes that the academy does award too many Ph.D.s in fields that aren't needed, and that that needs to be changed. He also says there are schools where conservative thought is not apparent, which is a problem. He doesn't believe that draining research coffers was the way to address those issues.

The grant money cannot be easily replaced, even at institutions with large endowments, such as Columbia ($14 billion) and Harvard ($50 billion). There are legal requirements governing endowments. For example, presidents cannot spend money donated for scholarships on construction. Typically, a school spends 4% to 5% of its endowment for operational costs annually.

A Ph.D. student from Penn reached for this article was fearful of political retribution for speaking up. But at West Virginia University, a senior named Gracie Hines posted on her Facebook page March 6 that her offer to join the WVU biomedical studies Ph.D. program had been rescinded.

"I got my dream taken away from me today. All because you guys wanted cheaper groceries and gas," Ms. Hines wrote.

"The West Virginia University Health Sciences Office of Research and Graduate Education is limiting admission to its Ph.D. programs due to the unforeseen budgetary challenges resulting from proposed cuts to federal research funding," school spokesperson April Kaull wrote in an email to the Monitor. "We communicated with students who had not yet signed and returned WVU's acceptance letter – a relatively small percentage of the total cohort."

Ms. Kaull said that costs to support university research programs need financial support. She also said that the school has met with affected faculty and students. The university will continue to support its ongoing programs, but will have to reevaluate admissions if circumstances change.

"Our leadership teams continue to work with key constituents and policymakers to seek reconsideration of these proposed federal cuts," Ms. Kaull said.

For Dr. Feinberg, who has spent almost 45 years conducting research, the potential loss of future researchers and problem-solvers is hard to take. "This is like a generation of young people with enthusiasm and excitement, intelligence and maybe ideas that are going to be world-changing, and we're going to lose them," she says. "It's never good to have that kind of loss in continuity for any field." ■

What are the top US cybersecurity concerns?

Amid the threats facing the United States, cybersecurity doesn't make flashy daily headlines – but the latent danger from digital threats has some government officials on alert.

The chair of the House Committee on Homeland Security named cybersecurity a "top priority" earlier this year. Former FBI Director Christopher Wray has called Chinese hacks the "defining threat of our generation."

Foreign hackers interfering against the U.S. worries Democrats and Republicans alike. A string of Chinese hacks into government agencies, infrastructure systems, and telephone companies in recent years has raised alarm bells, including a disclosure in December 2024 that hackers with ties to the Chinese government broke into the U.S. Treasury Department's systems.

In her Senate confirmation hearing, Department of Homeland Security head Kristi Noem called cyberattacks a "rising threat" that "demands our utmost attention." Yet the Trump administration has taken early actions that undermine long-standing cybersecurity efforts, critics argue.

In the middle of all of this, President Donald Trump is trying to chart his course on cybersecurity policy, sometimes sending mixed messages about his intentions. With the growing focus on cybersecurity, here's a look at some of the issues government officials are looking to address.

Q: What cybersecurity concerns does the U.S. face?

Risks are present in both the private and public sectors. One in 3 CEOs globally recently cited cyberespionage and loss of sensitive information as their top concern. Ransomware attacks, in which hackers block access to a computer system until its users pay a "ransom," is a growing concern. These types of attacks rose worldwide by 74% in 2023, with the U.S. "most heavily targeted," according to the former director of national intelligence under President Joe Biden.

The U.S. also faces a shortage of around 500,000 workers in cybersecurity, although some argue that advances in artificial intelligence could reduce the need for cybersecurity professionals.

Then there are foreign actors. Last summer, hackers employed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps were able to breach Mr. Trump's presidential campaign, stealing confidential information. In October, the U.S. disrupted a Russian cyberattack on Defense Department and State Department computers.

But China is outpacing both those countries, as it is responsible for more hacks globally than Russia, North Korea, and Iran combined. The Chinese government often operates through groups of contractors, sometimes called hackers for hire, who are paid to find vulnerabilities within U.S. data systems and infrastructure.

Q: What kind of hacks are involved?

Two of the biggest names among these hackers for hire are Salt Typhoon and Volt Typhoon. (Microsoft assigned these names in order to keep track of the groups.)

Last fall, reporting uncovered that Salt Typhoon had been carrying out a series of damaging cyberattacks since as early as 2022. The hackers targeted at least nine telecommunications firms, including Verizon and AT&T.

Richard Forno, a cybersecurity expert at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, says these hacks probably don't present an immediate threat to the average person. But they give China an informational edge.

Telecommunications and internet infrastructure "underpins so much of our modern society," says Dr. Forno. "So if you can penetrate and potentially disrupt that infrastructure, you can have all sorts of follow-on effects down the road."

Volt Typhoon presents a different kind of threat. In 2023, this hacking group, which is also tied to the Chinese government, was able to penetrate infrastructure such as transportation, water, and energy systems across the U.S. Once they gained access, hackers implanted malware – malicious software – that can essentially lie dormant until China wants to activate it. In early 2024, the FBI announced it had disrupted this attack by removing malware from hundreds of home and office internet routers.

But the U.S. is still determining the scope of these attacks. Many security experts and public officials warn that China could use them as a tool in the event of a conflict – for example, if China invaded Taiwan and wanted to limit the U.S. reaction.

"China traditionally takes a very long, patient view of espionage and warfare," says Dr. Forno.

Q: What is President Trump's stance on cybersecurity?

The Trump administration seems to be prioritizing an offensive approach to cybersecurity. National security adviser Mike Waltz has suggested imposing higher costs and harsher consequences on nations that carry out cyberattacks. The new head of a key federal cybersecurity agency, Sean Plankey, said he expects "more pointed measures at our adversaries."

President Trump has also been reshaping digital security institutions within the federal government. Shortly after taking office, he dissolved the Cyber Safety Review Board, a Biden-created commission that had been investigating the Salt Typhoon hacks. He also oversaw more than 100 layoffs at the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, including some employees who were tracking the efforts of Salt Typhoon and Volt Typhoon, according to media reports. (Some employees have reportedly been rehired and put on probationary leave.)

However, Reuters has reported that in early March, the White House sent a memo directing federal agencies not to fire their cybersecurity teams.

Q: What are some concerns about the Trump administration's cybersecurity practices?

Some early actions of the Trump administration are raising red flags among cybersecurity analysts. Recently, senior officials, including Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, drew bipartisan criticism for posting details of a pending U.S. military strike in group text messages on Signal, an encrypted commercial messaging app. The conversation was revealed after a journalist was accidentally added to the group.

A National Security Council spokesperson confirmed the authenticity of the text chain. Mr. Hegseth denies posting classified information. Yet officials used Signal even though the Department of Defense warned that the app has "a vulnerability" that Russian hackers are trying to exploit, NPR reported.

The quick pace at which Department of Government Efficiency workers have been given access to highly sensitive databases like the Treasury payment system has also generated controversy. Whether the DOGE team is following security protocols is unclear. Violating protocols could increase risks of foreign actors leveraging mistakes for their own gain.

For instance, two federal employees filed a lawsuit accusing the Office of Personnel Management of using an unauthorized private server to send DOGE email blasts across the government. But OPM lawyers argued in a court filing that this email system doesn't pose a security risk because it operates "entirely" on government computers and doesn't use a nongovernment server.

– Caitlin Babcock / Staff writer

GAWAM, MASS.

Waste not, want not? How Massachusetts became the only state to reduce food waste.

By Troy Aidan Sambajon / Staff writer

On a recent Thursday in March, Abe Marciniec unloads two dozen pallets of ice cream – enough to fill 31 refrigerators – into a machine that transforms it into fuel.

Today's flavor is room-temperature rocky road, but this facility handles all kinds of food waste from supermarkets, distribution centers, universities, and even residential drop-offs.

"We get everything you can find in Aisles 1 through 12," says Mr. Marciniec, site manager of the Agawam Organics Recycling Facility, owned and operated by Vanguard Renewables. Mr. Marciniec's recycling facility is one of six in the commonwealth and only one of 25 in the United States.

As the expired ice cream funnels into a turbo separator, Mr. Marciniec watches the machine strip food from its packaging. The organic waste is then trucked to a dairy farm, where it's mixed with cow manure and processed into renewable natural gas.

"It's really a great circle," says Mr. Marciniec. "Food starts at the farm, and our farms turn it back into energy. Farm to table, then back to farm."

WHY WE WROTE THIS
TRANSFORMATION

Many U.S. communities have taken steps to reduce food waste in recent years, but seen little progress. One state has actually managed to pull it off. Here's how.

Consider day-old strawberries. Whether they spoil on a supermarket shelf or in the back of the fridge at home, they often end up in the same place: a landfill.

Facilities like this one, which process up to 250 tons of food waste daily, replace manual work done by hand or not done at all.

That's a crucial step in diverting waste away from landfills. Americans throw out about 40% of food annually – a waste of both money and natural resources. Reducing food waste can increase food security, promote resource and energy conservation, and address climate change.

The Bay State is the only state to significantly reduce food waste – to the tune of 13.2% – according to a 2024 study. Massachusetts was among the first five states to enact a food waste ban in 2014. (The others were California, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont.)

"The law has worked really well in Massachusetts," says Robert Sanders, an assistant professor of marketing and analytics at the University of California, San Diego and co-author of the study. "That's due to three things: affordability, simplicity, and enforcement."

Converting waste into fuel

If food waste were a country, it would be the third-highest emitter of greenhouse gases after China and the U.S.

It's also the largest category of waste – at 25% – sent to landfills in the U.S. In 2019, some 66 million tons of food waste came from retail, food service, and households. Around 60% of this waste was sent to landfills, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Vanguard Renewables specializes in turning organic waste into renewable energy. The Massachusetts-based company partners with dairy farms to convert food scraps and manure into biogas through anaerobic digestion.

Microorganisms in cow manure digest organic matter, releasing biogas – a mix of methane and carbon dioxide. The gas is captured in large steel vats on the farm and refined into renewable natural gas, which can be used to heat homes and power buildings.

"Basically, we harvest bug farts," says Mr. Marciniec with a laugh. But the results are no joke. Each of Vanguard Renewables' five digesters produces enough energy to heat 1,600 to 3,500 homes per year.

Since 2014, Vanguard has processed more than 887,000 tons of food waste in New England, producing enough natural gas to heat 20,000 homes for a year. By 2028, the company plans to have more than 50 systems across the country.

Baking food recovery "into every part of the business"

In western Massachusetts, Amherst College has become a model for limiting food waste at the source. Last year, it was recognized as the winner in the zero-waste category in the Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition.

"The goal has been to push us aggressively to make sure everything is compostable," says Weston Dripps, director of sustainability. The school has phased out single-use plastics, to-go boxes, and even canned water, replacing them with refill stations and compostable materials.

In 2023, Amherst College generated 238 tons of food waste – roughly 4 to 5 tons per week. But instead of ending up in landfills, Vanguard collected 100% of that waste and processed it at its Agawam facility.

That total includes both preconsumer waste – such as kitchen scraps – and postconsumer waste, like leftovers scraped off plates in the dining hall. "To really have a clean waste stream, we have to focus on the front end," says Mr. Dripps.

Amherst's approach goes beyond composting. Each month, the school donates 2,000 to 3,000 pounds of frozen surplus food to the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, ensuring edible food reaches those in need.

Commercial businesses, too, are finding ways to cut waste. Maura Duggan, founder and CEO of Fancypants Baking Co., knows firsthand how much food can go to waste in her industry. Her company produces hundreds of thousands of cookies each week.

At its Walpole facility, Fancypants has large totes from Vanguard, which collect burnt cookies, food scraps, and anything that can't be donated or sold. Last year, Fancypants diverted about 22 tons of waste.

Ms. Duggan says the totes serve as a daily reminder that sustainability isn't an afterthought – "It can be baked into every part of the business."

"I'm sure we can do a better job"

For Massachusetts to hit its 2030 goal of reducing food waste disposal by 780,000 tons per year, it has to double its rate of waste diversion.

Back in Agawam, Mr. Marciniec passes by 275-gallon totes full of leafy vegetables. Every day, he faces the reality that Americans waste 92 billion pounds of food a year – enough to make 145 million meals.

"It really makes you think about the things we take for granted," he reflects.

"Millions of people are starving everywhere, and the amount of food waste in this country is substantial," says Mr. Marciniec. "I'm sure we can do a better job." ▪

KATHMANDU, NEPAL

Nima Rinji Sherpa is taking his community to new heights

By Aakash Hassan / Contributor

On a bright afternoon, Nima Rinji Sherpa's stroll down a crowded Kathmandu street is frequently interrupted by people coming to greet him. Some give him a warm pat on the back. As he joins friends for lunch at a pizzeria, its owner rushes to embrace him, gushing, "You are making us proud, Nima."

Everyone in Nepal, a small nation in the Himalayas tucked in between India and China, seems to know who he is. In October 2024, at age 18, he became the youngest person to summit the world's 14 mountains higher than 8,000 meters (26,247 feet). Apart from Nepal, these mountains are in Pakistan, China, and India.

WHY WE WROTE THIS
COMMUNITY

A trailblazing role model is advocating for his Sherpa community and aims to inspire young people to become mountaineers in their own right.

Mr. Rinji hails from a family of Sherpas, an ethnic Tibetan tribe living in Nepal whose people are pioneers in mountaineering. For generations, they have been highly sought-after guides and porters for international clients making the world's most difficult climbs.

While the climbing community around the globe has lauded Mr. Rinji's record-breaking accomplishment, back home there is more to it. He is seen as a trailblazer who is pursuing climbing as a professional mountaineering athlete and who aims to inspire more young people to break away from the Sherpa tradition of serving only as helpers on expeditions.

"[Sherpas] are well qualified to be the best climbing athletes, too," Mr. Rinji says. "They just need some guidance and inspiration."

Born into a clan of climbers

Mr. Rinji's father, Tashi Lakpa Sherpa, has summited Mount Everest nine times; at age 19, he became the youngest person to summit Everest without additional oxygen. In 2011, Mr. Rinji's uncle Mingma Sherpa became the first South Asian climber to summit the 14 peaks.

Mr. Rinji nevertheless showed no interest in climbing in his early teenage days. But in 2020, during the lockdown imposed for the COVID-19 pandemic, he developed an interest in photography and eventually followed his father up mountains with the hope of capturing scenic photos and videos.

On the first trek, Mr. Rinji says, he surprised his father by matching his pace and kept following him in the coming weeks on more trails, awestruck by the "beautiful and overwhelming" mountains. Soon, Mr. Rinji was part of his father's training sessions for professional climbers and was determined to summit the Himalayas.

In September 2022, a few months after Mr. Rinji turned 16 – Nepal's legal age for climbing – he was part of an expedition to Mount Manaslu, the world's eighth-highest mountain at 8,163 meters. There Mr. Rinji had firsthand experience of the challenges climbers face and of how tirelessly Sherpas work for their clients.

Out of 500 people who were at the base camp preparing to summit that season, he says, only about 100 achieved the feat. Twenty people were caught in avalanches and had to be rescued. At least one climber died. (Hilaree Nelson, a top American ski mountaineer, fell while descending.)

"Some got in danger; some got afraid," Mr. Rinji says. "But me and my dad knew for sure that we are not quitting, no matter what.

"I think I was one of the last people to summit. Then it clicked," he says with a smile and some pride showing on his face.

After that, he kept summiting one after another "eight-thousanders." When he reached the top of Everest, it was night, but he continued on, stopping only at the summit of an adjacent peak, Lhotse. "That entire expedition was 15 days of extreme climbing," he explains.

"A middle path"

It was during his 14-peaks expedition spread over the span of two years that Mr. Rinji realized the extraordinary, underrecognized work of Sherpas.

In 1953, Edmund Hillary, a New Zealand climber on a British expedition, and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay became the first people confirmed to have summited Mount Everest.

"The only reason [Norgay] got invited to be part of that climbing experience was because of the merit," Mr. Rinji says. "It's our duty to vocalize ourselves, to take credit for who we are."

Making his own case as an example, he says he didn't receive support from any major sponsors for his 14-peaks expedition and had to rely on the resources of his family. Had he been a Western climber, he says, big names would have rushed to sponsor him.

Mr. Rinji has been meeting with young Sherpas who work as guides – or aspire to be guides – to motivate them to see themselves as athletes. He visits schools, addresses public events, and posts on social media about the need for young Nepalese to be "leaders" in climbing.

With the help of his father's expedition company, he provides free courses, or charges a nominal fee, to train young people who want to become athletes. Such a course, he says, can cost around $10,000 in Western countries.

Mr. Lakpa is proud of his son not only for what he has achieved but also because "He is working for himself."

Lakpa Temba, a Sherpa who works for an expedition company in Kathmandu, says Mr. Rinji is broadening the employment horizons for Sherpas. "Nima is showing us a middle path," he says, "where you are climbing mountains for yourself, on your own terms."

Veteran Sherpas also believe that having more people from Nepal become athletes in climbing will bring new attention and opportunities for Sherpas. And it could attract more people to Nepal, a poor country that relies on tourism.

"Our young generation is moving forward from traditional climbing practices," said Nima Nuru Sherpa, the president of the Nepal Mountaineering Association. "What [Mr. Rinji] has done is inspiring." ■

1. Mexico

Eastern monarch butterflies doubled in population, according to a new report. The butterflies occupied 4.42 acres in central Mexico's forests over the winter, up from 2.22 acres the previous year – the second-lowest total recorded in three decades of data.

These migrating pollinators need large forests for protection against weather, and scientists attribute this year's growth to less severe drought along the route from Canada and the United States to Mexico.

Jorge Rickards, director general of World Wildlife Fund Mexico, said, "It's now time to turn this year's increase into a lasting trend with an all-hands approach where governments, landowners, conservationists, and citizens continue to safeguard critical habitats along the monarch's North American migratory route."

WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

2. United States

Oystercatcher populations have rebounded, even as other shorebirds have seen major declines. The red-billed shellfish eaters, which breed regularly on the Atlantic coast, faced falling counts from development, car traffic, and off-leash dogs disturbing habitat. Conservation efforts pushed up their numbers by 45% between 2008 and 2023, bringing the population to some 14,735 birds.

The American Oystercatcher Working Group, a partnership of 40 nonprofits and government agencies, has found success educating the public – even as encouraging behavior change means restricted human access to beaches during nesting season. "We're trying to do it in a way that has the least impact on humans but the best outcome for the birds. It's less about enforcement and more about engagement," said Shiloh Schulte, a shorebird scientist.

Conservationists are now focused on how rising waters increasingly encroach upon shorebird habitat.

INSIDE CLIMATE NEWS, AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER WORKING GROUP, CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY

3. United Kingdom

Scientists created a solar-powered device that captures carbon dioxide from the air. Carbon capture and storage have been extolled as tools in climate change mitigation. But the process typically requires a great deal of fossil fuel energy, and raises uncertainty about whether storing carbon dioxide in the long term is safe.

A recent paper from the University of Cambridge seeks to address both worries. Taking inspiration from photosynthesis, the new flow reactors pull CO_2 from the air using specialized filters. Sunlight then heats the captured carbon, and the device converts it into syngas, a mixture of hydrogen and carbon monoxide that can be converted into liquid fuel.

The devices do not need any external power other than sunlight, and, if researchers can convert the syngas into usable fuel, they would eliminate the need for storing captured carbon. And an advanced reactor could potentially allow individuals to generate their own fuel.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, GIZMODO

4. South Sudan

Trials of a rarely grown, climate-resilient coffee are bearing fruit. In South Sudan, more than 1,000 farmers in 2021 planted seedlings of the indigenous *excelsa* coffee. Deep roots and thick leaves enable the variety to thrive in the drought and heat that have affected major coffee-producing countries in recent years. Tasters say *excelsa* has a sweet flavor with notes of chocolate, dark fruits, and hazelnut.

Equatoria Teak Co. and international partners provided the seedlings and training to smallholders practicing agroforestry, growing coffee alongside other crops. Community leaders see *excelsa* as a chance for locals to gain financial independence from the government or foreign aid, but they also recognize the need for better infrastructure and stability in their country.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, CORDAID

5. India

The government has drastically expanded road connectivity in rural areas since 2000. The Prime Minister's Rural Roads Programme, billed as an effort to narrow the urban-rural income gap, resulted in the construction of some 773,000 kilometers (480,000 miles) of paved roads between 2000 and 2024.

Increased connectivity has benefited women in particular. Women reported lower rates of domestic violence, which researchers attributed to more freedom to leave the home and greater exposure to other communities. Other studies also found that travel times decreased, workers had greater mobility, and students stayed in school longer.

There's no evidence that the road program boosted incomes, though analysts note a lack of research on more recent years. India has also nearly tripled its highway network to 146,000 kilometers and plans to build 62,500 more kilometers of road by 2029.

THE ECONOMIST

– Cameron Pugh and Troy Aidan Sambajon / Staff writers

EDITOR'S NOTE: In a Points of Progress photo caption about Chino, California (April 7, page 18), a location was described incorrectly. The state prison complex is east of Los Angeles.

Conserving Big Cats, preserving human safety

A resurgence of leopards and tigers in northern India is a victory for conservationists. But as fatal attacks increase, local residents say, "Protect us, too."

By Michael Benanav / Special contributor

UTTARAKHAND, INDIA

While walking to school with a classmate one day in November 2023, a teenager named Ankit stepped off the asphalt road and into the adjacent forest, seeking a bit of privacy to relieve himself. As he turned to head back to the pavement, he was slammed from behind.

"At first I thought it was my friend messing around," recalls Ankit, who, like many in India, does not have a surname. But a second later, he hit the ground face down and felt a set of teeth sink into his right shoulder. "I knew instantly it was a tiger."

As Ankit tells it, he was dragged deeper into the forest, behind a clump of bushes. The tiger adjusted its grip, setting its jaws

around Ankit's head. "I was sure I was going to die," he says. "I was desperate."

Ankit lives in the north Indian state of Uttarakhand, where lowland jungles rise into forested hills that sit below soaring Himalayan peaks. It is about the size of West Virginia. In an average week, two to three people there are attacked by big cats, according to data from the Uttarakhand Forest Department.

Some 6 miles from Ankit's home, Jim Corbett National Park has the highest density of tigers anywhere in the world. An estimated 260 tigers live within it, while another 300 or so live elsewhere in Uttarakhand, for a total of 560 cats statewide, according to the most recent tiger census.

For those who care about protecting tigers, these numbers are a triumph. In 2006, when India's National Tiger Conservation Authority was created, Uttarakhand's tiger population was estimated at just 178. Nationwide, the number of tigers has also grown over the past two decades, from 1,411 cats in 2006 to 3,862 today, making India home to approximately 75% of the world's wild tigers.

But the current intensity of conflict between people and predators has caused communities to question whether Uttarakhand's success at protecting endangered animals has come at too high a human price.

WHY WE WROTE THIS

SAFETY

The number of endangered tigers in northern India has more than doubled in the past 20 years – a triumph for conservation. But as fatal attacks on humans also increase, local residents

Ankit says that, while struggling for his very life, he somehow managed to reach up and grab the tiger by the tongue. Then he pulled. Hard.

The tiger, apparently surprised, released him and retreated into the jungle.

Hearing his screams, his friend ran for help to a nearby Forest Department check post, where a few forest guards were stationed. The guards refused to go in to help the teen, and wouldn't allow anyone else to try to rescue him.

"They said, 'No one can be saved from the jaws of a tiger – he's gone.' And they didn't want to risk more lives with the tiger still nearby," recounts Ankit's father, Suraj, who arrived at the scene some 30 minutes after the attack. By that time, a small crowd had gathered along the road.

Suraj shouted for his son three times, and, to everyone's shock, Ankit staggered out of the jungle. His shirt was shredded, and he was covered in blood. Among other severe injuries, his scalp had been slashed open by the tiger.

Ankit's father immediately stripped off his shirt and wrapped it around his son's head. Ankit remembers making it to the road, but doesn't recall feeling any pain. He was rushed to a hospital on the back of a motorcycle, sandwiched between his father, who was driving, and another man who sat behind him, holding him in place.

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AS THE NUMBER OF TIGERS in Uttarakhand has increased, so has the number of tiger attacks. In 2023, when Ankit was mauled, the state reported 26 attacks, including 17 fatalities. In 2006, when the National Tiger Conservation Authority was formed, there were just two, including one death.

And tigers are not the state's only, or even most prevalent, feline threat.

One afternoon in July 2024, in a small hamlet in the Himalayan foothills near the village of Akhori, a 9-year-old girl named Poonam was playing with a neighbor.

"I called over there at 5 o'clock, wondering why she hadn't returned yet," Poonam's mother, Usha Devi, says. "I was told that she'd left an hour earlier."

A search party was organized, and that evening Poonam's remains were discovered in the forest, a few hundred yards from her home. She'd been killed by a leopard.

Over the next few months, two more children in the village were killed by the same leopard. Schools were closed for weeks. Cages baited with goats were placed in the forest, camera traps were installed, and teams of hunters – known as shikaris – were dispatched. It wasn't until November that the leopard was ultimately tracked down and shot. "It was watching kids playing when they killed it," Usha Devi says.

In 2024, there were 137 people attacked by leopards in Uttarakhand, according to Forest Department figures. Fifteen died. During a spike in attacks that fall, five children were reported killed over a span of four weeks. Schools in villages across the state were shut due to what they called the "leopard menace." Curfews were imposed.

While the Forest Department estimates there are 3,100 leopards within Uttarakhand's borders, that figure is generally regarded by wildlife experts as unreliable, as no official census has ever been conducted. Many believe there are more, and that the population is growing.

"Conservation efforts have been very successful. There's an increase in numbers and lots of leopard sightings," says Puneet Tomar, the officer in charge of Uttarakhand's Tehri Forest Division, which includes the village of Akhori. Leopard encounters, too, appear to be rising. Over the past 25 years, the average number of annual attacks, measured over five-year spans, has jumped from 75 to 125 per year.

After a leopard or tiger kills or injures someone, the Forest Department typically pays 400,000 rupees (about $4,600) in compensation to families. In Ankit's case, this wasn't enough to cover the cost of his medical treatment. His family says it has gone deep into debt and can't afford the further surgeries that doctors have recommended for Ankit. Others reported similar difficulties with paying for the care of wounded family members.

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UTTARAKHAND CURRENTLY FACES a dilemma: how to continue protecting big cats while reducing human-wildlife conflict. For some, even one fatality is too many. Manish Kumar runs the Socialist People's Front, a nongovernmental organization that advocates for "peasants and forest dwellers," he explains.

"I am not against tiger conservation," he tells me at his office in Ramnagar, just outside Corbett National Park. "But I am against the practice of conserving tigers at the cost of human life."

He believes the government should assess the territorial needs of tigers and leopards, and then determine the number of cats Uttarakhand's ecosystems can actually support. If there are more cats than resources and territory, he suggests "balance hunting" to reduce their populations to sustainable levels.

"Forest officials say, 'Live together,'" Mr. Kumar says. "This is impossible. When a tiger is hungry, he will eat you."

There are, however, strategies that researchers and government officials alike believe can greatly reduce the number of attacks while keeping guns out of the equation. The goal of the Guidelines for Human-Leopard Conflict Mitigation, published by the Indian government in 2023, is "harmonious coexistence" between humans and wildlife.

Sanjay Sondhi, a founder of Titli Trust, a nonprofit that works on reducing human-leopard conflict in Uttarakhand, says, "There are no easy answers, but the solution must be coexistence. You can't eliminate leopards or people."

A program run by Mr. Sondhi's organization, called Friends of the Leopard, teaches communities nonviolent strategies that will

help them stay safe. In the handful of villages where pilot projects have been launched, attacks have in fact dropped by 75%, Mr. Sondhi says. "We've shown that it works. The issue is how to translate intent to action across the state."

Big-cat attacks are nothing new to the people of Uttarakhand. This is the region where Jim Corbett, for whom the park is named, rose to fame as a shikari in the early decades of the 20th century. In his classic memoirs, he recounts tracking the Champawat Tiger, which reportedly killed 236 people over four years in the eastern part of the state and 200 more in neighboring Nepal. He also writes of the hunt for the Leopard of Rudraprayag, which claimed a reported 125 lives over eight years.

"People here have a tolerance for sharing space with wild animals," says C. Ramesh, a researcher at the Wildlife Institute of India who worked on the Guidelines for Human-Leopard Conflict Mitigation. "But that tolerance level has gone down."

Residents of villages where attacks have occurred say this is because the situation, as they've known it during their own lifetimes, has changed.

"It was not like this earlier," says Vipin Chandra Sharma, whose 19-year-old daughter, Nikita Sharma, was killed by a tiger while cutting grass in her family's field with a number of other women. She was its third victim in the area. "We hear tigers or leopards growling every day. The Forest Department issued a warning two weeks ago saying, 'Don't go out between 4 p.m. and 9 a.m. – if you get attacked it's not our responsibility.'"

Feeling that they have nowhere else to go, locals have had to learn to overcome their fears. I visited homes in several villages where children had been grabbed by leopards mere feet from their houses. Some survived – like Siya, who at age 8 in April 2024 was severely injured after a leopard dragged her into the forest before releasing her. Others did not.

"We have seen the worst," says Kavita Devi, whose 9-year-old son, Aarav Singh, was killed by a leopard while crossing the family's courtyard in Koirali village. "So what is there to be scared of?" Still, she makes sure her three remaining children are always inside before sunset.

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WHEN A BIG CAT PROVES to be a danger to people, it will be trapped or tranquilized and relocated – if it can be found. Sometimes, when a leopard – or, much more rarely, a tiger – becomes a repeat offender, the government will issue orders to shoot it.

Over the past decade or so, the most prolific shikari in Uttarakhand has been Joy Hukil. By his own count, Mr. Hukil, a thoughtful and soft-spoken man with a great respect for leopards, has killed 47 of the cats. His difficult and exhausting work is an unpaid public service, and he covers his own expenses, from food to ammunition.

"There is more conflict now than in the past," he says at his spartanly furnished stone house, built in the town of Pauri by 19th-century American missionaries. "Thirty years back, there was no fear of leopards. People used to be afraid of evil spirits lurking in every corner. Nowadays, everyone has forgotten about the spirits."

Mr. Hukil believes one reason leopards attack is that their base of natural prey in the forests has dwindled.

"It's a pity. Leopards, they're designed to eat meat. They have no other option, so they come close to human habitations and sometimes some of them decide to kill people," he says.

No one knows whether the prey base has shrunk, Mr. Tomar, the forest officer, tells me, because that hasn't been studied.

"Less prey may be part of the problem," he says. "But there are no numbers on how much a part of the problem it is. Even if deer are there," he continues, "leopards will come out of the forest for easy prey." He thinks that when attacks occur near houses, leopards are hunting cattle and dogs, "and they happen to encounter kids."

Mr. Sondhi of Titli Trust says that the reasons attacks occur where they do are often a mystery. "There is no difference between areas of high and low conflict. The habitats are similar, and habitat quality is similar. It just seems random," he says.

"Sometimes there's just no way to explain leopard behavior," he adds. "There are many things we don't know."

Among those things are, How much is the behavior of big cats changing? And what is their motive when they attack?

In his 1944 book, "Man-eaters of Kumaon," Corbett wrote what has long been a tenet of human-tiger conflict:

"It is only when tigers have been incapacitated through wounds or old age that, in order to live, they are compelled to take to a diet of human flesh." People, in other words, are easy prey, he believed, but healthy tigers don't bother to hunt them. For cats that do, it's a matter of survival.

This no longer seems to be true – at least not with the current spate of attacks, says Dushyant Sharma, senior veterinary officer at Corbett Tiger Reserve. In charge of teams that relocate problem cats, he says, "Out of 20 tigers captured, only 1 or 2 is old or injured."

All of the Forest Department officials I spoke with, however, reject the idea that some cats are "man-eaters" that deliberately hunt people. Instead, they attribute attacks to "accidental encounters," when a tiger or leopard is surprised by a person, or cases of "mistaken identity." "A leopard doesn't want to kill any child," says Dhruv Martolia, divisional forest officer in the Bageshwar area, during a phone conversation.

When I talked to Pradeep Dhaulakhandi, another divisional forest officer in Almora, I referred to one leopard held at the Almora Rescue Centre for over a decade as a "man-eater," since it has been deemed too dangerous to release back into the wild. He immediately scolded me for using that term.

But Dr. Ramesh of the Wildlife Institute of India explains that while "Leopards usually try to avoid contact with people," they are extremely smart, highly adaptable, and able to live very close to towns and villages.

"Once a leopard is habituated to human presence, its shyness will go away," he says. "Many attacks are the result of surprise encounters, but leopards can learn that humans have no self-protection, that they are easy prey. And if cubs taste human flesh, they learn they can hunt humans." This knowledge, Dr. Ramesh adds, can pass from one generation of leopards to another.

When I ask Mr. Hukil, the shikari, for his thoughts, he replies, "Once a leopard kills a human and eats the body, humans are added to their menu." He dismisses the notion that leopards mistake people for other animals. "Leopards can see far better than us. They are aware who they are attacking."

But, he points out, "They're hungry; their numbers are in the thousands, but relatively few leopards are actually killing humans."

▪ ▪ ▪

A COMMON ASSUMPTION regarding the roots of human-wildlife conflict is that people are increasingly encroaching on wildlands and reaping the consequences. But in much of Uttarakhand, the opposite is also true.

Many rural villagers are leaving remote areas for better jobs, better schools, and better health care. The crop fields that they once tended have become overgrown with brush.

Situated between homes and the forest, these fields are a crucial buffer zone between humans and wildlife habitats. When they become untended and overgrown, that buffer disappears, and wildlands begin encroaching on residential areas. Attacks become more likely, and when they occur, more people move away out of fear.

"Human-wildlife conflict is now one of the biggest reasons for migration, and migration is a reason why these killings keep happening," Mr. Hukil says. "It's a self-perpetuating cycle."

One of the top tactics for reducing the conflict, recommended in the Guidelines for Human-Leopard Conflict Mitigation and by Friends of the Leopard, is to keep fallow fields clean.

Other strategies include improving lighting in villages and around homes; reducing the number of stray cattle, since many people suspect they lure the predators, which then attack people instead; and improving waste management, as trash draws dogs, cows, and other animals that big cats hunt. "When garbage dumps are located on the periphery of or inside a village/town, high levels of conflict may result," the guidelines note.

These guidelines, however, which include ambitious proposals that could improve our understanding of leopard behavior patterns, are merely suggestions, not rules.

When I asked how rural residents of Uttarakhand can be persuaded to support big-cat conservation efforts despite their fears of being attacked, Mr. Sondhi, Dr. Ramesh, and others reply that respect for animals is ingrained in the region's culture – and the Hindu religion.

This perspective can be reinforced by education, informing people about the benefits that healthy populations of apex predators have for the environment as a whole. Still, this is a project that will need patience.

Any path toward a harmonious coexistence must be sensitive to the fear that locals are currently living with, Dr. Ramesh says. He adds, "It can seem out of touch for people in the city to say, 'You have to have high tolerance,' when we are not the ones living with it day to day. But we need to mitigate the conflict while protecting the wildlife."

Many of the people I talked to who had endured the trauma of attacks by big cats can support that sentiment. But they give it a slightly different emphasis.

"Put all the tigers in the world in Corbett, fine. But protect us, too," says Ankit's father, Suraj. "If tigers are important, we people are important, too."

Ankit himself ultimately hopes to work for the Forest Department one day.

"No one tried to save me," Ankit says. "But I will try to save people." ▪

PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

Syrians reweave their identity

Among all the countries offering models of reconciliation after long conflicts, Syria is now trying to make its mark. A good example is a grassroots rescue organization known as the White Helmets.

During a severe but short flare-up of sectarian violence in early March, the group's volunteers quickly entered the killing zone in a minority area to help any and all, conducting around 30 responses a day.

"When we go to rescue someone in need, we don't ask them about their religion or political opinion," said Abdulkafi Kayal, head of the group's operations in the coastal region where the killings took place.

"Our mandate is to help those in need," he told the BBC.

A reporter from the BBC was able to join the Syria Civil Defence, as the White Helmets are formally known, as it went about its humanitarian missions. What was clear is that such acts of equality and kindness are the necessary building blocks for a country starting over.

"We consider ourselves as an umbrella to serve all Syrians," Mr. Kayal said.

Civil society groups like the White Helmets are proving to be far more effective at binding Syrians than the new, interim government of former rebel leader Ahmed al-Sharaa. While his Islamist group was able to overthrow a dictatorship in early December, it has struggled to assure Syrians that it can achieve political inclusion regardless of ethnicity or religion.

On March 29, President al-Sharaa did announce a new and broader Cabinet that is far more representative of Syrian society, a nod by him to pressure from civil society and foreign countries to provide more inclusive government.

"Civil society is always closer to the people than government administrations. We know people's needs and opinions," Bayyan Skaf of the activist youth group Khatwa, or Step, told the Monitor's Taylor Luck. In many cities, volunteers are forming local councils to meet basic needs or hosting inclusive town halls to prevent the kind of revenge attacks of March 6-10.

As the de facto first responders in violent incidents or simply a fire emergency, the White Helmets and their 3,500 volunteers are emphasizing the need for impartial organizations to provide safety and a path toward justice.

For almost six decades while living under a dictatorship, reports The Atlantic, "Syrians have been taught to hate and fear one another." Now local civil society groups are filling a political void, trying to keep anarchy and anger at bay.

The White Helmet volunteers who rush to scenes of violence and hatred are, as Mr. Kayal said, showing that it doesn't matter if a Syrian "is a Muslim, Sunni, Alawite, Christian, Druze or even an atheist."

"Those families are our families." ▪

THE MONITOR'S VIEW

Rallies for innocence in Gaza

For two days in late March, hundreds of Palestinian civilians marched against Hamas in several cities. It was the largest protest against the militant group since it sparked a war with Israel more than 17 months ago. Clearly, the fear of harsh retribution by Hamas for speaking out is falling among the territory's 2 million residents as they face further war devastation.

Yet more telling was what partly drove protesters to set aside their fears: a claim of innocence.

In one video on the social platform X, a man in the northern city of Beit Lahia yells to a crowd, "We are a peaceful people. ... We just want to live." One construction worker told the German Press Agency, "We shouldn't have to keep paying the price for leaders who only care about their own power." A slogan on one sign read, "We refuse to be the ones who die."

Such statements point to the fact that Hamas purposely embeds its leaders, fighters, and weapons inside civilian buildings to draw Israeli bombs, a clear violation of international law. For its part, the Israeli military says it tries to follow the rules of war by giving proper warning to civilians to flee an area before bombing a Hamas site.

"People have realized that Hamas is using them as pawns and human shields, nothing more," Hamza Howidy, a peace activist from Gaza, told The Times of Israel last year. "They have realized that Hamas's only strategy is to maximize civilian casualties."

Many in Gaza may be emboldened to speak out after an edict last year from a prominent Muslim scholar, Salman al-Dayah. He said Hamas failed to keep its fighters "away from the homes of defenceless [Palestinian] civilians."

Some experts say wars often end when people caught in a conflict start to empathize with innocent victims on both sides. That realization is behind the Geneva Conventions of 1949 that prohibit the use of civilians as shields. Many in Gaza are now trying to turn their innocence into a shield, one that may help end this war. ▪

BEHIND THE SCENES

Our writer probes a series about work and meaning

By now you probably either are all in on the Apple TV+ series "Severance" or have walled it off. On the eve of its Season 2 finale, we had a no-spoilers chat with our senior culture writer about why the dark show resonates.

By Clayton Collins / Director, editorial innovation
and Jingnan Peng / Multimedia producer

Work-life balance was never quite like this.

At Lumon Industries, the setting for the Apple TV+ series "Severance," medically manipulated employees clock in so completely that their lives outside work effectively cease to exist. At home, it's the same. Viewed from there, work is a total mystery that's one weird daily elevator ride away.

In both locations, life's pretty dark. But a cold productivity culture under overbearing managers gets challenged as characters bond. Work and life with meaning emerges as the show's core. Stephen Humphries, the Monitor's senior culture writer, wrote about "Severance" recently. He joined our "Why We Wrote This" podcast ahead of Season 2's March 21 finale. (Don't worry. No spoilers.)

"When work is stressful and challenging, what's the payoff?" Stephen says, describing how his reporting kept pulling him into a nonfiction zone. "Because we have to find that, I think, to make the difficult parts more bearable. And that was really the inspiration for my article."

"You know, we're not drones," Stephen says. "I think part of what makes work meaningful is feeling like a valued part of a community within a workspace." ▪

PODCAST

Staff writer Stephen Humphries recently joined the Monitor podcast "Why We Wrote This" for a discussion about the hit Apple TV+ series "Severance."

Find the full interview at **www.CSMonitor.com/WhyWeWroteThis**.

GLOBAL NEWSSTAND

MACLEAN'S / TORONTO

Time to rethink the future of energy in Canada

"For decades, [Canada and the United States] have been close economic partners," writes Moshe Lander, a senior lecturer in economics at Concordia University. "... Then, almost out of nowhere, [U.S. President Donald] Trump's tariffs threw everything into chaos. ... Energy switched from a cornerstone of co-operation into a bargaining chip in an escalating dispute. ... [Ontario Premier Doug Ford] initially proposed cutting off electricity to [Northern U.S. states]. ... [But] Canada rolling back its energy exports wouldn't just be an inconvenience for Americans; it would be an economic and logistical nightmare for us all. ... This isn't just a trade dispute – it's a reminder that we need a long-term energy plan that doesn't hinge on the stability of our closest neighbour."

THE NASSAU GUARDIAN / NASSAU, BAHAMAS

Why should the US be open to all?

"The United States has always had stringent immigration policies, but we are now living in an era of ... heightened enforcement actions," states an editorial. "... On March 18 ... a Bahamian citizen ... was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents [in Florida]. ... She had overstayed her visa by more than a decade. ... While the US has the world's largest and most robust economy, The Bahamas is not a nation where one cannot make a suitable living. ... It is the height of irresponsibility and hubris to think that you can simply stay in someone else's country without going through the proper legal channels. ... Just as The Bahamas enforces its immigration policies to protect its borders and citizens, so, too, does the United States."

DHAKA TRIBUNE / DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Cities – and people – need green spaces to breathe

"With a mild heatwave sweeping across Bangladesh, our vulnerability to climate change and unchecked urbanization has never been more starkly evident," states an editorial. "... Dhaka's rapid expansion has come at the cost of its wetlands, parks, and tree cover, exacerbating the urban heat island effect. ... Combined with global warming, this has turned Dhaka into a veritable pressure cooker during summers, with heatwaves growing more intense. ... Green spaces, then, offer a natural solution. ... Other cities, like Singapore and New York, have shown that urban greenery is achievable even in dense environments. Dhaka can and must follow suit."

THE GUARDIAN / LONDON

Trump's imperialism is deployed at home, too

"The imperial boomerang effect is the theory that techniques developed to repress colonised territories and peoples will, in time, inevitably be deployed at home," writes columnist Nesrine Malik. "... Donald Trump's second term has so far been a case study. ... The

creation of a domestic caste system [in the U.S.] ... mirrors the one outside a country's borders, as demonstrated in the recent treatment of those foreigners with permanent US residency and valid work visas who expressed dissenting views on Gaza. ... In allying themselves with Palestinians ... they are demoted to the level of those Palestinians in their treatment by the US government. ... A nation that withholds its best ideals from some will end up losing them for all."

EKATHIMERINI / ATHENS, GREECE

Can protests lead to lasting change?

"[In March,] Turkey's main opposition party ... was to nominate Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglou as its candidate for the country's presidency, to run against [President] Recep Tayyip Erdogan," writes columnist Nikos Konstandaras. "... [But] Imamoglou is in detention ... and tens of thousands of Turkish people are protesting ... against the president's increasingly autocratic behavior. ... Mass protests always raise the question whether people power can change things for the better or if these lead only to a release valve for pressure and anger. ... [Mr. Erdogan is] telling the European Union that he does not care what it thinks. It is now up to the Turkish people to show whether Erdogan will win this bet."

– Compiled by Jacob Posner / Staff writer

HOME FORUM

I ran from the law – to run a rural farm

The work is grueling, and animals can get ornery. But farming has enriched our life in ways untold.

Mark Twain's famous satire "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" chronicles the fictitious time travel of an engineer named Hank Morgan from East Hartford, Connecticut. After being struck in the head with a crowbar, he awakens in sixth-century England and works his way into King Arthur's favor by use of his modern knowledge.

I have a similar tale, except it is true. I am an attorney admitted since 1989 to the Connecticut bar. I graduated from high school in East Hartford. I was struck in the head not with a crowbar but with a chronic illness. I did not wake up under a tree being challenged to a joust by a medieval knight, as in Twain's tale; I woke up owning a former dairy farm in Vermont's wild Northeast Kingdom, where my family and I moved so that I could recuperate.

Our journey into the world of farming entailed a complete cultural reeducation for my family, including my three children. Most American grade schoolers aren't helping Mom and Dad perform an emergency procedure on a sheep that had just delivered her lambs. Nor are they bouncing around in a tractor, seatbelt-free, at age 12. Or, for that matter, herding bulls, exploring ancient barns, or raising rabbits for consumption.

Our 160-acre farm was in Barton, Vermont, where temperatures hit 39 degrees below zero one winter (before windchill, and those Vermont winds sure can howl). We started with chickens. We added goats, and then sheep, pigs, and cows. Most of our neighbors were farmers, loggers, or homesteaders.

Once they accepted the "flatlanders" from Connecticut, the community was extremely warm and supportive, offsetting those arctic blasts. My Vermont nickname became "Old MacDonald" because, at one point, we tended four draft horses, 70 milking goats, 40 pigs, 100 sheep, and 20-odd beef and dairy cows.

One of the most transformative insights occurred around food. After just a year or two of farming, I came in from haying to a dinner prepared by my wife, Jacqui. I looked at the table and realized that everything on it came from our farm: the chicken legs, the vegetables, the milk, the butter. And it all tasted better than anything we could buy in a store.

This self-sufficiency became a pursuit of its own. Jacqui and I would play a game of seeing how many weeks we could go without visiting the grocery store, a tradition we learned was practiced by many Vermont farmers, perhaps for generations.

One day our neighbor Claude, whose family previously owned our Barton dairy in the 1920s, stopped by to visit. Claude is legendary for using draft horses to run cable for utility companies. He walked into the living room, saw our 5-year-old daughter, and asked, "Whatcha eatin', Em?"

Without pausing between bites of her pork chop, grease glistening on her chin, our little girl nonchalantly remarked to the grizzled old farmer, "Spotty."

Besides matter-of-factness, hard work – regardless of age – is implicit in farming. Our three children helped us harvest hay, feed and milk animals, haul water, and shovel manure. We offered no wages or allowance; they were taught this was the price of their dinners. They worked seven days a week and learned that complaining did not make their labors easier but harder. By the time each of them reached age 12, our children could outwork most grown men – and they knew it.

I never planned to farm for the benefit of my children, but our low-income, arduous, cold, adversarial venture became a way of life that shaped our children to be self-reliant, tough, hardworking adults. They live in gratitude, not resentment. They embrace challenges with purpose and joy. Now, our son, Joe, is raising his two sons with the same skill sets and love of rugged work and the outdoors.

In his historical novel, Twain contrasted the culture of sixth-century England with the perceived enlightenment of his late-19th-century era. What he found was entirely unexpected, much like my transition from a suit-and-tie law practice to a barnyard in Vermont.

To be sure, the work can be grueling, the hardships of animal care can be traumatic, and I rarely get a day off. But I have found the simple lives of rural Vermonters to be rich with originality, frugality, and innovative practicality. In their unpretentious lives, my Vermont neighbors and my experiences tending a country farm have taught me more meaningful lessons than I ever learned in law school. And my children have learned them, too.

– John Klar

We do care

I had lost a glove. Turning to God in prayer to solve problems has been natural for me for decades, but this was such a small thing. I could always just buy another pair. I found myself drifting to the mindset that maybe this wasn't important enough to give much thought to.

Suddenly I saw how that was just not caring enough to pray. On the heels of that thought, a desire to cherish the deeper spiritual blessing that I've found consistently comes from prayer swept over me. The choice was about much more than just finding a glove; it was about proving God's care for us. So I prayed to hear God's loving guidance.

I felt a quiet peace of God's governing power that embraced this situation, and I didn't think anymore about the loss. Soon after, I found the glove in an unexpected place.

As we turn to God to resolve problems, even the smallest of problems, we gain in our conviction of how natural it is to pray, no matter what we are faced with. We can care enough to pray, even when it seems too hard to do so, or our problems appear so large that we don't feel prayer would work, or when we feel overwhelmed by unsolved problems in the world.

One encouraging place to start when we're tempted not to pray is to deepen our understanding of God's ceaseless care for His creation. The EasyEnglish Bible describes God's tender attention in this way: "He takes care of his people, like a shepherd who takes care of his sheep. He picks up the young lambs and he carries them near to his heart" (Isaiah 40:11).

Christian Science enlightens our spiritual understanding of this unbreakable relationship between God and the true, fully blessed identity of each of us. Biblically based names for God as Spirit and Love are designated as synonyms for God in the teachings of Christian Science. Because God, Spirit, is the creator of man – including you, me, and everyone – we all are His loved children, created in His likeness, completely spiritual in nature, character, and activity.

God is expressed "in all spiritual individuality from the infinitesimal to the infinite" (Mary Baker Eddy, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," p. 336), and as divine Love He tenderly cares for every aspect of existence. As the reflection of God, we care with the same tenderness. This being unchangeable spiritual reality and the truth about our identity, the impulse not to care is illegitimate and has no presence or force. It is a false mental assertion that doesn't come from an all-good God, so we can prayerfully rule it out as having any power to govern us.

This spiritual basis enables us to quickly dismiss "I don't care" thinking for the willingness to pray. It gives us inspiration and conviction that we do care enough to pray no matter how little or large the problem being addressed seems to us. Right where trouble seems to be, genuine caring can open our hearts more and more to take in the abundant spiritual good and harmony evidenced all around us.

– Elizabeth Mata

BRUNSWICK, MAINE

Monhegan Island is a portrait of resilience. Artists have captured it for 2 centuries.

By Jennifer Wolcott / Contributor

Monhegan Island has captivated visitors like me for centuries. Located 10 miles off Maine's coast, the remote island has a natural beauty that strikes awe at every turn of its scant 1-square-mile size.

I first went with my mother, who loved off-the-beaten-path adventures. I returned later as a reporter for the Monitor, interviewing the only lobsterwoman on the island and sleuthing out a chef's secret stew recipe.

Most day-trippers and adventurists are probably completely unaware of an important backstory of the charming island: its history of environmental renewal.

A new exhibition, "Art, Ecology, and the Resilience of a Maine Island: The Monhegan Wildlands," is changing that. The show illuminates the island's ecological journey from the last ice age to modern times.

Indigenous artifacts, maps, scientific research, and the creations of a range of artists help tell the story. Works include those by Edward Hopper, Robert Henri, Jamie Wyeth, printmaker Barbara Putnam, and Lynne Drexler. The show is on view at Bowdoin College Museum of Art until June 1 and then moves to the island to summer, so to speak, at the Monhegan Museum of Art & History. There, viewers will be encouraged to pair their art experience with the nature that inspired it.

WHY WE WROTE THIS
RESILIENCE

Maine's Monhegan Island is a scant square mile in size. But don't underestimate it. The island has a thing or two to teach the world about mistletoe – and resilience.

That connection between environment and canvas is how Bowdoin biology professor Barry Logan came to be involved. Dr. Logan has been traveling to Monhegan for 20 years to study the island's forest landscape, often with his students in tow.

Of particular interest to him has been the dwarf mistletoe plant, which has wreaked havoc on the island's white spruce trees. (The parasite is known to glom on to its host's branches, siphoning off water and nutrients to survive.)

Those spruce trees had colonized fields once used for sheep farming. But since the decline of white spruce forests, deciduous trees, such as birch, aspen, and maple, have replaced them.

This natural phenomenon, Professor Logan found, can be evidenced in artworks by some of the island's most illustrious painters, who depicted its effects, likely unknowingly, on their canvases. For example, in Hopper's "Monhegan Landscape," from the early 20th century, a scrawny, lifeless white spruce tree is prominently painted against the mighty, deep-blue ocean. Other works, Dr. Logan observed, also bear witness to the changing landscape.

He says in an interview that he was struck by what he'd noticed, and he approached directors at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art and Monhegan Museum of Art & History. Together they decided to curate an exhibition that would tell the story of Monhegan's environmental evolution.

"We have two centuries of artists who have been painting this

place, and we realized they can help us understand its ecology," says Frank Goodyear, co-director of the Bowdoin museum. "These artists are keen observers, and I have been impressed how the scientific data matches what they depicted."

Dr. Goodyear points to Rockwell Kent's "Sun, Manana, Monhegan," which the artist painted from his island home on Horn's Hill in 1907. He revisited the spot 43 years later to include the young forest that had grown up in what was originally open pastureland.

The theme of ecological resilience spoke loudly to the curatorial team. "The word 'resilience,' which we placed in the title with great intention," says Dr. Logan, "is meant to convey that if one can place a forest in conservation, whatever its condition, it will likely return and take on a beautiful trajectory."

They give heaps of credit to Monhegan Associates, a land trust organization. It was founded in 1954 by Ted Edison, one of inventor Thomas Edison's sons, who led an effort to acquire and steward land outside the town's historic village. The hard work to preserve the wildlands was done back in the 1950s and 1960s, and now the group maintains them for the enjoyment of all.

"The actions of motivated individuals like Ted Edison can make a huge difference," says Dr. Logan, "but he didn't do it alone. It took a community."

The wildlands make up about four-fifths of the island, close to 400 acres, including forests and 9 miles of trails.

"I sometimes feel like I'm walking through a painting here, and now others will experience that," says Jennifer Pye, director of the Monhegan Museum of Art & History. This summer, she says, the trails will get their close-up, as viewers of the exhibit will be encouraged to wander in the nearby wildlands.

For example, one might view George Bellows' "Cathedral Woods," painted in 1913, and then step out onto that same treasured trail. "This work was a late addition to the exhibit, and it's such a gem," says Ms. Pye. "Bellows is better known for his crashing surf scenes, but this painting perfectly captures the dark, quiet, still feeling of being in Cathedral Woods."

There will be some changes from the Bowdoin show, she adds. For example, the student-produced audio and visual effects will no longer be needed, since viewers will be immersed in the place where those artworks originated. Also, the Monhegan venue is smaller, so not all the art and artifacts will make the trip.

One islander says the exhibit has changed the way he sees his home. Doug Boynton, who has lived on Monhegan for 55 years (one of about 40 year-round residents) and lobstered there for almost as long, says the show taught him a few things, particularly about the island's early history. It also changed the way he looks at art.

"You see art everywhere here, but you don't really think of it as a scientific tool for documenting ecological changes," says Mr. Boynton, who contributed a chapter to the exhibit catalog. "Now I realize what a beautiful tool it is!"

▪ *"Art, Ecology, and the Resilience of a Maine Island: The Monhegan Wildlands" runs through June 1 at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. On July 1, it opens at the Monhegan Museum of Art & History*

MOSCOW

What Voice of America meant to Russians in the Cold War.

VOA's closure by Trump sparks fond memories in Moscow.

By Fred Weir / Special correspondent

Voice of America started programming in Russian in 1947 at the start of the Cold War, and from the very beginning the Soviets sought to silence it.

Authorities made elaborate efforts to jam the signals of foreign radio stations like VOA that broadcast news happening both inside and outside the USSR.

In the era of Vladimir Putin, VOA came under attack again. In 2014, Kremlin authorities labeled it a "foreign agent" spreading propaganda aimed at undermining the Russian state. Its correspondents were evicted.

So it is no surprise that Russians in officialdom met the news that U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order in March to defund the radio service, along with its more politicized sister Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, with a certain amount of glee. "This is an awesome decision by Trump!" said Margarita Simonyan, editor of Russia's state-funded RT network.

But for Russians who came of age alongside the U.S. state media network, the closure evoked poignant memories: of grasping to hear jazz music, of being witness to the global events of the day, of listening to broadcasts and momentarily feeling "a breath of fresh air."

"It was like being connected to another world," says Andrei Kolesnikov, an opposition-minded scholar in Russia who went to work as a freelancer for several years at Radio Liberty, which set up a Moscow bureau after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

"For me, as a person of liberal views, these radio stations had an almost legendary dimension" as a forbidden realm of ideas that kept intellectual life alive during Soviet years, he says. "Even in childhood, I can remember my father – a devout communist – turning the knob of his shortwave receiver, making his way through the wheezing jammers to hear the Western voices."

"A breath of fresh air"

VOA and similar Western shortwave stations, such as the BBC and Deutsche Welle, which broadcast alternative news and views into the USSR in Russian and other Soviet languages, represented a tiny crack in the wall of Soviet state propaganda.

These stations also delivered news of the outside world, and sometimes reported events happening inside the USSR that the Kremlin was silent, or lying, about. That included the 1983 shooting down of a Korean airliner with 270 people aboard by a Soviet fighter plane, and the deadly 1986 explosion in the Chernobyl nuclear plant, which Soviet authorities denied for several days.

In the 1970s, when Alexander Iskanderyan was a student in Soviet Armenia, it was impossible to get any credible information from the Soviet media. "Its picture of the world had nothing to do with reality. But listening to the VOA introduced us to Soviet dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and others. We learned about the Gulag, and other facts that Soviet authorities would prefer to cover up. There were music programs. ... It was a breath of fresh air."

The USSR, a vast country that depended on its own shortwave broadcasting to reach far-flung communities, produced a wide range of shortwave radios and made them available to the population.

Lev Gudkov of the Levada Center, Russia's only independent

pollster, says that Soviet authorities created a special sociological unit to study the effects of Western propaganda on the population. Its workers routinely inflated the results to scare their bosses.

When pollsters began counting, they learned that only about 3% of the population listened to such stations, mainly among the intelligentsia in big cities. "So the direct influence wasn't that great, but it was the only source of alternative information," he says. "And its effect was magnified through word of mouth, people passing it on through personal channels."

VOA and the USSR

Some Russian analysts argue that stations like VOA contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union by amplifying negative news and feeding distrust of the government. But in reality the impact may have been limited, says Rudolf Pikhoya, an expert with the official Institute of Russian History. There were a lot of internal reasons the Soviet system became increasingly nonviable, including the war in Afghanistan, economic failure, and the rise of nationalism in other Soviet republics, he says. "Propaganda can only do so much," he says. "People see what's going on around them, and that's what makes them feel dissatisfied or angry."

The objectivity of VOA, which Mr. Trump has called too "radical," has long been questioned. In the Putin era, growing confrontation with the West led Russia to establish its own foreign-language broadcasters, such as RT and Sputnik. Ironically, some Western countries have moved to ban or curtail those outlets.

Inside Russia, while VOA hasn't been heard since 2014, its televised successor, Current Time TV, has been broadcasting since then. Today, many alternative news sources are widely available, including independent Russian outlets, many of which have been in exile since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

For Maria, a retired Moscow literature teacher who declined to give her last name, there was something special about listening to VOA. "It was the voice of a different world, one where there was freedom. Not just the political kind, but art and music and, well, just in the way of life," she says. "I would listen to the 'Jazz Hour' program, and dream about being in New York, or New Orleans." ▪

ON FILM

Wit and wonder fuel 5-star 'The Ballad of Wallis Island'

The film pulses with humor as it explores nostalgia and love.



ON FILM

BY PETER RAINER

"The Ballad of Wallis Island" is both modest and magical. One of its co-stars, Carey Mulligan, has described its tone as a "gentle euphoria." That phrase perfectly expresses how this wonderful movie – directed by James Griffiths from a script by Tom Basden and Tim Key – transports us.

Basden plays Herb McGwyer, a British pop rock star who has accepted a high-paying solo gig on a remote island off the coast of England. He is there at the behest of Charles Heath (Key), a local inhabitant and Herb's self-described biggest fan. Charles' ardor also applies to Herb's former musical and romantic partner, Nell Mortimer (Mulligan). Before Herb went off on his own 10 years ago and rancorously broke up the duo, they were a popular indie folk team.

Charles wants to reunite them. Unbeknownst to Herb, he has also invited Nell onto the island for the gig. Accompanied by her caustic husband, Michael (Akemnji Ndifornyen), who spends most of the movie bird-watching off-screen, Nell initially accepts the setup for what it is. She has retired from the music scene, makes and sells her own chutney, and needs the money.

Herb, already on edge after discovering the gig is intended solely as a private concert for Charles, is far less compliant. He still loves Nell, or thinks he does. She sets him straight: "You love the past and it's all gone." He went on to major commercial success after he and Nell split, but he knows his artistry with her was at its purest.

And who is this mysterious Charles? A widower of five years, he resides in a historic home on the sparsely populated island. He owes his largesse to having won a national lottery – twice. Prone to bad puns, he's supremely affable and unflappable.

What makes him such a figure of warmhearted whimsy is that he genuinely loves the music Herb and Nell made. He may have a trunkful of their records and memorabilia, even a purported lock of Nell's hair that he bought on the internet, but he doesn't come across as creepy. That's because for him, their music represents a way of summoning both the good times in his past and the promise of good times to come.

Basden, who also wrote the plaintive songs that Herb and Nell play together in the film, has an extensive career in British television and theater. As does Key, with whom he has often partnered. "The Ballad of Wallis Island" is actually based on a short film they made in 2007, also directed by Griffiths. The intervening years likely deepened the material from a sketch comedy to something far richer. Its pervasive humor flows from an intimate observation of human folly.

When Herb and Nell play together, their music-making unites their souls, if not their hearts. Charles, hearing them, recognizes that their fervent communion can't be faked. He wonders why they can't get back together as a team, for their own benefit as well as his own. But the filmmakers are well aware that life doesn't work that way.

This realization comes through most powerfully in the performances. As Nell, Mulligan, who has never been better, is wised-up without being cynical. She accepts without a boatload of bitterness where time has taken her. Basden could have slicked up his acting with a lot of pompous pop star clichés. Instead, he gets at the regret, as well as the comedy, beneath Herb's tantrums and frustrations. We grasp the innocence that still resides within him.

Key lets us see the wonderment within Charles' oddball charm. We grasp how his constant prattling is a lonely man's way of entertaining himself. His bashful yen for Amanda (Sian Clifford), a kindly, smiley local shopkeeper, is poetically perfect because she is so like him – off-center and unfeigned.

Near the end, Herb rails at Charles for reuniting him with Nell. "You ruined my life," he yells. But we know better, and, finally, so does Herb. He comes to terms with his past, with his true artistry, and the honesty of that understanding sets him aglow.

▪ *"The Ballad of Wallis Island" is rated PG-13 for some language and smoking.*

Whodunits with history: Those were the slays!

By Yvonne Zipp / Staff writer

How do you like your murder served? For those who want a side of learning with their escapist fare, April offers a trove of new mysteries with literary, musical, and historical underpinnings. There are also current events and a smattering of philosophy. Or at least a philosopher who seems perpetually in danger of being smattered by the martial arts experts who surround him.

While these books tend toward enjoyable pastiches, at least one rises to the level of an art form. Ariel Dorfman's "Allegro" features, improbably enough, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart trying to track down the truth about the last days of Johann Sebastian Bach. And as if that's not enough composers to fill a symphony hall, the contents of a letter delivered to the late George Frideric Handel may hold an important clue.

Early on, the characters in "Allegro" engage in a storytelling contest, in which Aristotle is invoked. "Better that the stories seem true than that they be true," an earl says. "Though if seeming and truth coincide, fiction and history, so much the better," another character rejoins, setting out Dorfman's task.

The author, whose play "Death and the Maiden" has been produced many times for stage and screen, clearly has a reverence for both classical music and its history. The music, dates, public events, and figures are accurate, he writes in a foreword. While he calls "Allegro" a divertimento, it's an intricate examination of grief overlaid on a globe-trotting mystery. As for the solution?

"I think the answer is always music," Mozart says.

Jay Gatsby's sister to the rescue

To celebrate the 100th anniversary of "The Great Gatsby" by shooting Tom Buchanan dead strikes me as a brilliant stroke of literary assassination.

"They were careless people, Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made," F. Scott Fitzgerald famously wrote.

In Claire Anderson-Wheeler's "The Gatsby Gambit," the person cleaning up the mess is Jay Gatsby's invented younger sister, Greta, home from school with a stylish new bob and a desire to learn about the world. With her brother, still besotted with Daisy, looking like the lead suspect and unwilling to protect himself, it's up to his little sister to find the real humanitarian ... er, killer.

"The Gatsby Gambit" is not as nimble as Fitzgerald's slim masterpiece and clocks in at double the length. But Anderson-Wheeler examines questions of class and wealth that feel current in today's tumultuous era.

A Chinese philosopher as Dr. Watson

When "The Railway Conspiracy," the sequel to "The Murder of Mr. Ma," opens, the Chinese philosopher Lao She, plunked forward in time as an Oxford professor, is nearly choking to death on a police officer's whistle. Lao serves as Watson to Judge Dee Ren Jie (also transported to 20th-century London) as Sherlock, and he is the only mere mortal among a cast of wushu experts, boxers, pickpockets, and *rōnin*.

When readers reunite with Judge Dee and friends, they are busy retrieving a stolen rare artifact. Dee is in his Springheel Jack costume, since London bobbies of that era would rather work with a mythical highwayman than with a real Chinese man.

Then a banker drops dead after a banquet given by the owner of the artifact, a young student is killed, and Dee and Lao become concerned that the deaths are part of a bigger conspiracy. The vibe established by co-authors John Shen Yen Nee and SJ Rozan is entirely cinematic, and the action fast-paced and full of humor.

There's a scene that will test whether "The Railway Conspiracy" is for you: A chemist walks into the middle of a melee to calmly hand over the correct antidote needed to save a dog. Do you think: (a) "Thank goodness, the puppy is OK!" (b) "How on Earth would he know which poison the villain would use, and why is he not trying to save the dying humans?" or (c) "This is patently ridiculous, and I am here for it."? If your answer is A or C, you will thoroughly enjoy the adventures of Judge Dee and Lao She. Just make sure you read "The Murder of Mr. Ma" first.

Found family, generosity, and food

"Sometimes, all an old lady wants is a murder to solve. Is that too much to ask for?" Vera thinks at the beginning of "Vera Wong's Guide to Snooping (on a Dead Man)" by Jesse Q. Sutanto. It is the sequel I have longed for since I finished "Vera Wong's Unsolicited Advice for Murderers."

When the new book opens, teahouse owner Vera is still feeding her adopted and real family members veritable feasts and arranging their lives to her satisfaction. (Public service announcement: Do not read this book hungry.) Then, after getting caught in a phone scam and soliciting help from the detective she plans to make her future daughter-in-law, Vera runs into a young woman outside the police station. Millie is trying to find a missing friend, but is too terrified to go inside. Vera, sensing both a mystery and another hapless young person who needs her cooking and bossing, goes on the alert.

"Vera Wong's Guide to Snooping (on a Dead Man)" has everything that made the first book such a treat – found family, generosity, outstanding food – and ups the stakes with a grounded mystery that gives the sequel an unexpected gravitas. In an afterword, Sutanto writes about her own mother being scammed, and the poignancy and compassion she brings to all her characters make "Vera Wong" an antidote for our all-too-selfish times.

Female assassins' next assignment

Another sequel I could not wait to get my hands on was "Kills Well With Others," the follow-up to "Killers of a Certain Age," by the always entertaining Deanna Raybourn. I recommended the first book – about a quartet of female assassins who come out of retirement when their bosses decide to kill them – to every reading friend over the age of 30. After a promising opening set in a seedy 1980s club where Billie inadvertently kills the wrong mobster, the second book just doesn't quite hit its stride.

The four women are still a fun ensemble, but they simply have fewer existential reasons for this second mission. And if you've read Raybourn's other mysteries, the villains are easy to spot.

For the squeamish among us (hi!), the ethical fallout of finding out that a "bad guy" isn't so bad after all could have been rich fodder. There's not enough moral introspection to elevate the sequel beyond a page-turner, but Mary Alice, Helen, Natalie, and Billie remain good company.

Retired spies on the trail

There are consequences galore in "The Summer Guests," Tess Gerritsen's excellent follow-up to "The Spy Coast." Retired CIA agent Maggie Bird spends her days selling eggs at farmers markets and her evenings with four fellow spies who retired to remote Purity, Maine, where privacy is a respected right. Maggie and Co. put away the birding books and antipasti plates after a teenage girl from Boston goes missing and Maggie's neighbor is the last one to have seen her alive. "The Spy Coast" didn't quite let readers get to know

the full ensemble. Gerritsen corrects that in the sequel, fleshing out the deep friendships among Maggie and married couple Lloyd and Ingrid, widowed Ben, and charming Declan. "To anyone who saw them, they probably looked like five retirees out for a leisurely hike, but these retirees came prepared to tackle a crime scene." ■

IN PICTURES

A village's livelihood, sustained by the sea

Story by Kang-Chun Cheng / Contributor

FUMBA, TANZANIA

Biasha Hamadi Makungu steps in at low tide, carefully threading her way past vibrant coral colonies and congregations of spiky sea urchins.

Ms. Makungu is searching for seaweed. Over the past 26 years, she has cultivated and hauled countless tons of it to shore from the coast of Fumba, a village in the Tanzanian archipelago of Zanzibar.

"I started harvesting seaweed because of the scarcity of water," she says.

Most villagers in Fumba are subsistence farmers, growing cassava, bananas, cabbage, and other produce. But when the tides are right, Ms. Makungu and 14 other women work as part of Pania Uchupe, a seaweed harvesting collective whose name in Swahili roughly translates to "Let's work hard to succeed."

Each harvest week lasts four or five days, with the women collecting more than 8,000 kilograms (17,000 pounds) of *Eucheuma denticulatum*, a strain of red algae. It can be made into a variety of products, from soaps and cosmetics to hot sauce and juice.

The collective has been active for years, selling mostly at local markets or to intermediaries who export to China, the United States, and elsewhere abroad. But in 2021, the women began supplying the SeaWeed Café, a factory in Kerege that's north of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania's largest port.

"The idea was to invest in seaweed-based foods while empowering local farmers," says Nancy Iraba, a marine scientist who founded the factory.

Back in Fumba, the women of the collective sit in a circle, picking through baskets of semidried seaweed. They will reserve some of it for their own families, whipping up cakes, soups, and *kachumbari* (a traditional tomato-based salad).

Ms. Makungu supports her children and grandkids with her harvests; her husband, a former schoolteacher, died a few years ago.

"Our mothers didn't do this – we are the first generation here," she says. "And we'll teach our children to do the same." ■

SUDOKU

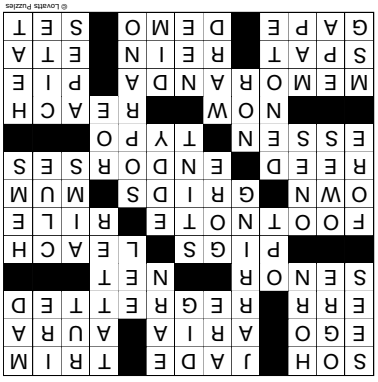
Sudoku difficulty: ★☆☆☆

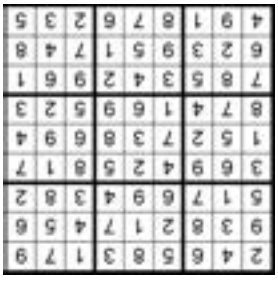
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	3	8						
5	1	7		9	4			2
		9	4			8	1	7
		2		3		6	9	
8		4			9		2	3
7				4		9		
	2		9		1		4	
4		1	8	7		2		5

How to do Sudoku

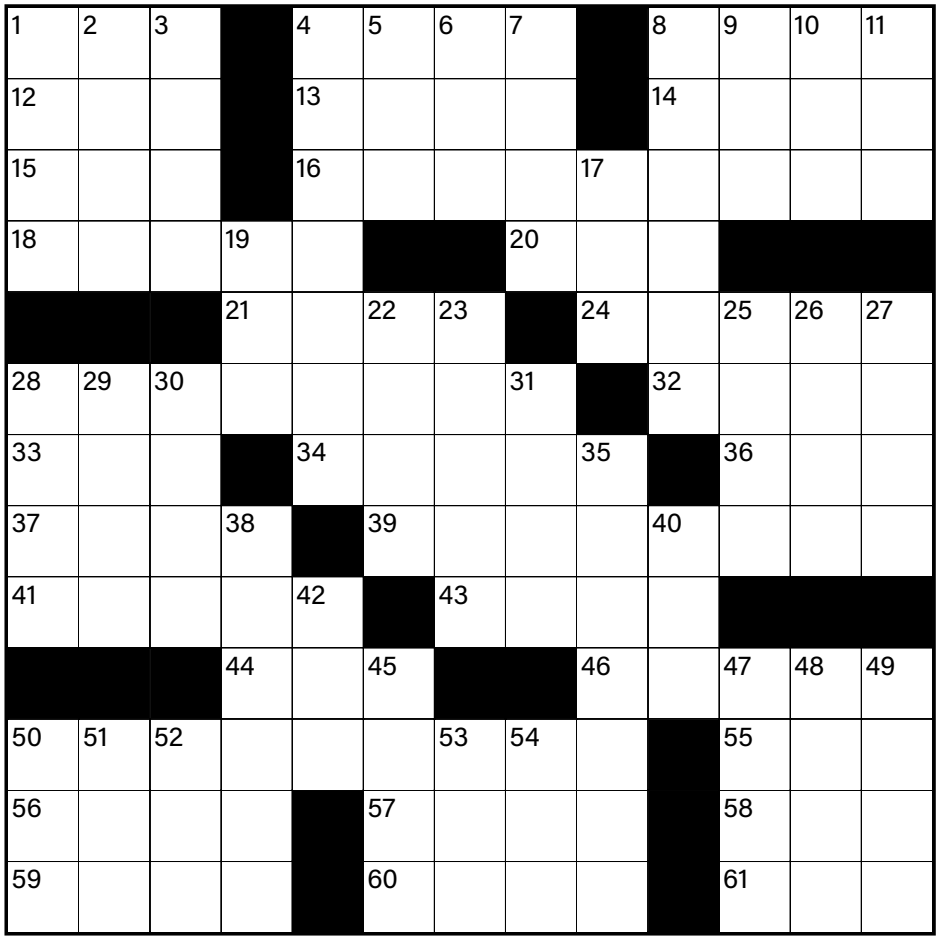
Fill in the grid so the numbers 1 through 9 appear just once ineach column, row, and three-by-three block.

Crossword and Sudoku solutions





Crossword



© Lovatts Puzzles

Across

1. Fifth musical note
4. Ornamental stone
8. Wasp-waisted, e.g.
12. Pride part
13. It might have a cadenza
14. Personal glow
15. Make muffs
16. Rued
18. Mexican address?
20. It's often surfed
21. Babe and Porky
24. Archibald ___ (Cary Grant)
28. Certain explanation
32. Steam up
33. Part of MYOB
34. Graph paper sections
36. ___'s the word
37. Singer Lou
39. Publicly supports
41. German city whose name means "to eat"
43. Proofer's find
44. When your chance may be
46. Achieve
50. Firm messages
55. Word after honey or humble
56. Petty clash
57. Trammel
58. Vowel for Plato
59. Betray wonder
60. DJ's tape
61. Point-match connection

Down

1. Visualizes
2. Fairytale monster
3. Klaxon
4. Not meshing well
5. "I" can't take it, but "you" can
6. Cutting remark
7. Get through work
8. Cloth shred
9. Dead-end job
10. Hotness
11. TV's "__ About You"
17. Finless fish
19. Pick or choose
22. Horror movie sight
23. Short period
25. Objects
26. Help for Nancy Drew
27. Skirt edges
28. Fairway duck?
29. Is obliged
30. Skinny numerals
31. Guitarist Duane
35. Voice heard above the others
38. Designate
40. Nondairy eggs
42. Fish-fowl nexus
45. Electoral district
47. Zoo animals
48. Officially commend
49. Qualifying race
50. Restaurant sign, "No ___"
51. Wetlands watchdog
52. Tourist guide
53. Formerly called
54. Switch to low beam