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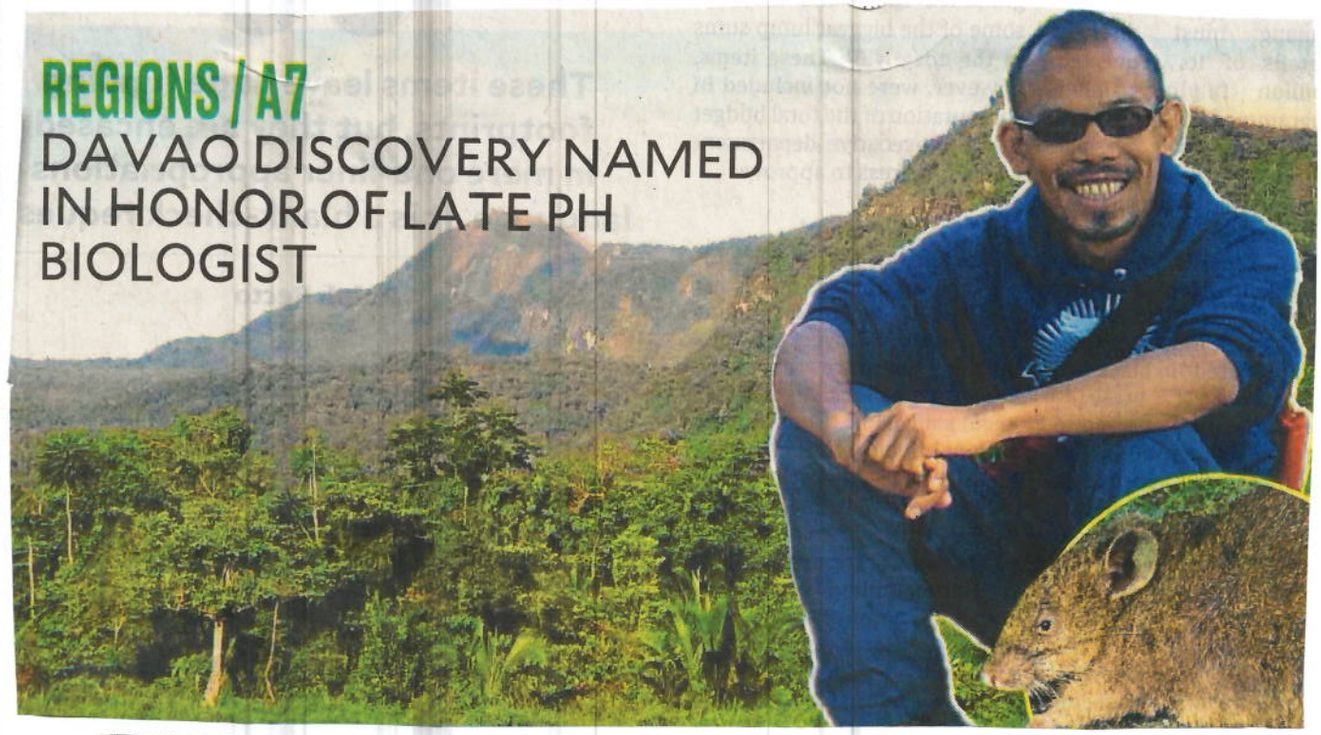
DAVAO DISCOVERY NAMED IN HONOR OF LATE PH BIOLOGIST



BIODIVERSITY STOCK The discovery of the long-nosed "shrew mouse" (left), named "Balete's mouse" after the late Filipino mammalogist Danilo Balete, indicates the rich bioversity stock in Mt. Kampalili in Davao Oriental province. —PHOTOS FROM THE COLLECTION OF DANILO BALETE AND COURTESY OF JAYSON IBAÑEZ

By Germelina Lacorte
@InqNational

DAVAO CITY—Scientists have named a newly discovered long-nosed "shrew mouse" after a Filipino mammalogist who first discovered it in the forests of Mt. Kampalili in Davao Oriental province.

The shrew mouse, which has been revealed to be not just a new species, but a whole new genus, is seen to boost conservation works for the Philippine eagle, according to a statement from Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History.

Scientists gave the new genus the scientific name, Baletys kampalili, which means "Balete's mouse," to honor the late biologist Danilo Balete, who, aside from discovering the mouse during his fieldwork in 2010, had been credited for his contribution to scientific knowledge about biological diversity in the Philippines.

"In the past several decades, we've learned just how incredibly important the mountains in the Philippines are in terms of being home to mammals that are found nowhere else, and a lot of that knowledge can be traced back to fieldwork led by Danny Balete," said Larry Heaney, curator of mammals at Chicago's Field Museum and senior author of the paper, describing the new mouse in the Journal of Mammalogy.

"Naming a new species after anyone is a big deal, a major honor given to people who make long-term, high-impact contributions to biodiversity science," added Dakota Rowsey, first author of the study entitled, "A new genus and species of shrew-like mouse (Rodentia: Muridae) from a new center of endemism in eastern Mindanao, Philippines," published on August 18 this year in the peer-reviewed journal. Aside from Heaney and Rowsey, Filipino scientists Mariano Roy M. Duya and Jayson C. Ibañez co-authored the study along with Sharon A. Jansa of the University of Minnesota and Eric A. Rickart of the Natural History Museum of Utah.

"Naming a new genus after someone is one of the highest honors biologists can bestow," said Rowsey, the vertebrate collections manager at Arizona State University and research associate at the Field Museum.

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Newly discovered mountain mouse honors late PH scientist's work

'Shrew mouse,' named after biologist Danilo Balete, also seen to boost conservation of Philippine eagle

First sighting

The "shrew mouse" was first sighted in 2010, when Balete joined the second field work of the expedition that started in 2007 to Mt. Kampalili as part of the collaboration between the Field Museum and the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF) to study what mammals lived alongside one of the largest and most critically endangered birds, the Philippine eagle.

While on Mt. Kampalili, Balete and his team discovered a dark brown mouse with small eyes and a long, tapering nose like a shrew, but different from anything he had ever seen in Mindanao because it looked more those he had seen on the island of Luzon.

"High up in the mountains, Danny was able to get cell phone service, so he sent me a text message right away, saying, 'We just caught this animal that looks a lot like the ones from Luzon, and it shouldn't be here,'" Heaney recalled. "So he immediately recognized that this was something really cool."

He said three specimens of the new mouse were then shipped to the Field Museum for further analysis. The results confirmed Balete's hunch.

When scientists discover something in the field, it often takes years for their work to be analyzed, written up and published, which was the case with the newly described "shrew mouse," the statement said.

Despite Balete's death in July 2017, his colleagues continued to study the specimens from his fieldwork. Rowsey, then a postdoctoral researcher with Heaney, led a DNA analysis of the "shrew mouse" and found that Balete was right: the rodent was different from any species known to science.

"That DNA study demonstrated that the new mouse was not related to the species up in the northern Philippines, but instead was related to species from Mindanao. It appears as though this is a remarkable case of what biologists call convergence—distantly related species that have independently evolved to resemble each other in ways that allow them to use habitats and resources in similar ways," said Rowsey.

Piece of a puzzle

Aside from honoring Balete, scientists consider the new genus important because "it's another puzzle piece in understanding the diversity of life in the Philippines."

"Demonstrating that Mt. Kampalili is home to a mouse found nowhere else on earth may bolster conservation efforts by indigenous communities which would help the mouse's neighbors, including the critically endangered Philippine eagles," the statement said.

"It's really important to show that when we protect one species, like the magnificent Philippine eagle, we protect not only our unique biological wealth but our cultural heritage as well," said Jayson Ibañez, coauthor and director for research and conservation at PEF.

He said the Philippine eagle and "Balete's mouse" were neighbors to the indigenous Mandaya group of Mt. Kampalili.

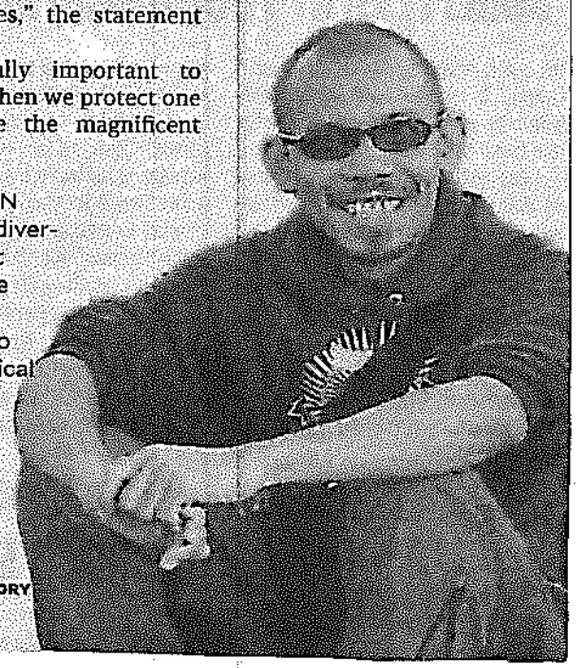
"Indigenous peoples get very excited whenever they learn that they share their homeland with a totally unique life form. And in this case, when we help protect Mt. Kampalili, we also protect the primary watershed, airsheds and biocultural sanctuaries for much of southeastern Mindanao, giving huge benefits to all the people who live here," Ibañez said.

"With all of the threats from watershed destruction and climate change, we need all the help we can get," he added.

'Bigger deal'

Animals (and plants and fungi and other organisms) were given scientific names based on what were their closest relatives, the Field Museum explained in the statement.

"Humans, for instance, are *Homo sapiens*. Sapiens is our species, and we're part of the



INSPIRATION The late biodiversity scientist Danilo Balete remains an inspiration to many biological researchers in the Philippines. —PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

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larger genus Homo, which includes our now-extinct closest relatives such as Neanderthals, *Homo neanderthalensis*. And since a genus is a higher-level group than a species, describing a whole new genus, like this mouse, is a bigger deal than finding a new species," it said.

"New species of mammals are being discovered globally at a considerable clip, maybe 50 to 100 new species per year," said Heaney. "Finding a brand-new genus, previously unknown to science like this one, that only happens at most a couple of times per year. In our 40 years of intensive study of Philippine mammals, this is one of nearly 50 new species, but just the fourth new genus we discovered."

According to the statement, the mountains of the Philippines may not get as much attention as the Amazon Rainforest or the Great Barrier Reef but these are one of the most biologically diverse places on the planet.

"Inch for inch, these misty cloud forests are home to more unique species of mammals per square mile than anywhere else on earth. Finding these mammals, most of which are tiny and hard to spot, is difficult work for even the most seasoned scientists. But the late biologist Danilo Balete had a special knack for fieldwork," it said.

Mentor

Scientists believe that the mountainous geography of the Philippines also contributed to its biodiversity.

"Its high mountains are cooler and much wetter than surrounding lowlands, and it's difficult for small mammals to get from one mountain peak to the next. As a result, they tend to stay isolated on their own 'sky islands,' evolving separately from each other and forming new species. The taller and the bigger the mountain range, the more species of mammals will be living there that don't live anywhere else in the world," Heaney said.

Heaney, who has been studying the mammals of the Philippines in the last 40 years, first met Balete in the late 1980s when Balete just completed his BS in zoology at the University of the Philippines in Los Banos and was already making a name for himself with his love of nature and skill at fieldwork.

"I was establishing a research program, and asked around, 'Who would be a really good, enthusiastic young person to take into the field?' And several people immediately said, 'Danny Balete.' So I invited him to do some field work with me, and he did fantastically well," Heaney recalled.

"He was just a superb field biologist. Danny could identify every plant, every frog, every bug, everything that you encountered, it was just astounding," he added.

Balete and Heaney went on to work together for the next 25 years until Balete's sudden death in July 2017 at the age of 57.

"Danny contributed hugely to scientific knowledge about biological diversity in the Philippines. His enjoyment of biodiversity was really infectious, making him a mentor and inspiration to a generation of researchers and conservationists," said Mariano Roy Duya, assistant professor of biology at the University of the Philippines, and coauthor of the newly published study. "By the time of his death at far too young an age, he was already one of the most prominent biodiversity scientists working in the Philippines."

His colleagues agreed that even after his death, Balete still continued to shape what scientists knew about Philippine mammals. "As we began picking up the pieces after his death, it became obvious to us that we had to name this new mouse after him, he deserves this," Duya said. INQ

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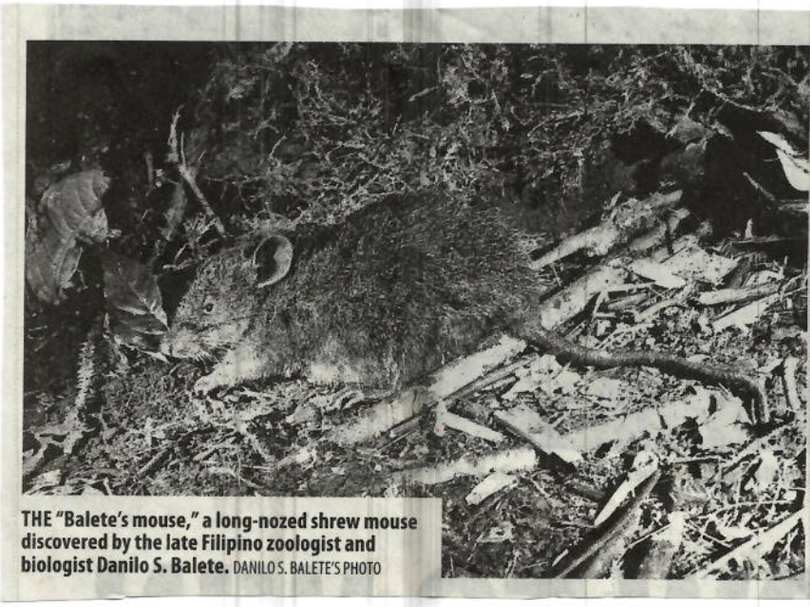
NAMED AFTER LATE BIOLOGIST DANILO S. BALETE, WHO DISCOVERED THE MAMMAL

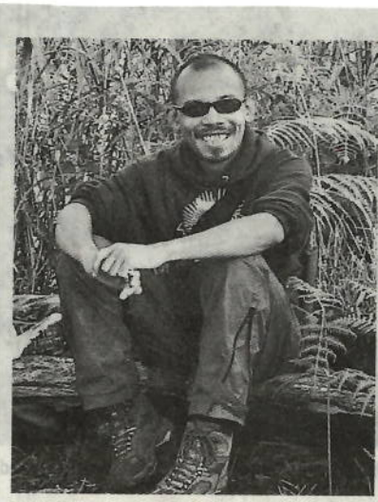
'Balete's mouse' discovered on Mindanao mountain

By Jonathan L. Mayuga

As tiny and elusive as they are, rodents are hard to spot on mountains. But not for a passionate scientist like the late Danilo S. Balete. The Filipino zoologist and biologist was recognized for his numerous studies and discoveries of new species in the Philippines.



THE "Balete's mouse," a long-nozed shrew mouse discovered by the late Filipino zoologist and biologist Danilo S. Balete. DANILO S. BALETE'S PHOTO



FILIPINO zoologist and biologist Danilo S. Balete during his fieldwork on Mount Kampalili PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. LARRY HEANEY

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TITLE: Balete's mouse discovered on Mindanao mountain PAGE 2/3

More than five years after his untimely passing in 2017, Balete's discovery of a long-nosed "shrew mouse" has been finally established and recognized by the scientific community, not only as a new species of mountain mouse in Mindanao, but as an entirely new genus of shrew mice.

'Balete's mouse'

IN honor of discovering the new mice genus as a result of his fieldwork and discovery way back in 2007 and 2010, scientists finally named it after him: "Baletemys" or "Balete's mouse."

Both renowned biologist Dr. Larry Heaney, curator of mammals at Chicago's Field Museum and senior author of the paper published in the Journal of Mammalogy, and Jayson Ibañez, co-author and director for Research and Conservation of the Philippine Eagle Foundation (PEF), described Balete's mouse as a very exciting new discovery in the Philippines.

The Field Museum, which examined the animal, described it as a "dark brown mouse with small eyes and a long, tapering nose like a shrew." The Field Museum is a revered Chicago institution and one of the world's great museums of natural history. Its exhibits explore everything from ancient cultures to the latest scientific discoveries, drawing from a collection of more than 24 million objects.

A total of three specimens were brought from Mount Kampalili to the Field Museum of Chicago to be studied by scientists. It took more than 15 years to finally declare that indeed, "Balete's mouse" is a new species and entirely new genus.

Balete, who was known to discover new species of animals during his field works in mountainous areas, was quick to say that the shrew mouse is different from anything he had seen on the island of Mindanao at his first sight of the elusive mountain mouse.

He believed it looked more like a mice that he had seen hundreds of miles away on Luzon island, prompting him to pursue the new study.

Little-known mouse

DESPITE being discovered in 2007, very little is known about the shrew mouse.

"From what we can tell, they are somehow unusual. Unlike most species of mice, the females produce one or two babies in each litter and have only one litter per year," Heaney, who had studied the mammals of Luzon in the 1990s, told the BusinessMirror via Zoom interview on August 24.

"They probably live for five to six years, longer than other species of rodents of mouse known to science," he surmised.

"If you compare to one of the mouse species, the females have five young, and they produce more than once in a year," Heaney said.

Naturally, Balete's mouse is part of the food chain and could be part of the diet of some raptors, snakes or other large animals. But there's no evidence yet to say that it is part of the diet of the Philippine eagle, Ibañez said for his part.

While scientists knew that Balete's mouse feeds on earthworms, Ibañez said it will be exciting and interesting to know which animals prey on the newly discovered shrew mouse.

The discovery of Balete's mouse highlighted once more the country's rich biological diversity and the need to protect critical habitats, such as Mount Kampalili in Davao Oriental, where the unique species was discovered.

"They might not get as much attention as the Amazon Rainforest or the Great Barrier Reef, but the mountains of the Philippines are one of the most biodiverse places on the planet. Inch for inch, these misty cloud forests are home to more unique species of mammals per square mile than anywhere else on Earth," Chicago's Field Museum said in a news release.

Enormous contribution

HEANEY said Balete's contribution to science through his research was enormous.

Heaney, who has been doing fieldwork in the Philippines for over 40 years, said it is only fitting to name Balete's discovery to the late Filipino biologist in recognition of his achievement.

"Naming a new species after anyone is a big deal, a major honor given to people who make long-term, high-impact contributions to biodiversity science," Dakota Rowsey, the study's first author, a vertebrate collections manager at Arizona State University, and research associate at the Field Museum, said in the Chicago Field Museum's a news release.

"Naming a new genus after someone is one of the highest honors biologists can bestow," Rowsey added.

Rare discovery

HEANEY said new species are something being discovered regularly. In the 1990s, he experienced studying mammals in Mindanao, including Mount Kitanglad, but rarely that an entirely new genus is discovered.

This is only the fourth time that he has experienced the discovery of an entirely new genus, he said.

Heaney said in 2007 and 2010, in expeditions jointly conducted by Chicago's Field Museum and the PEF, Balete spearheaded the teams.

He had spent at least a month doing fieldwork in the mountains, narrating how, during Balete's astounding discovery, the Filipino scientist immediately called him to tell him of the discovery.

Balete, as a researcher of the Chicago Field Museum, was then a representative of Heaney's team along with the PEF team that looked at several animals on the mountains of Eastern Mindanao, including Mount Kampalili, Ibañez narrated.

Home to endemics

"IN the past several decades, we've learned just how incredibly important the Philippines are in terms of being home to mammals that are found nowhere else, and a lot of that knowledge can be traced back to fieldwork led by Danny Balete," Heaney pointed out.

He noted that the mountainous geography of the Philippines contributes to its biodiversity.

Its high mountains are cooler and much wetter than the surrounding lowlands, and it is difficult for small mammals to get from one mountain peak to the next. As a result, they tend to stay isolated on their own "sky islands," evolving separately from each other and forming new species, Heaney explained.

"The taller and the bigger the mountain range, the more species of mammals living there don't live anywhere else in the world," Heaney said.

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TITLE: Balete's mouse' discovered on Mindanao mountain PAGE 3/3

Mount Kampalili: A shared ecosystem

IBAÑEZ said Balete's discovery highlighted the need to protect both the species and its unique ecosystem, which happens to be home to the critically endangered Philippine eagle.

Moreover, he said the Philippine Eagle and the new Balete's mouse are "neighbors" to the Indigenous Mandaya group.

"Indigenous peoples get very excited whenever they learn that they share their homeland with a totally unique life form," he said.

He said helping protect Mount Kampalili, "we also protect the primary watershed, airsheds and biocultural sanctuaries for much of southeastern Mindanao, giving huge benefits to all the people who live here. With all of the threats from watershed destruction and climate change, we need all the help we can get."

Home to unique species

IBAÑEZ said the discovery underscored the important role of the mouse in the ecology of the area.

"The fact that it can only be found there [Mount Kampalili], it is performing a very important role in that environment, feeding on earthworms. If we lose this animal, we lose the ecological function of this animal and that cascades to the ecology of the area," he explained

"Mount Kampalili is an area where new species are evolving," Ibañez added.

He said other new species were also discovered on the mountain, including a rare plant with unusual flower known for its large size and pungent smell, which description refers to Rafflesia, the fourth species of which, Rafflesia verrucosa, was found on Mount Kampalili in 2010. R. verrucosa is the tenth species of Rafflesia found in the Philippines

An Internet source said Balete is credited for the discovery of several species of Rafflesia.

Moreover, Ibañez said being home to the Philippine eagle, Mount Kampalili's protection should be strengthened further.

Evolution

BOTH Ibanez and Heaney believe that Mount Kampalili is an ecosystem where species of plants and animals have adapted and evolved over millions of years.

"That part of Mindanao is one of the oldest parts of the Philippines. The mountain is probably more than 20 million years old," Heaney said.

"Our estimate is that the ancestor of this new genus and species diverged from their closest relative about 5 million years ago," Heaney added.

Balete is known for his work on the taxonomy and conservation of Philippine mammals.

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THE PHILIPPINE STAR
TRUTH SHALL PREVAIL

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Gov't seeks P453-B budget to address climate change

By LOUISE MAUREEN SIMEON

The government plans to allocate a record P453 billion out of its proposed P5.27 trillion budget proposal for next year for projects that will address the worsening impacts of climate change.

Under the National Expenditure Program (NEP), the government's budget for climate change adaptation and mitigation for 2023 is 56.4 percent higher than this year's allocation of P289.73 billion.

Of the P453 billion, bulk or P265 billion will go to water sufficiency projects.

Another P132 billion is earmarked for sustainable energy and P41 billion for food security.

According to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), climate change expenditures will continuously prioritize funding for major projects such as the flood management program of the Department of Public Works and Highways with an allocation of P169 billion.

The amount will cover the construction and rehabilitation of flood-mitigation structures and drainage systems nationwide.

Around P2.49 billion will be spent for the national greening program of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

The allocation will be used to plant 6.18 million seedlings in 11,631 hectares of land resources.

Budget chief Amenah Pangandama said a 21.3 percent increase in climate-related expenditures has been observed since 2015.

The directive for Climate Change Expenditure Tagging is based on the joint memorandum circular of the DBM and the Climate Change Commission. It targets to track, monitor, and report programs that help address and alleviate problems posed by climate change.

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The Manila Times

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PROPOSED 2023 NATIONAL BUDGET

Recto questions P588B unprogrammed funds

BY BELLA CARIASO

THE House of Representatives Deputy Speaker and Batangas Rep. Ralph Recto questioned the P588 billion unprogrammed funds submitted by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), saying the proposed 2023 national budget is actually P5.856 trillion and not P5.268 trillion.

"The spending amount being asked by the Palace is actually half-a-trillion pesos more," Recto said.

Recto said the P588 billion represents the Unprogrammed Appropriations portion of the National Expenditure Plan (NEP).

"It is more than double the current year's P251.7 billion unprogrammed fund," Recto added.

The House on Friday started deliberations on the P5.268 proposed national appropriations for the next fiscal year.

He said topping the list of "unclear and undefined" 2023 Unprogrammed

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Recto questions P588B

Appropriations is the "Support to Foreign Assisted Projects" with proposed funding of P380.6 billion.

Also included in the unprogrammed funds is the P149.7 billion for "Support for Infrastructure Projects and Social Programs."

"The funding footprint is big, but the appropriations language contains [a] one-liner description. It is a blank check request," Recto added.

According to Recto, the Unprogrammed Fund is one of the biggest "lump sums" in the draft three-volume national budget Malacañang had sent to Congress.

"While it is part of the NEP, the unprogrammed fund is not included in the total amount. The result is, every popular budget literature nowadays quotes a smaller budget level," Recto said.

Recto explained that while the Unprogrammed Appropriations can only be released if several "funding triggers" are met, the authority to spend it comes with the passage of the national budget.

"Thus P5.856 trillion is the ceiling of the proposed 2023 budget. Once the latter becomes law, it confers standby authority to the executive to spend it, provided conditions are met," Recto said.

Recto said, as in previous general appropriations acts, the proposed budget for 2023 states that the unprogrammed fund can only be spent if revenue targets are exceeded or once loans have been perfected.

"But the problem is, there seems to be lax compliance on this. In 2020, for example, when revenue collections were down because of the pandemic, every centavo of the P122 billion in unprogrammed appropriations was released," Recto said.

"Same with this year. The P251.6 billion unprogrammed funds were also used," he added.

Recto said the DBM should begin posting details of releases from the said fund on its website.

On the other hand, Recto said he supports a few items included in the Unprogrammed Appropriations, including the allocation of P18.9 billion in public health emergency benefits for frontliners and P14.6 million in local government units arrears.

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"The P5 billion in AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) modernization, in principle, is good, but in the interest of transparency, must be itemized. The P2 billion in arrears to the IT provider of the Land Transportation Office must also be scrutinized," Recto added.

P2.49B for DENR green program

Meanwhile, the DBM has proposed at least P2.49 billion for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' National Greening Program.

According to the DBM, the amount is intended for the planting of 6.18 million seedlings in 11,631 hectares of land resources.

The DBM said the funding will boost the campaign on Protected Areas Development and Management Program, and Management of Coastal and Marine Areas.

"We have documented an average of 21.3-percent increase in climate-related expenditures from 2015 to 2023. With the continuous help of implementing agencies and of every Filipino, we can work toward climate resiliency to safeguard a sustainable future for our country," DBM Secretary Amenah Pangandaman said.

The P2.49-billion funding is included in the P453-billion proposed budget for climate change adaptation and mitigation for 2023.

The proposed climate-related expenditure for 2023 is 56.4 percent higher than this year's P289.73-billion budget.

According to the DBM, P264.89 billion will be used for water sufficiency projects, P131.51 billion for sustainable energy, and P40.78 billion for food security.

"Climate change expenditures shall continuously prioritize funding for major programs such as the Flood Management Program of the Department of Public Works and Highways with a budget allocation of P168.9 billion. This will cover the construction and rehabilitation of flood-mitigation structures and drainage systems nationwide," the DBM added.

The climate-related expenditures were part of a joint memorandum circular issued by the DBM and the Climate Change Commission.

The memorandum is aimed to track, monitor and report programs that help address and alleviate problems posed by climate change.

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400 pine trees planted at Shrine of Valor

BALANGA CITY: The Mount Samat Flagship Tourism Enterprise Zone (FTEZ) announced Friday that 400 seedlings of pine trees were planted near the Shrine of Valor in the historic mountain of Pilar, Bataan.

The tree-planting activity was conducted by FTEZ in partnership with the Philippine Veterans Affairs Office (PVAO) to support measures on climate change adaptation and mitigation toward environmental sustainability, and the climate-smart-tourism program.

"The initiative is also under the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR's) National Greening Program and the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP), which aims to promote environmental stability, biodiversity conservation, and enhancement of climate change mitigation," Mount Samat FTEZ Administrator Francis Theodore Initorio said.

Representatives from the DENR, Bataan Police Provincial Office, Army's 305th Reserve Infantry Battalion, FTEZ, and PVAO took part in the tree-planting activity.

"This is in line with the recommendation of the Mount Samat FTEZ's Comprehensive Tourism Master Plan to promote the development of the heritage and national park while harnessing its ecological potential and focusing on the measures aligned with risk reduction plans and climate change adaptation of the NCCAP," Initorio said.

"The tree-planting supports Mount Samat FTEZ's proposal for the development of mini-parks at the shrine's zigzag footpath." **ERNIE ESCONDE**

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Daily Tribune
WITHOUT FEAR ♦ WITHOUT FAVOR

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Trees for greener Philippines

Winford Manila Resort & Casino joined forces with ABS-CBN Foundation Inc. at the La Mesa Nature Reserve for a tree-planting activity on 6 August 2022.

The effort is bannered under WMRC's Green Drive corporate social responsibility program geared toward promoting environmental sustainability through employee engagement.

The project is part of AFI's environmental program, Bantay Kalikasan, which is committed to preserving and enhancing Philippine biodiversity and making every Filipino a vigilant steward of the environment.

WMRC executives and employees were welcomed by Sarah Alcayde-Agcaoili, AFI Operations manager for Save La Mesa Watershed Project,

"In 2019, we held our first tree-planting activity at Angat Watershed in Bulacan," Jeff Evora, WMRC president & COO, said. "The purpose of that activity was to raise awareness of climate change and how planting trees can help diminish its negative effects."

"Today, we revisit our environmental cause by appreciating our country's biodiversity up close. All these trees provide fresh air and clean water not just for us to breathe and drink, but for our grandchildren and future generations to benefit from as well."

Evora and his WMRC team planted 400 young trees across one hectare of forest as part of their efforts to realize the shared vision with AFI for a cleaner and greener Philippines.

"With the help of partners like WMRC, we have rehabilitated 1,552 hectares of forest for over 20 years now," Agcaoili said. "We have also established protocols and systems that ensure successful reforestaton based on science and best practices."

WMRC partipants were guided by experienced Bantay Kalikasan forest workers during the activity who adhere to plantation establishment and maintenance practices that allow for a high 90 percent survival rate of the seedlings planted.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WMRC

ENSURING a green Philippines: (from left) WMRC director for Safety & Security Col. Vic Vicente, director for Corporate Communications Jami Ledesma, director for Gaming Compliance & Operations Darwin Cusi, and president & COO Jeff Evora, with AFI Operations manager for Save La Mesa Watershed Project Sarah Alcayde-Agcaoili and team mates Rona May Cadelino and Mar Zeri Ramirez.

All these trees provide fresh air and clean water not just for us to breathe and drink, but for our grandchildren and future generations to benefit from as well.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND INITIATIVES SERVICE

PEOPLE'S JOURNAL
Everybody's Newspaper

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Mining tax bill contrary to gov't avowal of support p.5

Onerous Mining Tax Bill Contrary to Gov't Pronouncements of Support for Industry

THE Chamber of Mines of the Philippines welcomes pronouncements that mining—after languishing in a restrictive policy environment for more than a decade—will be accelerated under the new administration to support post-pandemic recovery efforts. The lifting of the moratorium on new mining permits and the open pit ban in 2021 will indeed contribute to the revitalization of the industry and will encourage badly needed foreign investments.

We submit, however, that the mining tax bill recently passed by the House Ways and Means Committee will once again set back the revitalization of the industry, contrary to pronouncements of the new administration. We lament the fact that no consultations took place with the industry that would have allowed us to prove that the onerous provisions of the bill would make the Philippine mining industry one of the highest taxed in the world.

We also maintain that figures shown during the Committee hearing that purported to show the industry's effective tax rate at 38% was woefully out of date as such report was done in the year 2000, prior to the doubling of the excise tax on mineral products under TRAIN 1.

Once again, the mining industry is faced with a drastic policy change that will not be conducive to its growth, preventing it from playing a major role in the recovery of our economy. Should this bill become law, three flagship mining projects that can otherwise substantially contribute to economic development in areas where they are located, result in a substantial amount of exports and tax revenues and a considerable amount of social expenses will instead be in jeopardy.

In addition, a number of large-scale operations run the risk of closure, resulting in massive unemployment in their areas of operations.

Simply put, the onerous tax bill will once again put into question the stability of our policies, which is most detrimental to attracting foreign investments in such a capital-intensive industry. Foreign investors will simply look elsewhere; we are not the only country blessed with mineral resources.

If further tax increases are unavoidable, the tax structure should not be onerous as to stop investments from coming in. This will sustain existing mines and encourage quality investments in the hugely untapped Philippine minerals sector, ultimately expanding considerably the tax base and providing far larger tax revenues to government.

We thus call on Congress to revisit the bill recently approved by the Committee on Ways and Means and allow for full and meaningful consultations with stakeholders. This will give all affected parties an opportunity to contribute to the passage of a mining fiscal regime that will encourage investments and finally unlock the industry's huge economic potential.

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Saving bees and supporting sustainable honey

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF FAO

THE Saharan yellow bee is important for the environment and for beekeepers. They enhance and protect local agro-biodiversity, improve the incomes of smallholders and provide employment for women and youth.

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TITLE: Saving bees and ...

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In the small town of Er-rich, nestled in the plains of Morocco's Atlas Mountains, a group of local men and women settled into a packed room as an Food and Agriculture Organization beekeeping training got underway on one afternoon in March.

The room was full of excitement and anticipation; the beekeepers of Er-rich were eager to learn and do whatever they could to save the regions' bees from extinction.

Through the course of the training, the beekeepers learnt about the Saharan yellow bee, a particularly resilient and non-aggressive species that is well-adapted to the local climatic and breeding conditions of the Atlas Mountains.

Learning how to protect the Saharan yellow bee was of critical importance for this community of beekeepers in Er-rich, many of whom relied on the bees as a key part of their livelihoods.

"Don't be afraid," the instructor, Mohamed Aboulal, reassured the beekeepers. "This is the gentlest breed. That's what makes its neighbor to the north, the black bee, 'yellow' with jealousy," he said with a smile. "It's not only beautiful in its long yellow dress, it's also docile, produces great honey and is a better forager, since it can travel up to eight kilometers compared to only three kilometers for the ordinary bee."

Despite these qualities, the Saharan yellow bee is under threat of extinction due to a combination of successive droughts in the region, the knock-on effects of pest control and the impact of other breeds of bee being introduced to the area.

Learning how to protect the Saharan yellow bee was of critical importance for this community of beekeepers in Er-rich, many of whom relied on the bees as a key part of their livelihoods.

They were eager to learn everything they could from Mohamed during the training, asking him many questions, including the best methods for producing more queens to learning the techniques for artificial insemination.

Passion from childhood

Mohamed, the instructor who led the FAO bee training course in Er-rich, dates his passion for bees back to when he was a young boy, and his father allowed him and his siblings taste honey straight from the wooden hives.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WFP

AISHA'S honey production is a vital source of income for her family.

Today, as the resident of the regional Chifae Beekeeping Cooperative and a national beekeeping association, Mohamed spends much of his time providing training courses and helping to build greater knowledge and understanding of the Saharan yellow bee.

Mohamed is a regular visitor at the national renowned beekeeping center, which holds many training courses in how to protect and preserve important species of bees.

Together with the support of Government of Morocco and other partners, FAO has established a new technical beekeeping center, which, alongside the national center works to safeguard the Saharan Yellow Bee, improve bee keeping skills and help multiply and inseminate more queen bees.

Safeguarding the Saharan yellow bee plays an important role in protecting local agro-biodiversity, improving the incomes of smallholders and providing employment for women and youth.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF FAO

FAO, the government of Morocco and other partners have created a beekeeping technical center, whose mission is to improve beekeeping skills and to select, multiply and disseminate queen bees to safeguard the future of the Saharan yellow bee breed.

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BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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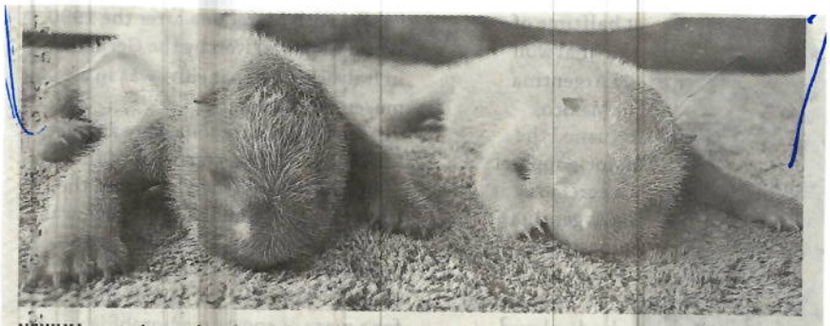

NEWLY born twin panda cubs, male at left and female at right, at the center in Xi'an, in northwestern China's Shaanxi Province, on August 23, this photo released by Qinling Giant Panda Research Center shows. The male cub weighed 176.4 grams while the female cub weighed 151.2 grams when they were born, according to the Qinling Panda Research Center.
QINLING GIANT PANDA RESEARCH CENTER VIA AP

Panda twins born in China as species struggles for survival

BEIJING—Twin giant pandas have been born at a breeding center in southwestern China, a sign of progress for the country's unofficial national mascot as it struggles for survival amid climate change and loss of habitat.

The male and female cubs, born on August 23 at the Qinling Panda Research Center in Shaanxi province, are the second pair of twins born to their mother, Qin Qin.

Another panda, Yong Yong, gave birth to twins at the center earlier this month.

Qin Qin was also born at the center and previously gave birth to twin females in 2020.

State media gave no word on the father, but Chinese veterinarians for years have been using artificial insemination to boost the population of the animals, which reproduce rarely in the wild and rely on a diet of bamboo in the mountains of western China.

The efforts have paid off, with some captive-bread pandas being released into the wild. The population of wild pandas has ticked up gradually, reaching an estimated 1,800.

About 500 others live in captivity in zoos and reserves, the majority in the mountainous, heavily forested province of Sichuan.

Encroachment on their land by farmers and industry has reduced the pandas' space while cutting them off from other populations with which to breed.

Like much of central and western China, Sichuan has been hit by soaring summer temperatures and drought this year that have sparked forest fires and the withering of crops and forests, generally attributed to global climate change. ***AP***

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Plastic waste campaign names SEA innovators

Between 2017-2019, an estimated two million tons of plastic waste leakage per year came from Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. This accounts for 17 percent of annual global marine plastic waste leakage.

The Incubation Network, in partnership with the Global Plastic Action Partnership, UpLink by the World Economic Forum, and the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, recently launched the Plastic Waste to Value Southeast Asia Challenge to tackle plastic waste mismanagement in the region.

Established to accelerate innovative solutions that are focused on plastic recycling and upcycling in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, the challenge is excited to unveil five innovators that will be participating in the tailored development program over the course of five months.

The challenge received a total of 101 applications through the UpLink platform. A total of 48 shortlisted candidates were carefully assessed by academic researchers, corporate sustainability practitioners, innovators, and climate & circular economy specialists. The selected innovators will receive partnership building opportunities, mentorship, increased visibility, access to networks, and grants to scale their solutions.

"Working in partnership with the Global Plastic Action Partnership and the Alliance to End Plastic Waste, The Incubation Network is committed to support solutions that will enhance waste management ecosystems and accelerate the move towards a circular future for plastics," Simon Baldwin, Global Head of Circularity, SecondMuse, says. "We are very excited. The selected innovators have demonstrated a compelling opportunity for growth and economic and environmental impact!"

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ALLIANCE TO END PLASTIC WASTE

ENVIROTECH Waste Recycling Inc. collects single-use plastic and turns them into useful products, such as school chairs. It has been invited to be part of the Plastic Waste to Value Southeast Asia Challenge among 101 submissions across SEA.

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Women farmers tackle a rapidly changing climate

In Yemen, where communities confront conflict and economic decline, temperatures have been rising faster than the global average over the last three decades. Across the country, droughts and floods periodically damage agricultural lands, reduce the availability of arable lands and threaten the livelihoods and food security of communities.

"Agriculture is the main source of income for our communities, but climate change has made farming difficult and brought a decline in our economy," Noha Alban, a community leader from Lahj, a governorate of Yemen, said.

Majority of people here know the climate is changing, but they do not know what kinds of precautions they can take. Women can help to reduce the risks of climate change.

Yemen is facing a decline in agricultural productivity and a shortage of seasonal crops on which the rural population depends, leading to increased food insecurity and high rates of malnutrition, as well as the continued shortage of groundwater and drinkable clean water.

"Before we started to experience drought, heavy rain and flooding, 80 percent of our community worked on farms, but now only 30 percent can afford seeds or the other resources they need to continue farming," Noha said.

In rural communities across Yemen, women are tackling the issue of climate change with grit and resilience.

Women often work as farmers and are increasingly becoming the sole breadwinners of their families, Noha said. They also play a pivotal role in food security and land management and help to mitigate tension over natural resources, like water, among local farming groups.

Noha is a member of one of the International Organization for Migration's Conflict Resolution Committees, which were formed to address issues that arise in communities due to displacement and competition over resources.

Committee members work to raise awareness about environmental sustainability, social cohesion and peaceful solutions to conflicts through community dialogue and mediation.

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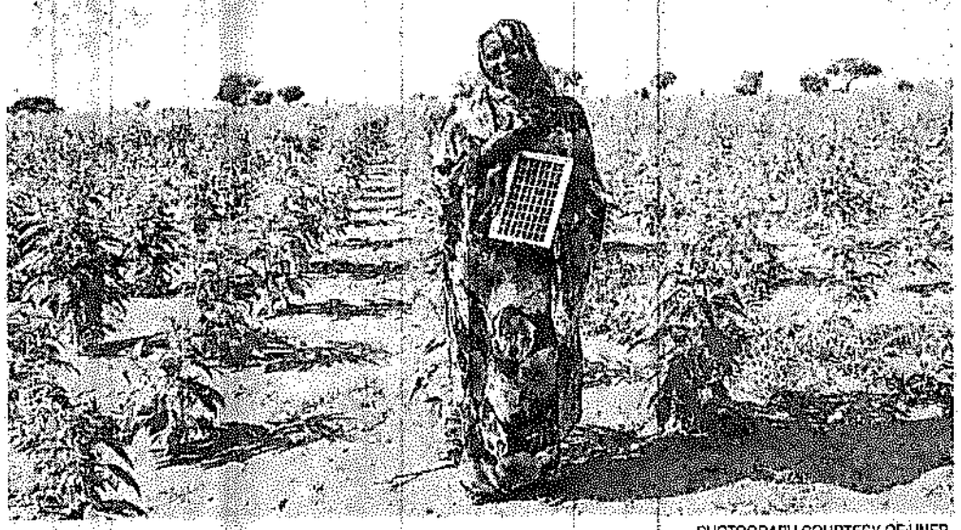
address issues that arise in communities due to displacement and competition over resources.

Committee members work to raise awareness about environmental sustainability, social cohesion and peaceful solutions to conflicts through community dialogue and mediation.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF UNEP

KHARTOUM Abdulrahman Al Duma shows her farm in the Darfur region of Sudan.

"The majority of people here know the climate is changing, but they do not know what kinds of precautions they can take. Women can help to reduce the risks of climate change by talking to people and raising their awareness," Noha added.

Noha and other committee members work closely with male and female farmers to improve and care for their agricultural crops, and educate them about the complications of climate change and the causes of floods and droughts.

"As a member of the Conflict Resolution Committee, I help to resolve these disputes. We also educate farmers and encourage them to support each other in the management of resources and their land," Noha concludes.

In Sudan, women lead their communities in the fight against climate change.

Khartoum Abdulrahman Al Duma spent much of November harvesting sesame and peanuts on her farm in the Darfur region in Sudan.

In Darfur, land can be hard to sow; parts of the land are semi-arid and prone to droughts, which are becoming worse amid the climate crisis. The region has been beset by conflict for the past two decades, compounding the challenges for its inhabitants.

But Al Duma's crop turned out to be a bumper one -- that yields an unusually abundant harvest.

That's thanks in part to training she received under an initiative led by the UN Environment Program.

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BusinessMirror
A broader look at today's business

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Study: Already shrunk by half,

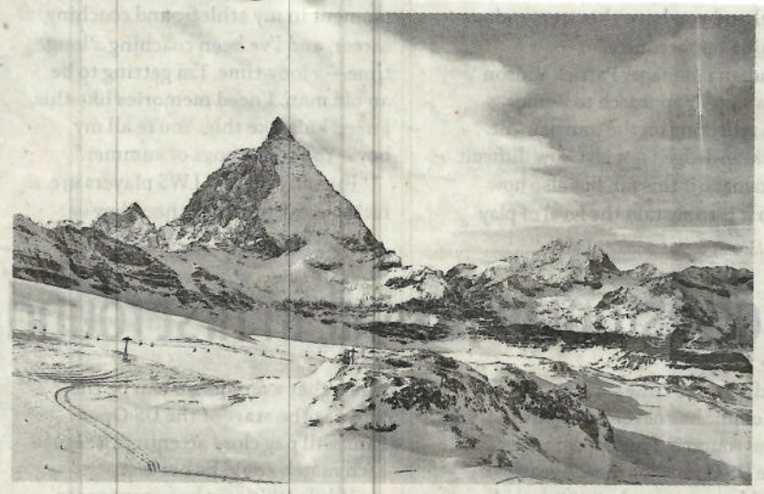
Swiss glaciers melting faster

GENEVA—Switzerland's 1,400 glaciers have lost more than half their total volume since the early 1930s, a new study has found, and researchers say the ice retreat is accelerating at a time of growing concerns about climate change.

ETH Zurich, a respected federal polytechnic university, and the Swiss Federal Institute on Forest, Snow and Landscape Research announced recently the findings from a first-ever reconstruction of ice loss in Switzerland in the 20th century, based in part on an analysis of changes to the topography of glaciers since 1931.

The researchers estimated that ice volumes on the glaciers had shrunk by half over the subsequent 85 years—until 2016. Since then, the glaciers have lost an additional 12 percent, over just six years.

"Glacier retreat is accelerating. Closely observing this phenomenon and quantifying its historical dimensions is important because it allows us to infer the glaciers' responses to a changing climate," said Daniel Farinotti, a co-author of the study, which was published in scientific journal The Cryosphere.



GUIDED tours to European Alps, including on Matterhorn, one of the highest summits in Europe, are currently canceled owing to possible dangers brought about by the current extremely dry and hot conditions, Internet sources said. Matterhorn is a near-symmetric pyramidal peak that straddles between Switzerland and Italy. Lying in the Pennine Alps, it is within the basin of the Zmutt glacier. This photo was was taken on January 30, 2020. LYN B. RESURRECCION

By area, Switzerland's glaciers amount to about half of all the total glaciers in the European Alps.

The teams drew on a combination of long-term observations of glaciers. That included measurements in the field and aerial and mountaintop photographs—including 22,000 taken from peaks between the two world wars.

By using multiple sources, the researchers could fill in gaps. Only a few of Switzerland's glaciers have been studied regularly over the years.

The research involved using decades-old techniques to allow for comparisons of the shape and position of images of terrain, and the use of cameras and instruments to measure angles of land areas.

The teams compared surface topography of glaciers at different moments, allowing for calculations about the evolution in ice volumes.

Not all Swiss glaciers have been losing ice at the same rates, the researchers said. Altitude, amounts of debris on the glaciers, and the flatness of a glacier's "snout"—its lowest part, which is the most vulnerable to melting—all affect the speeds of ice retreat.

The researchers also found that two periods—in the 1920s and the 1980s—actually experienced sporadic growth in glacier mass, but that was overshadowed by the broader trend of decline.

The findings could have broad implications for Switzerland's long-term energy sources, since hydropower produces nearly 60 percent of the country's electricity, according to government data.

Jamey Keaten/Associated Press