



1,114 bird species tallied, 20 previously unrecorded

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — Myanmar bird enthusiasts have counted 1,114 bird species including 20 undocumented species between 2010 and 2014 in Myanmar (also known as Burma), seven of which are endemic to the country. One of the surveyors, Thet Zaw Naing, said the Great Frigate and the Pied Falconet are among 20 previously unrecorded birds spotted during the four-year field survey by the Bird and Nature Society, the Wildlife Conservation Society, Flora and Fauna International, and several other bird-enthusiast associations. Myanmar is seen as one of Asia's last bastions of biodiversity in part because decades of isolation under harsh military rule allowed the country to avoid the often rampant development experienced in other parts of the region. Environmentalists, however, worry that could change as economic development expands into agricultural land and results in the destruction of grasslands.

Vietnam buries thousands of cats smuggled for restaurants

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Vietnamese authorities have buried thousands of cats, many apparently still alive, that were seized after being smuggled in a truck from China for restaurants, according to a police officer. Cat meat is easily available in some restaurants in Vietnam, especially in the north near the Chinese border, even though the government in 1998 ordered such restaurants closed and banned the trade of cats because they are a predator to rats, which destroy crops. The buried cats were dealt with in accordance with the law because they posed an environmental and health risk, said the police officer, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media. He confirmed that live cats were buried but was uncertain how many. Police stopped the truck, which was carrying 3 tons of cats in cramped bamboo baskets, earlier this month. The truck driver, to whom the cargo belonged, was fined \$360 for smuggling animals. Animal-rights advocates had sought to stop the cats from being killed.

Fourth giant panda dies from canine distemper virus

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese state media have reported that a fourth giant panda has died from canine distemper virus in the same rescue center in northwestern China where three other pandas died over the past two months. The official Xinhua News Agency reported that the six-year-old panda, named Feng Feng, died after falling into a coma on January 8. It did not say when the death occurred. Xinhua said an additional four pandas were diagnosed with canine distemper but recovered. The center sent its healthy pandas to other reserves. About 1,600 giant pandas live in the wild, mostly in the Chinese province of Sichuan, while more than 300 live in captivity. Canine distemper affects a wide variety of animals and is the leading cause of death for dogs.

Japan, Mongolia ink free trade pact

TOKYO (AP) — Japan and Mongolia have signed a free trade agreement expected to open the landlocked frontier market to more Japanese auto exports and strengthen Tokyo's leverage with a key partner in its dealings with North Korea. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Mongolian counterpart, Chimed Saikhanbileg, signed the agreement at a recent summit. Free trade talks began in 2012 and the two countries reached a basic accord last July. Mongolia's imports from Japan, mostly vehicles, are roughly 16 times the size of its exports to Japan. Mongolia has served as a conduit for Japan's talks with the North Koreans on abductions of Japanese decades ago.

Partly paralyzed, jailed blogger allowed to go home

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — A prominent Vietnamese blogger who is partially paralyzed and was jailed two months ago for posting articles that oppose the Communist Party said he has been released from prison on medical parole. Blogger and writer Nguyen Quang Lap, 58, said he was still being investigated for allegedly spreading propaganda against the Communist government, though. Lap often reposts other bloggers' political and social writings critical of the government. In 2001, Lap suffered brain injuries in a traffic accident that paralyzed the left side of his body. He needs a cane to walk and relies on family members to help with his daily needs, his wife, Ho Thi Hong, said in a letter to police after his December 6 detention that requested medical parole for her husband. Lap said he was released and allowed to return to his home in Ho Chi Minh City. "In prison, I can't help myself with daily needs, I'm guessing that is why they released me on bail, but I'm still being investigated. I am not free," Lap said by telephone from his home. He declined to give more details. The state-run *Tuoi Tre* (Youth) newspaper quoted Maj. Gen. Le Dong Phong, Ho Chi Minh City's chief security investigator, as saying that police changed their prevention measure from detaining Lap to putting him under house arrest because of Lap's "sincere confession" for having committed acts that violate the law.

649 million online in China, fewer are microblogging

BEIJING (AP) — China has 649 million people online, but they are drifting away from microblogging sites after a government crackdown on free speech. China's online population was already the world's largest. Of those counted in the government-backed China Internet Network Information Center's annual report, 557 million were using mobile devices. The number of microblog users dropped in 2014 by 32 million to 249 million, a decline that shows the sites failed to recover from the 2013 crackdown that chilled discussion on China's Twitter-like sites. Meanwhile, newer products — especially the instant-messaging service WeChat — are rapidly gaining popularity. The report also says the number of users of mobile instant-message services grew 17.8 percent to 508 million.



BARRIER TO FREEDOM. Soe Nyunt, the current owner of the iron gate that stood in front of the home of Myanmar's formerly imprisoned democracy icon, Aung San Suu Kyi, separating her from throngs of cheering supporters as she made speeches challenging the country's then-military rulers, poses for a picture in Yangon, Myanmar. Soe Nyunt plans to auction the gate with a starting bid of \$200,000. (AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe)

Gate that Suu Kyi spoke from going up for auction

By Aye Aye Win
The Associated Press

YANGON, Myanmar — The iron gate that stood in front of the home of Myanmar's formerly imprisoned democracy icon, separating her from throngs of cheering supporters as she made speeches challenging the country's then-military rulers, is going on the auction block.

Soe Nyunt, the current owner, said the starting bid would be \$200,000.

He said the proceeds would go toward helping Aung San Suu Kyi build a new National League for Democracy (NLD) party headquarters.

The 69-year old Nobel laureate — and daughter of the country's famous independence leader, Gen. Aung San — became an international symbol of peaceful resistance in the face of oppression during her 15 years of on-again-off-again house arrest.

She permanently moved from London to the lakeside house of her mother almost 27 years ago, where while under incarceration she often mounted a table behind its front gate and held the pointed iron spikes as she spoke to crowds through a loudspeaker about everything from corruption to the abysmal state of education.

In 1996, the then-military regime had enough, blocking public access to the house. But in 2007, more than 500 chanting Buddhist monks brazenly walked past the barricades. Suu Kyi met them in front of the gate, bowing

her head in a show of respect and then waving.

When finally released in 2010, soon after elections that were widely seen as neither free nor fair, thousands of supporters greeted her with garlands and bouquets of flowers.

A bumpy transition from dictatorship to democracy followed. Suu Kyi is now leader of the opposition in the country's young, military-dominated parliament, but she has said many of the reforms implemented since 2011 have either stalled or been rolled back.

Soe Nyunt said he saw the gate — and the house number, 54, painted on a separate lacquered plate — while landscaping the garden. He said it was lying under a mango tree waiting to be picked up by a junk collector.

Recognizing its significance, he asked if he could have it, giving a few hundred dollars in exchange.

"This gate tells the history of the country's democratic struggle," Soe Nyunt told The Associated Press, adding that it should be placed in a museum for future generations.

But he decided on the auction, to be held soon, after seeing that the cash-strapped NLD badly needed a new party headquarters.

He said he hoped some of the money would go toward upcoming centennial celebrations to honor Suu Kyi's father.

This is not the first time items associated with Suu Kyi have been auctioned. Suu Kyi's handmade sweaters were auctioned at a party fundraiser in 2012, fetching \$123,000. The proceeds went to her education and health projects.

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Bangladesh Taka	77.875
Cambodian Riel	4059.6
China Renminbi	6.2405
Fijian Dollar	2.0387
Hong Kong Dollar	7.7553
Indian Rupee	62.196
Indonesian Rupiah	12798
Iranian Rial	27497
Japanese Yen	119.06
Laos New Kip	8111.5
Malaysian Ringgit	3.5795
Nepal Rupee	99.231
Pakistani Rupee	101.44
Papua N.G. Kina	2.6072
Philippine Peso	44.285
Russian Ruble	63.37
Saudi Riyal	3.7519
Singapore Dollar	1.3566
South Korean Won	1096.9
Sri Lankan Rupee	132.91
Taiwan Dollar	31.447
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Vietnam Dong	21330

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