

Captive and wild panda mating completed in China



Giant panda Caocao. [Screenshot: CNTV]

Chinese researchers confirmed that Caocao, a female giant panda in captivity, has completed natural mating with a wild male companion on March 23, 2017, which marks the first such instance in the world and is regarded as a breakthrough in the country's panda breeding.

On March 27, researchers with the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda (CCRCGP) reclaimed a voice recorder installed in the collar of Caocao, a subject of the organization's wild mating trial program. Caocao was released into the wild early in March, in a field monitor station in the Wolong National Nature Reserve in southwest China's Sichuan Province.

Researcher recently announced that Caocao mated for 90 seconds with a wild male giant panda on March 23.

Previously a wild panda, Caocao was reportedly found injured and rescued by researchers in 2003, when the then cub was only months old.

The female bear has undergone wildlife training and possesses rich wildness survival experience. She has delivered cubs four times, giving birth to a total of six baby pandas.

According to Zhang Hemin, Deputy Director of the CCRCGP, China's captive panda breeding program has witnessed an increasing population for the species but how to enhance the pandas' genetic vitality and diversity under artificial propagation remains a challenge.

The center hopes that its captive-bred giant pandas released into the wild could mate with wild companions, thus bringing new blood into their existing group.

So far, China has 471 captive pandas, and most of them succeeded in mating via artificial intervention in the past years.

Polluted pools spur nationwide probe

China has launched a thorough investigation into the pollution of soil throughout the country and will release the final results to the public later, top environmental protection officials said on Friday.

“I can declare today that the Ministry of Environmental Protection will treat all soil polluting cases with no tolerance once we have found them,” Tian Weiyong, head of the Environmental Inspection Bureau under the Ministry of Environmental Protection, said on Friday, after an NGO discovered two untreated sewage pits filled with hazardous industrial waste.

Photos of the polluted pools, provided by the Chongqing Liangjiang Voluntary Service Center, went viral on Tuesday. The pits were found in Dacheng county of Langfang, Hebei province, and in Tianjin’s Jinghai district.

The ministry launched an investigation with the Hebei government immediately after the photos were shown online. According to the Langfang government, several officials of Dacheng county in charge of environmental protection have been suspended from their posts, and the local government has invited experts to work on a plan for restoration of the area.

Restoration will be completed by the end of September, the local government vowed.

A preliminary local investigation found that the sewage had strong acidic qualities, which was caused by waste from acid-washing at steel and iron plants and electroplating factories, said Yan Jingjun, deputy head of the ministry’s Environmental Inspection Bureau. Yan is in charge of the joint investigation teams with Hebei and Tianjin.

“But all the pits are located at deserted land that is far away from residential areas, and no villagers nearby drink underground water,” Yan said.

As for the pits in Tianjin, the ministry said the municipality solved the pollution in 14 out of 18 similar pits in Jinghai district since 2014, and plans to deal with the remaining four pits.

“Actions of pouring hazardous waste into the pools has broken the law and will be dealt with seriously,” said Tian, the inspection bureau head.

“We are extremely open to all kinds of NGOs, the public and the media helping to provide oversight, so we can improve our environment,” he added.

According to China's Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law adopted in 2008, discharging noxious sewage water and other waste into wells, pits, cracks and caves is forbidden.

Discharging pollutants into pits and wells has been defined as a crime of contaminating the environment based on a judicial interpretation released in 2013 by the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate.

Press release: Cornwall waste disposer prosecuted for illegally storing asbestos

The owner of a Cornish waste disposal business has been ordered to pay almost £80,000 in fines and costs for illegally storing and treating waste including asbestos at a site near Penzance.

The site manager was also prosecuted and ordered to pay a total of £6,000 in fines and costs. The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

Leslie Allen ran a waste operation from a site in Perranuthnoe where waste from various commercial and domestic sources was illegally processed. The site was also used to store hazardous waste including asbestos. The storage and bulking of waste requires an Environment Agency permit.

Truro Crown Court heard how the defendant operated without a permit despite receiving advice and guidance from the Environment Agency and assuring officers he would apply for a permit. The business had traded for some 18 years.

An investigation was launched by the Environment Agency in 2014 after officers suspected Les Allen Waste Disposal Services was still operating illegally. The transfer of waste was often not recorded and when it was, the records were either inadequate or misleading.

Waste was recorded as being taken from a customer direct to an approved site when, in actual fact, it was transported to Perranuthnoe for sorting before being taken to various sites. The business benefitted financially from operating without an environmental permit.

During their investigation, Environment Agency officers recovered asbestos from a pile of waste at the site. It had not been bagged or stored in a secure container as is required by law.

Sentencing Allen and his site manager, Richard Shore, Judge Carr said the handling of asbestos was a 'great responsibility' and the defendants had

exposed themselves and others to risk. He said poor record keeping meant we would never know what waste went through the site.

On 5 February 2016, the Environment Agency discovered Leslie Allen was continuing to run an illegal waste operation despite having been interviewed under caution and giving an assurance he would stop. The business was operating a crusher and swing shovel on land near Sunnyvale Farm, Rosudgeon, Penzance and treating mixed construction and demolition waste to raise a ground level without an Environment Agency authorisation.

Sophie Unsworth of the Environment Agency said:

Waste sites must operate within the law and always put human health and the environment above financial gain. This is especially important for sites receiving hazardous waste such as asbestos.

Despite being given repeated advice and guidance by the Environment Agency, the owner chose to continue to operate illegally, receiving, handling and storing waste, without a permit.

Leslie Allen was fined £40,000 for two offences under the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2010 including, between 17 November 2014 and 6 November 2015 and 5 February 2016 operating a regulated facility, namely a waste operation at The Workshop, Perranuthnoe Lane, Perranuthnoe and on land adjacent to Sunnyvale Farm, Rosudgeon, Penzance without an environmental permit.

He was also ordered to pay £14,200 costs and £25,772 under the Proceeds of Crime Act. Allen was warned that failure to pay would result in a 9-month prison sentence.

The site manager, Richard Shore, was fined £4,000 for the same offences and ordered to pay £2,000 costs.

The sentencing hearing took place at Truro Crown Court on 10 April 2017.

The Environment Agency is currently running a [Right Waste Right Place campaign](#) aimed at small to medium sized businesses who need waste advice.

Notes to editor

- Waste crime can cause serious pollution to the environment, puts communities at risk and undermines local businesses. It's a serious issue, diverting as much as £1 billion a year from legitimate business and the Treasury.
- Waste crime is an issue that we and the government take very seriously. The Environment Agency has enhanced powers – introduced in 2015 – to tackle illegal activity at waste sites.
- The Environment Agency stopped nearly 1,000 illegal waste sites from operating in 2015/16.
- 97% of waste management operators are well run and provide a much needed

waste management service. But we take tough action against poor performing companies and those who commit waste crime.

- If you see waste crime report it by calling our incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60 or anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

[John McDonnell responding to Treasury announcement that it has sold all of the public's stake in Lloyds Banking Group](#)

John

McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, responding to the Treasury announcement that it has sold all of the public's stake in Lloyds Banking Group, said:

"Two days after the Chancellor shamefully admitted that he will be unable to sell RBS at a profit, he is now trying to claim the handling of Lloyds as a success despite having had to scrap his earlier proposed retail sale because returns were so poor.

"Philip Hammond needs to stop ignoring the elephant in the room of Britain's biggest banking failure and get to grips with RBS. Only Labour will put in place the tough measures needed to reign in our banks instead of Tory tax giveaways on the bank levy and bankers' bonus tax."

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the execution of Mr Ledell Lee in the US State of Arkansas](#)

The execution of Mr Ledell Lee yesterday has broken a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty in the State of Arkansas, in place since 2005. Regardless of the circumstances, the death penalty can never be justified and remains an unacceptable denial of human rights and dignity. It also fails to act as a deterrent to crime.

Whilst reiterating that the European Union is strongly and unequivocally opposed to capital punishment, there are internationally-recognised minimum

standards that States which insist on maintaining the death penalty must respect. This includes that where capital punishment occurs, it shall be carried out so as to inflict the minimum possible suffering.

We call on the authorities of the State of Arkansas to reinstate the moratorium on executions as a first step towards full abolition, thus following the positive example of the so far 19 US States who have abolished the death penalty.