

Arctic sea ice cover to be second-lowest recorded

Arctic sea ice cover is set to reach to the second-lowest extent since satellite observations began in 1979, according to scientists from Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS).

“Based on an Arctic sea prediction system developed by our research team, the ice cover is expected to shrink to 4.1 million square kilometers in September, 2017,” said Liu Jiping from the Institute of Atmospheric Physics of CAS.

In general, the Arctic sea ice reaches its minimum extent in September each year, and global climate change has brought significant changes to the sea ice cover, with nearly 50 percent of losses since 1979, according to Liu.

The Arctic sea ice cover shrank to 3.41 million square kilometers in September, 2012, the lowest summer minimum in history, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

Scientists from the CAS said that the shrinking will make it possible for vessels to sail along the Arctic’s Northeast Passage, a path across the top of Siberia, Russia.

Liu said that the loss of the Arctic sea ice in autumn and winter will affect atmospheric circulation, and that the north part of China may suffer from worse air quality.

“The prediction of the growing and melting seasons of the Arctic sea ice will also be helpful in analyzing the extreme weather events in winter,” said Liu.

‘Coast chiefs’ to fight pollution, illegal fishing

A coastal Chinese province is to appoint coast chiefs to fight pollution and illegal fishing.

Zhejiang provincial government said Tuesday that the arrangement will take effect on August 7 and by the end of this year all coasts in Zhejiang should have their chiefs.

Coast chiefs will be responsible for supervising waste discharged into the sea, illegal fishing gear, unlicensed fishing boats, illegal use of coasts,

illegal ship building, repairing and recycling, the government said in a circular.

Zhejiang has a coastline of more than 6,600 kilometers, the longest of any Chinese province.

The coast chief practice is regarded as an extension of river chiefs, which are being rolled out across the country after a successful trial in Jiangsu Province.

The responsibilities of river chiefs include water resource protection, pollution prevention and control, and ecological restoration. Their performance is assessed and they will be held accountable for environmental damage in the bodies of water they oversee.

Zhejiang tested the practice in 2008 and expanded it across the whole province in 2013 and there are now 61,000 river chiefs there.

Once-threatened marmots threaten shepherd life in NW China

Bobak marmots, a once threatened species, is posing threats to herder's livelihood in northwest China's Pamir Plateau, as the rodents prosper under local conservation efforts.



Photo taken on July 21, 2014 shows a bobak marmot running on northwest China's Pamir Plateau. [Photo/Chinanews.com]

The small fluffy animals mainly feed on grass and have been destroying grassland and affecting herding in Aketao County, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous

Region, according to local herders.

"They look cute, but they are especially vexing to us in winter," says herdsman Tajidin Ghupur. The rodents eat grass roots and collect plants in their burrows to keep out the cold.

"My cattle and sheep eat only leaves of the grass, which will grow again. But the marmots root out the grass," he says. "As long as they are here, there will be no food left for my flock."

It is destructive to grassland, says Muhttar, head of grassland conservation center of Aketao County. Local conservation authorities estimate that a bobak marmot can ruin four to five square meters of grassland a year, which can take years to recover.

Bobak marmots inhabit the steppes of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In China, habitats of the species include the Tianshan Mountains and the Altai Mountains in Xinjiang.

The population of wild bobak marmots declined severely in the 1980s and the 1990s as they were hunted by locals to protect the grassland. Herders were rewarded five to ten yuan (0.73 to 1.47 U.S. dollars) for hunting a marmot. Herders also sold their fur at a high price as it can be used to make hats and coats.

The species was assessed as "lower risk/conservation dependent" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1996.

As the Chinese government intensified its wildlife conservation efforts, hunting wild marmots was prohibited.

"The marmot population grows at 20 to 30 percent annually in Aketao," says Muhttar.

The species was upgraded to the "least concern" category by IUCN in 2008 as its number rose and become stable.

"Today, the rodents can be seen everywhere on the grassland, and some bold ones even burrow a mere 20 meters away from the herders' yurts," says Tajidin. "Not afraid of humans any more, they dare to play outside in the sun when it gets warm."

"We don't know what to do. Hunting them is illegal now. But if we don't get rid of them, they will mess up our grassland and our flocks won't survive."

[‘Olympic panda’ gives birth to a male](#)

cub



The panda cub, born at 12:33 p.m. on Monday, is in a healthy condition.
[Photo/newssc.org]

Jingjing, the panda named after the Beijing Olympics mascot, gave birth to a male cub, local sources confirmed Tuesday.

The cub, weighing 189 grams, was born at 12:33 p.m. on Monday, according to Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding.

The cub is in a healthy condition.

This was Jingjing's second delivery after giving birth to male twins in August, 2015.

Born in August 2005, Jingjing was named after one of the five mascots of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, although the mascot design was based on her older sister Maomao.

Jingjing is from an "Olympic family", her father Cobi was born on the same day as the opening ceremony of the Barcelona Olympics in 1992, and was named after the mascot, a Catalan sheepdog, by Juan Antonio Samaranch, former president of the International Olympic Committee. Her mother Yaya was born the day of the opening ceremony of the Beijing Asian Games in 1990.

Pandas are an endangered species due to extremely low reproductive rates in the wild. In captivity, they often give birth to twins and sometimes even triplets.

So far this year, five panda cubs have been born at the base, which boasts a

world leading giant panda breeding community.

Chengdu establishes offshore overseas talent base in US

An economic development zone in Chengdu, capital of southwest China's Sichuan Province, has established an offshore overseas talent base in San Diego, the United States.

The move brings Chengdu's number of overseas offshore talent bases to 13, the Chengdu Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone said Tuesday.

The talent base will work with the influential Sino-America Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Professional Association and U.S. diagnostic company GIMDX to recruit top global talent.

Chengdu is attempting to compete with larger cities closer to the coast, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, by offering more generous terms and a better environment.

In 2016, the hi-tech zone planned to invest 5 billion yuan (730 million U.S. dollars) to establish offshore overseas talent bases as well as create mass entrepreneurship spaces and offshore incubators, in a bid to attract talent and enhance competitiveness in science and technology.

It also seeks to strengthen cooperation with global innovation hubs such as Silicon Valley in the United States, Tel Aviv in Israel and Sophia Antipolis in France.

So far, the zone has attracted five Nobel Laureates, hundreds of top employees worldwide as well as 115 Fortune Global 500 companies.

In 2016, the zone's gross industrial output was nearly 390 billion yuan, only behind Beijing's Zhongguancun Science Park and Shanghai's Zhangjiang Hi-tech Park.