

Japan to make crater on asteroid to get samples

By Mari Yamaguchi
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan’s space agency said its Hayabusa2 spacecraft is following up on its touchdown on a distant asteroid with another risky mission — to drop an explosive to make a crater and collect underground samples to get possible clues to the origin of the solar system.

Hayabusa2 made history on February 22 when it successfully touched down on the boulder-rich asteroid, where it also collected some surface fragments.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said Hayabusa2 is to drop a copper impactor the size of a baseball and weighing 4.4 pounds on the asteroid on April 5 to collect samples from deeper underground where they had not been exposed to the sun or space rays.

The new mission will require an immediate evacuation of the spacecraft to the other side of the asteroid so it won’t get hit by flying shards from the blast, JAXA said. While moving away, Hayabusa2 will leave a camera to capture the outcome.

The mission will allow JAXA scientists to analyze



CRATER COLLECTION. This image released by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) shows the shadow, center above, of the Hayabusa2 spacecraft after its successful touchdown on the asteroid Ryugu. Japan’s space agency says the spacecraft is following up on its touchdown on a distant asteroid with another risky mission — to drop an explosive to make a crater and collect underground samples to get possible clues to the origin of the solar system. (JAXA via AP, File)

details of a crater to find out the history of the asteroid, said Koji Wada, who is in charge of the project.

Hayabusa2 will start descending toward the asteroid the day before to carry out the mission from its home position of 12 miles above. It will drop a cone-shaped piece of equipment containing explosives that will blast off a copper plate on the bottom. It will turn into a ball and slam into the asteroid at the speed of 1.2 miles per second.

JAXA previously planned to have Hayabusa2 briefly touch down in a crater, but an agency researcher Takashi Kubota said they may not force it to prioritize safety for the spacecraft. Kubota said it would be the first time a spacecraft would take materials from underground a space object.

The asteroid, named Ryugu after an undersea palace in a Japanese folktale, is about 3,000 feet in diameter and about 180 million miles from Earth.

Orangutan mother blinded by air gun pellets in Indonesia

By Binsar Bakkara and Niniek Karmini
The Associated Press

SIBOLANGIT, Indonesia — An orangutan mother has been blinded after being shot with at least 74 air gun pellets on Indonesia’s Sumatra island, where threats to the endangered species have increased as the palm oil and paper industries shrink its jungle habitat.

An x-ray showed at least 74 air gun pellets in her body, including four in her left eye and two in the right, said veterinarian Yenny Saraswati with the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program.

The great ape, named “Hope” by her rescuers, also had several wounds believed to have been caused by sharp objects, she said. Hope also was recovering from surgery to repair a broken collarbone.

Villagers spotted the severely wounded orangutan on a farm in Aceh province’s Subulussalam district with her month-old baby, which was critically malnourished, said Sapto Aji Prabowo, who heads the Aceh provincial conservation agency.

The baby died as rescuers rushed the pair to a clinic in neighboring North Sumatra province’s Sibolangit district.

“Hopefully Hope can pass this critical period, but she cannot be released to the wild anymore,” Saraswati said, adding that only seven of the pellets were removed because the veterinarians prioritized the broken collarbone and the risk of infection that it posed.

The orangutan conservation program said the use of readily available air guns to shoot and kill wildlife, including orangutans, is a major problem in Indonesia.

It said in the last 10 years, it has treated more than 15 orangutans with a total of



HOPE ENDURES. Veterinarians and volunteers of the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Program tend to a female orangutan they named “Hope” after conducting a surgery for infections in some parts of her body and to fix broken bones, in Sibolangit, North Sumatra, Indonesia. A veterinarian says the endangered orangutan that had a young baby is blind after being shot at least 74 times, including six times in the eyes, with an air gun. The baby orangutan died from malnutrition. (AP Photo/Binsar Bakkara)

nearly 500 air gun pellets in their bodies.

Last year, an orangutan in the Indonesian part of Borneo died after being shot at least 130 times with an air gun, the second known killing of an orangutan that year.

A 2018 comprehensive study of Borneo’s orangutans estimates their numbers have plummeted by more than 100,000 since 1999, as the palm oil and paper industries shrink their habitat and fatal conflicts with people increase.

Only around 13,400 Sumatran orangutans remain in the wild. The species is listed as critically endangered by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

Karmini reported from Jakarta, Indonesia.

Swimmer Kenneth To dies at age 26 while training in Florida

HONG KONG (AP) — Kenneth To, a swimmer who won a silver medal for Australia at the 2013 world championships, has died after becoming ill while training in Florida. He was 26 years old.

To won six medals for Australia at the 2010 Youth Olympics in Singapore, including gold in the 400-meter medley. At the 2013 worlds in Barcelona, To was part of Australia’s silver medal-winning 400 medley relay squad.

“(To) felt unwell at a training session and was taken to hospital where sadly, he passed away,” the Hong Kong Sports Institute said. “Kenneth was known as a truly exceptional person, warm, funny, and kind.”

The cause of death was not immediately clear.

Born in Hong Kong, To’s family moved to Australia when he was young. He transferred his nationality in 2016 to swim for Hong Kong and was training for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

To was in Florida for a three-month training camp with the Gator Swim Club at the University of Florida in Gainesville.



TO TRAGEDY. Kenneth To of Australia swims to win the Men’s 200m Individual Medley final at the FINA Swimming World Cup in Berlin, Germany, in this August 11, 2013 file photo. To died in March after becoming ill while training in Florida. He was 26 years old. (AP Photo/Gero Breloer, File)

In December he competed at the world short-course championships in China and placed sixth in the 100-meter medley — his first individual final at a major championships in six years, he wrote on Twitter.

World swimming body

FINA said it learned of To’s death “with immense sadness.”

“Owner of many Hong Kong national swimming records, Kenneth To was a reference and example for the youth in the territory,” the Switzerland-based governing body said.



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