

Giant panda is no longer “endangered,” experts say

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of the bamboo-gobbling, black-and-white bear that has long been a symbol of China and the global conservation movement.

The panda population reached an estimated low of less than 1,000 in the 1980s due to poaching and deforestation until Beijing threw its full weight behind preserving the animal, which has been sent to zoos around the world as a gesture of Chinese diplomatic goodwill.

The Chinese government and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) first established the Wolong National Nature Reserve in Sichuan province in 1980. Wild panda numbers have slowly rebounded as China cracked down on the skin trade and gradually expanded its protected forest



areas to now cover 5,400 square miles.

International groups and the Chinese government have worked to save wild

pandas and breed them at enormous cost,

attracting criticism that the money could be better spent saving other animals

CUTE CUB. A panda cub born at the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding in Chengdu, the capital of southwest China's Sichuan province, is seen on June 23, 2015. A leading international group has taken the giant panda off its endangered list thanks to decades of conservation efforts, but China's government discounted the move, saying it did not view the status of the country's beloved symbol as any less serious. (Xue Yubin/Xinhua via AP, File)

facing extinction. The IUCN drew attention to the 70 percent decline in the eastern gorilla population over the past 20 years.

But the WWF, whose logo has been a panda since 1961, celebrated the panda's re-classification, saying it proved that aggressive investment does pay off “when science, political will, and engagement of local communities come together.” AP researcher Henry Hou contributed to this report.

Japan official blasted for piggyback ride after deadly storm

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — A Japanese government official is under fire for riding on a colleague's back to get through a big puddle of water during his recent visit to a town devastated by a deadly storm.

Vice minister of reconstruction Shunsuke Mutai headed a government team's visit to the northern town of Iwaizumi in early September to assess damage from the storm, which killed more than 20 people in the region.

Mutai, who had forgotten to bring rubber boots, was shown in television footage on the back of another government official wading through the puddle. The scene triggered sharp criticism on social media, with Mutai accused of not taking his job seriously.

The case resurfaced when his boss, reconstruction minister Masahiro Imamura, apologized for the incident.



“When I heard the story, I said ‘what on earth was he doing?’” Imamura said as he apologized to local residents. He said Mutai rushed to the disaster area and forgot his boots.

REGRETTABLE RIDE. Shunsuke Mutai, Japan's vice minister of reconstruction, visits Iwaizumi, a northern Japanese town devastated by a deadly storm, in this September 1, 2016 file photo. Vice minister Mutai is under fire for crossing a puddle piggybacked by his underling during his recent visit to the town. Mutai had headed a government team's visit to the town to assess damage from the storm, which killed more than 20 people in the region. (Jun Hirata/Kyodo News via AP)

Chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga criticized Mutai for lacking sensitivity.

“He went there as head of the government investigation team, so naturally he should have brought his rubber boots to begin with,” Suga said. “I must say he lacked sensitivity to the residents hit by the disaster and the region, and we should make sure not to repeat the same problem.”

Some people said on social media that the scene was “embarrassing,” while others wondered whether Mutai was wearing expensive shoes, or if he simply did not want to get wet.

Seven Chinese arrested in raid at drug laboratory in the Philippines

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — Seven Chinese citizens have been arrested in a raid on a clandestine methamphetamine laboratory inside a pig farm north of Manila, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency has reported.

The agency said nearly one pound of methamphetamine with a street value of around 2.5 million pesos (\$5,400), about 44 pounds of the drug ingredient ephedrine, laboratory

equipment, and various chemicals were confiscated in the raid in Pampanga province. Six men and one woman face charges of illegal drug possession and manufacturing.

The drug lab in the basement of a stockroom was able to produce up to 110 pounds of methamphetamine per week and may have been built in the hog farm to mask the foul smell of drug production, officials said.

President Rodrigo Duterte, who

has launched a massive crackdown on illegal drugs, said Chinese citizens are involved in the drug trade in the Philippines and that drugs have been smuggled from China to the Philippines.

More than 2,800 suspected drug dealers and users have been killed and nearly 700,000 others have surrendered out of fear of being killed since Duterte took office on June 30, according to police.

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