

Festive Wrap Good News Stories from 2021

Let's face it – it's been another tough year. The pandemic has continued to overshadow day-to-day life, and, with the emergence of the omicron variant, uncertainty remains – when will this all be over? Health burden aside, the pandemic has brought other issues into sharper focus – efforts to fight climate change, biodiversity loss and global inequality have all suffered set-backs during the last 18 months. Negative news stories have dominated the headlines this year, and it's easy to feel a little overwhelmed. But scratch below the surface, and you'll find reasons for optimism in these difficult times. So, sit back, find your Christmas slippers, and read on for some of the more positive news stories from 2021:

Coffee can survive climate change:

Coffee drinkers rejoice! For years, scientists have been concerned about the detrimental impacts of a warming climate for coffee bean crops, with one study estimating that by 2050, around half of land currently used to grow high quality coffee could be rendered unproductive. However, back in April, researchers exploring an area of remote forest in Sierra Leone rediscovered *Coffea stenophylla*, a plant previously thought to be extinct outside of the Ivory Coast. Studies show that the plant can tolerate temperatures up to 6°C hotter than Arabica, the world's current most popular coffee bean. Crucially, the rediscovered bean has passed the taste test - when roasted and served to a panel of coffee connoisseurs, over 80% could not tell the difference between *Coffea stenophylla* and Arabica in a blind tasting.

Biodiversity loss can be reversed:

Nature is in dangerous decline and species extinction rates are accelerating – that's the worrying conclusion from a UN report published in May. But all is not lost, and evidence shows that with a little help, nature can and will recover. Take the Giant Panda, China's national animal. Giant Pandas first became endangered in the 1990s due to excessive poaching and habitat loss, the bamboo forests that they rely on for food increasingly destroyed to make way for agricultural land. In the last three decades, Chinese authorities have taken a series of measures to bring the Giant Panda back from the brink. Reforestation efforts have increased the panda's range by 11.8%, and there are severe penalties for those hunting the animal. As a result, numbers have rebounded. In July, the Chinese government declared the Giant Panda no longer endangered, showing that biodiversity loss can be reversed where there is the will to do so. The protection of panda habitat has had other benefits, including an increase in sightings of other endangered species such as tigers, leopards and elephants.

Renewable energy is cheaper than ever before:

Energy accounts for almost three quarters of global greenhouse emissions, and a rapid transition to low-carbon sources of power generation is essential if we are to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. For over two centuries, coal has been the mainstay of economic growth due to its abundance and crucially, its price – the most polluting fossil fuel has traditionally been the cheapest to use. However, things are rapidly changing. In June of this year, a report



by the International Renewable Energy Agency concluded that the majority of new renewables undercut the cheapest fossil fuels on cost. In fact, renewable energy installations in 2020 will save developing countries an estimated \$156 billion over their lifespan. Perhaps then, it is no surprise that the rate at which renewables are being installed is rising rapidly – in 2021, an estimated 290GW of new capacity was installed, up 90GW from the previous year. The International Energy Agency is now predicting that renewables will produce the same amount of energy as fossil fuel and nuclear combined, by as early as 2026.

The biggest polluters are being forced to act on climate change:

While governments remain slow to act on climate change – just look at the underwhelming outcomes from COP26 – grass roots action is forcing the world’s largest emitters to harbour responsibility. Few companies are feeling the pinch more than the oil and gas giants. In May, a court in the Netherlands ordered Royal Dutch Shell to reduce its emissions to 45% of their 2019 levels by 2030. It will also be responsible for the emissions of its suppliers. It is the first time that a company has been legally obliged to align its emissions targets with the Paris Agreement and sets a precedent for future cases. Just months

later, Exxon – the world’s second largest oil company – suffered a stunning defeat, when shareholders elected two directors nominated by activist investors to steer the company towards a cleaner energy future. The campaign, led by a tiny hedge fund, is thought to be the first time that Exxon has lost a vote against company picked directors.

From everyone at Whitechurch, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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