

China officials dine on endangered salamander: reports

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File photo of a Chinese giant salamander, lying in a glass enclosure during the China International Conservation festival in Zhangjiajie, central China's Hunan province, in 2005

Chinese officials feasted on a critically endangered giant salamander and turned violent when journalists photographed the luxury banquet, according to media reports Tuesday on the event which appeared to flout Beijing's austerity campaign.

The 28 diners included senior police officials from the southern city of Shenzhen, the Global Times said.

"In my territory, it is my treat," it quoted a man in the room as saying.

The giant salamander is believed by some Chinese to have anti-ageing properties, but there is no orthodox evidence to back the claim.

The species is classed as "critically endangered" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List of threatened species, which says the population has "declined catastrophically over the last 30 years".

"Commercial over-exploitation for human consumption is the main threat to this species," the IUCN said.

The Global Times cited the Guangzhou-based Southern Metropolis Daily, which said its journalists were beaten up when their identities were discovered by the diners.

One was kicked and slapped, another had his mobile phone forcibly taken, while the photographer was choked, beaten up and had his camera smashed, the reports said.

A total of 14 police have been suspended and an investigation launched into the incident, added the Global Times.

One of the Shenzhen diners provided the salamander and said it had been captive-bred, according to the report.



A waitress serves shark fin's soup at a restaurant in Guangzhou, southern China's Guangdong province, on August 10, 2014

Chinese President Xi Jinping has launched a much-publicised austerity drive for the ruling classes, including a campaign for simple meals with the catchphrase "four dishes and one soup".

The ruling Communist Party also says it is cracking down on the consumption of [endangered species](#), including shark's fin.

China's legislature last April approved a law including prison sentences for people caught eating rare wild animals.

The Chinese government considers 420 wild animal [species](#) as rare or endangered, state media previously said.

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