

POLICY

Chimp review

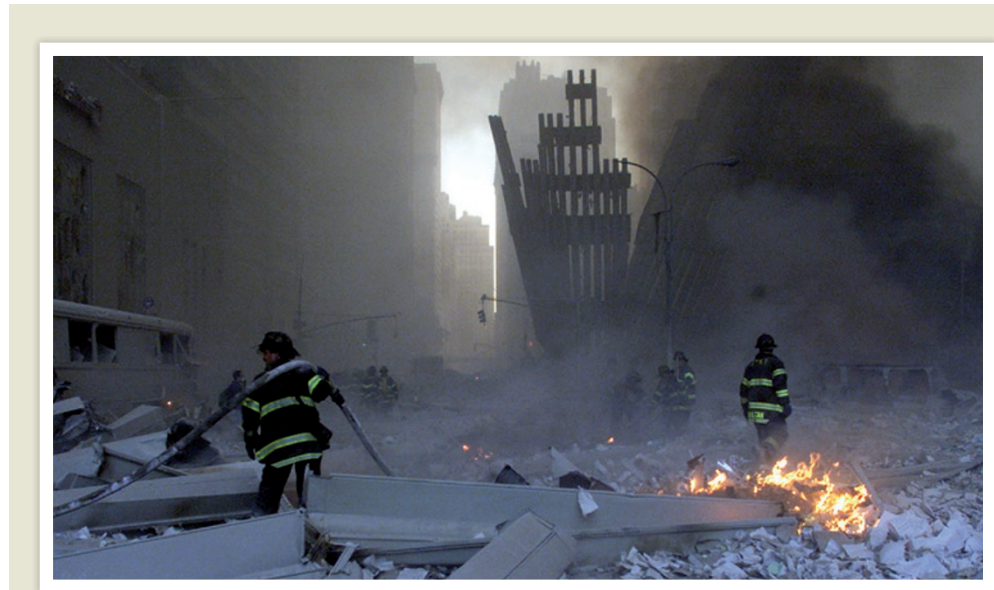
A petition arguing that captive chimpanzees in the United States should be reclassified from 'threatened' to 'endangered' is gaining federal traction. On 1 September, the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced that it would review the status of captive chimps in response to the petition, submitted in March 2010 by groups led by the Humane Society of the United States. If the change goes ahead, scientists would have to petition the agency for permission to use captive chimps in research, and would have to show that the experiments served chimp conservation. See go.nature.com/v1btka for more.

Quake nuclear risk

The US Nuclear Regulatory Commission plans to ask operators of all 104 of the country's commercial reactors to launch a detailed assessment of their facilities' ability to withstand earthquakes. The draft requirements, released for comment on 1 September, came as regulators analysed damage to the North Anna reactor in Mineral, Virginia, in the wake of a magnitude-5.8 earthquake across the eastern United States on 23 August. The quake shifted fuel rods and exceeded the ground motion that the facility was designed to withstand.

Polio in China

Wild poliovirus has appeared in China for the first time since 1999. China's ministry of health said last week that, in July, an outbreak had left four young children paralysed in China's westernmost province, Xinjiang. The virus' DNA matches that of strains in Pakistan, which has already recorded 77 cases of



P. MORGAN/REUTERS

Health legacy of 9/11 attacks

Two studies have found an increased incidence of disease in those involved in rescue and recovery at the World Trade Center in New York after the attacks on 11 September 2001. One found that the cumulative incidence of respiratory, gastrointestinal and mental illnesses in 27,449 workers was highest in those who were at the site the longest and had greatest exposure to the dust cloud (J. P. Wisnivesky *et al. Lancet*

378, 888–897; 2011). The other, which looked at some 10,000 men who were firefighters in 1996, found a "modest" (but not statistically significant) excess in cancer incidence in those doing the job in September 2001 compared with those who weren't (R. Zeig-Owens *et al. Lancet* 378, 898–905; 2011), although the authors add that cancers caused by environmental exposure can take decades to develop.

polio this year. Global health authorities have long worried that Pakistan's inability to wipe out polio could fuel outbreaks in neighbouring countries that have already eradicated the virus (see *Nature* 473, 427–428; 2011). China's health ministry plans to vaccinate 3.8 million children in Xinjiang this month.

Iran's nuclear plant

Iran's first commercial nuclear power plant has begun producing electricity. On 4 September, workers connected the 1,000-megawatt pressurized water reactor at Bushehr to the grid, according to the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. The plant was begun by Siemens in

1975, but work halted in 1979 after the revolution. In 1994, Russia agreed to complete the reactor. It was scheduled to be finished in 1999, but suffered repeated delays.

Smog plans shelved

On 2 September, President Barack Obama asked the US Environmental Protection Agency to withdraw proposed stricter air-quality standards for ground-level ozone (smog). Republican politicians and business leaders had argued that the new standards would hurt the struggling economy by imposing stricter limits on industrial pollution. Environmental groups castigated Obama's decision. The draft standards, proposed

last year, aimed to limit smog concentrations to 60–70 parts per billion (p.p.b.), stricter than the 75 p.p.b. limit set in 2008 (see *Nature* 452, 266; 2008). The ozone standard will be reconsidered in 2013.

BUSINESS

US solar woes

The struggles of US solar-energy companies to compete with cheaper products sold by Chinese firms were underlined on 31 August, when high-profile start-up firm Solyndra said that it would file for bankruptcy and lay off some 1,100 employees. The company, based in Fremont, California, makes thin-film cylindrical photovoltaic modules to

REUTERS/OLD MELBOURNE GAOL/HANDOUT
be installed on commercial roof-tops; in March 2009, it had been given a US\$535-million loan guarantee by the US Department of Energy to expand manufacturing capacity. Two weeks before Solyndra's announcement, Evergreen Solar of Marlboro, Massachusetts, also filed for bankruptcy.

Arctic oil and gas

The US oil company ExxonMobil has struck a deal with Russia's state-controlled oil firm Rosneft over the exploration and extraction of oil and gas in the Arctic and the Black Sea. The deal, announced on 30 August, thwarts BP's hopes of becoming Russia's main strategic partner in exploiting the Arctic's vast hydrocarbon reserves. Instead, Exxon and Rosneft will embark on a US\$3.2-billion project to map and develop three licensed sites in the Kara Sea in the Arctic Ocean, and the Tuapse License Block in the Black Sea.

RESEARCH

Mental maladies

Every year, mental disorders afflict 38% of Europe's population, but fewer than one-third of the cases are treated, according to a 5 September report from the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology in

Utrecht, the Netherlands. The study of 30 European countries finds that the most common disorders are anxiety (14%), insomnia (7%) and depression (6.9%). Brain disorders are the biggest contributors to Europe's disease burden in terms of years of life lost and productivity declines, making up 27% of the burden. See go.nature.com/8xnbaw for more.

Chemistry revival

One of the United Kingdom's major universities, King's College London, is bringing back the chemistry department that it shut down in 2003. The shock exit eight years ago was part of a wave of closures for the country's chemistry departments, and the university's chemists were subsequently dispersed across different departments at King's. But they are now to be united in a reincarnated chemistry department that boasts 38 staff members and plans to appoint five more. The department will take its first batch of undergraduate students in 2012. See go.nature.com/giutad for more.

Outlaw found

Using DNA evidence, Australian authorities have located a legendary outlaw — 130 years after his death. Robert Clark, attorney-general for the state of Victoria,



announced on 1 September that scientists at the Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine in Melbourne had used pathology, historical records and DNA from a living relative to identify the skeleton of Ned Kelly (pictured), a famous criminal whose body had been dumped in a prison mass grave. The whereabouts of Kelly's skull remains unknown.

PEOPLE

Polar bear inquiry

The US Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General has defended its investigation of Charles Monnett, a wildlife biologist who studies polar bears and who returned to work last month (see *Nature* 477, 10–11; 2011) after a six-week suspension. On 1 September, global-warming sceptic Senator James Inhofe (Republican, Oklahoma) released a letter about the investigation from

COMING UP

10–13 SEPTEMBER

The European Molecular Biology Organization holds its annual meeting in Vienna. www.the-embo-meeting.org/

11–17 SEPTEMBER

Exoplanet enthusiasts gather for the second Extreme Solar Systems conference, at the Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. go.nature.com/5hh7w3

13–16 SEPTEMBER

Researchers explore the influence of epigenetics on health at the first Epigenomics of Common Diseases meeting in Hinxtton, UK. go.nature.com/t7h7yz

acting inspector-general Mary Kendall. She says that in 2010, a seasoned career official at the department made “credible” allegations of scientific misconduct against one or more employees. The investigation, says Kendall, remains ongoing.

Journal chief quits

The editor of *Remote Sensing*, Wolfgang Wagner, resigned on 2 September over the publication of a controversial paper that challenged the reliability of some of the climate models used to forecast global warming. The paper, published in July, argued that climate researchers overestimate the sensitivity of the climate to greenhouse-gas pollution. Wagner, of the Vienna University of Technology, wrote in an editorial that he now views the paper as “fundamentally flawed and therefore wrongly accepted”. See go.nature.com/13sbi1 for more.

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TREND WATCH

The threat posed by orbital debris, which can rip apart spacecraft, has reached concerning proportions, says the US National Academy of Sciences. The academy's report, released on 1 September, notes that two events — China's blowing up of a weather satellite in 2007, and an accidental collision between two satellites in 2009 — more than doubled the amount of fragment debris orbiting Earth (see chart). The United States is responsible for roughly 30% of the objects in orbit. See go.nature.com/a1q8ai for more.

SPACE TRASH

The rising amount of debris in Earth orbit is likely to jeopardize future space endeavours.

