

# INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION

## NEWSLETTER

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## International Conservation Organizations Visit Taiwan

Representatives of two IUCN (The World Conservation Union) programs—The Species Survival Commission (SSC) and the TRAFFIC Network, visited Taiwan on Sept. 20-22, 1999. Head of the IUCN Species Survival Programme, Dr. Simon Stuart, Head of the Wildlife Trade Programme, Dr. Alison Rosser, and Director of the TRAFFIC Network, Mr. Steven Broad, visited the Chairman of the Council of Agriculture (COA) of the Executive Yuan and other government agencies to exchange information and ideas about trends in international conservation.

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is one of the six commissions of IUCN, and is responsible for stimulating co-operation between scientists around the world to monitor the status and conservation needs of wild species. Over 20 scientists in Taiwan are members of SSC and one is a member of the SSC Steering Committee, the governing body of the SSC. The COA has provided generous

support to the SSC for a number of years, in particular its Wildlife Trade Programme and its Communications Programme—specifically for SSC publications and its Internet site.

The TRAFFIC Network aims to help ensure that trade in wild animals and plants does not threaten the conservation of nature. For the past three years, the COA has supported the TRAFFIC project “Assisting the enforcement of CITES and related national legislation,” which provides help to government agencies worldwide in their efforts to halt wildlife smuggling. In particular this work includes investigations, training, development of practical enforcement tools, dissemination of intelligence information about illegal trade, and production of CITES awareness materials.

The SSC and TRAFFIC projects supported by the COA have a strong focus on international wildlife trade issues. By providing this support, Taiwan is making a visible contribution to international conservation and in return receives direct benefits in terms of collaboration and development of its own

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wildlife conservation efforts. One practical example of this is the COA's recently developed nursery registration system for slipper orchids, which received considerable technical input from TRAFFIC and SSC.

In addition to the Council of Agriculture, the SSC and TRAFFIC representatives also visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Board of Foreign Trade, Directorate General of Customs

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to discuss important wildlife trade and species conservation issues, and to promote international scientific and technical collaboration.



## The Third Meeting of the WCPA/EA of the IUCN

Representatives from the Council of Agriculture (COA) and the ROC National Parks Association participated in the Third Meeting of the World Commission for Protected Areas—East Asia (WCPA/EA) of the IUCN from Sept. 8 to 10, 1999. Topics on the agenda included:

1. Important issues and management strategies for protected areas;
2. Preservation of biodiversity of species;
3. Conservation of ocean, wetland, mountain, and sensitive scenic areas;
4. Networks for international cooperation, community and individual participation, eco-tourism and other issues.

During the meeting, the ROC obtained the privilege of holding the Fourth WCPA/EA meeting. The ROC representatives present suggested that before the Fourth Meeting was held, members of the relevant government agencies and NGOs in Taiwan should

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consolidate the management of Taiwan's protected areas and to categorize Taiwan's protected areas according to IUCN standards. In this way, the operation and management of conservation work in Taiwan might be systematized.

In the future, Taiwan will continue to actively participate in the International Convention of the WCPA in the year 2000 and the World Conference of the IUCN in 2002.



## **ROC Conservation Efforts Receive International Approval**

Following the Chinese Wild Bird Federation's (CWBF) success at holding the International Conference on Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Taiwan in March of this year, BirdLife International and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) invited the CWBF to take part in the 12<sup>th</sup> RSPB Exhibition held this August in England. The CWBF, in cooperation with the COA and other agencies, displayed a series of pamphlets, magazines, origami birds, dough bird sculptures, bird pictures, and other materials that explained the ROC's achievements in bird conservation. Due to its diverse and colorful display, the ROC stall attracted a large number of visitors and thus helped increase international understanding of

conservation work in the ROC. Furthermore, the ROC display won first prize for its artwork. The ROC representatives at the display also exchanged ideas and opinions with the managers of local bird conservation areas to increase Taiwan's understanding of bird area management.

In the future, the ROC will strengthen the legal framework to help non-governmental conservation groups assist the government in the management of bird conservation areas. In addition, the participation and training of volunteers will also be strengthened, while conservation education will be conducted to increase citizens' understanding of the environment and its conservation. Furthermore, eco-tourism will be promoted and NGOs will be encouraged to take part in international conservation events.



## **New Fish Species Discovered in Taiwan during Past Five Years**

Taiwan is located in one of the most ecologically diverse regions of the world on the northern edge of the geographic region known as the East Indies, at the meeting point of the marine ecologies of the East China Sea, the South China Sea and the Philippine Sea. The island is blessed with diverse habitats like

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estuaries, coral reefs, sand beaches, mangroves, and open- and deep-ocean. Consequently, Taiwan's marine and river areas have a high level of biodiversity. Despite the fact that Taiwan's land mass accounts for less than three-thousandths of the world's total area, more than 2,450 species of fish, or one tenth of all fish species in the world, are presently known to inhabit Taiwan.

Fish taxonomy in Taiwan began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it wasn't until 1984 that the large-scale classification of Taiwan's fish species became more systematic. A database of Taiwan's fish species gradually became more complete following projects like "Survey of Taiwan's Fish Species" and "The Distribution, Database, and Community Structure of Fish along Taiwan's Coastlines," which were supported by the National Science Council (NSC) of the Executive Yuan. The database is now available on the Internet (<http://www.fishdb.sinica.edu.tw>).

Director of the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica, Dr. Kwang-Thao Shao said that, every year, an average of 200 new fish species were discovered throughout the world. Over the past five years, Taiwan has discovered seven to eight new species of fish annually. From 1981 to 1999, a total of 44 species of fish found on the island of Taiwan and the surrounding marine area were globally certified as new fish species. Up until February 1999, existing fish in Taiwan numbered 237 genus

and 2,430 species. Of which, at least 40 species of saltwater fish are found only in Taiwan or the Taiwan-Ryukyu area, and almost 30 species of freshwater fish are indigenous to Taiwan alone.

The following 15 new fish species discovered over the past five years are found only in Taiwan:

<b>Saltwater Fish</b>
<i>Gorgasia taiwanensis</i>
<i>Ostichthys sheni</i>
<i>Archamia goni</i>
<i>Pseudocoris ocellatus</i>
<i>Pseudochromis striatus</i>
<i>Gymnothorax niphostigmus</i>
<i>Cirrimaxilla formosa</i>
<i>Fusigobius aureus</i>
<i>Callogobius nigromarginatus</i>
<b>Freshwater Fish</b>
<i>Schismatogobius ampluvinculus</i>
<i>S. fulgimentus</i>
<i>Rhinogobius delicatus</i>
<i>R. henchuenensis</i>
<i>R. maculafasciatus</i>
<i>R. rubromaculatus</i>



## Fewer Green Turtles Coming Ashore to Lay Eggs

In recent years, the ecology of Taiwan's green turtles has changed significantly. The good news is that a female green turtle has been found visiting the more highly developed area of Aimen on the Penghu archipelago. This is the first time in 30 years that female turtles have been seen at Aimen. The turtle, which was not

fitted with tracking equipment, laid around 124 eggs. The local village chief called for volunteers to patrol the beach until the turtle eggs hatched to prevent them from being harmed. In contrast to this good news, the number of green turtles coming ashore in Penghu and Orchid Island in general has dropped. National Taiwan Ocean University professor Y. C. Cheng has been studying sea turtles for almost 10 years. He has found that, in the past, during the sea turtle's egg-laying season from May to September each year, at least 10 female turtles would come ashore at Wang'an in the Penghu archipelago to lay eggs and that in each nest there would be around 110 eggs. However, over the past two years, the number of female turtles coming ashore to lay eggs has fallen to well under 10 and egg deformities were often found. At Orchid Island, normally around eight to 11 female turtles come ashore each year; however, this year, only two made it, but there was no sign that they had laid any eggs.

Professor Cheng and American sea turtle experts surmise that the steep fall in the number of sea turtles coming ashore in Taiwan may be due to the following: firstly, the La Nina phenomenon has caused a severe reduction in the amount of seaweed in the world's oceans; therefore, undernourished female green turtles might not have had the strength to make their usual migratory journey to Taiwan to lay eggs. Secondly, female turtles are still being caught and killed by fishermen. ♣

## Conservation News

### Report on Success of Restoration of Oryx from Senegal

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The most recent news on the ROC's efforts to help Senegal with a conservation program for scimitar-horned oryx has already had fruitful results. One of the eight scimitar-horned oryx recently released into the Guembeul Wildlife Protection Area in Senegal by the joint efforts of the ROC and Israel gave birth to a calf on Aug. 29, 1999. The calf has been named "Formosa" and both mother and calf are doing well. The calf is the first scimitar-horned oryx to be born in Senegal for 150 years, following the extinction of Senegal's native oryx due to poaching. ♣

### COA Plans to Establish Gull Reserve in Matsu

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In mid-July, the chairman of the Council of Agriculture (COA), Dr. Peng Tso-kwei, visited the islands of Matsu in Lienchiang County to review conservation work there. In this visit, Dr. Peng strongly supported the County Government's proposal to establish the "Matsu Islands Gull Reserve."

The Matsu islands are known to be the breeding grounds of Bridled Tern (*Sterna anaethetus*), Black-naped Tern (*Sterna*

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*sumatrana*), Roseate Tern (*Sterna dougallii*), Japanese Gull (*Larus crassirostris*), Greater Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*), Reef Egret (*Egretta sacra*), and Fork-tailed Swift (*Apus pacificus*). May through August is the breeding season for these gulls and terns. In the past, only a small number of fishermen occasionally came near the islands to catch fish and collect other sea produce. However, in recent years, Mainland Chinese fishing boats have been venturing into neighboring areas more often to catch fish, sometimes using explosives to kill the fish, and this is threatening the gulls' habitat.

The area of the proposed Matsu Islands Gull Reserve will be 72 hectares (including 12 hectares on land and 60 hectares at sea). Most of the reserve will be composed of small, uninhabited islands. Once the reserve has been established, fishermen will be prohibited from coming ashore on the islands and the area will be strictly patrolled.



## Firefly Film Wins International Award

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A film documentary about the ecology of fireflies filmed and produced by the Yushan National Park Headquarters has received the Merit Award for Excellent Astrophotography and the Merit Award for Photography at this year's 22<sup>nd</sup> IWFF. The awards confirm that the hard work of Taiwan's National Parks to

promote wildlife conservation has generally been recognized.

Due to the destruction of its habitat through the pollution of riverbanks, excessive use of pesticides, the development of mountainside areas, and damage from artificial lighting, the once commonly seen firefly has almost disappeared from Taiwan. The documentary film uses a cultural and scientific angle to call on the public to understand the firefly and care for its habitat. The film documents the characteristics of the firefly ecology, the relation of the firefly to people's lives both now and in the past, and the firefly conservation work taking place in the Asia Pacific region.



## National Park Conservation Guideline Draft Unveiled

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Taiwan currently has six National Parks. In order to maintain the safety and orderly behavior of park visitors, while also raising the public's environmental awareness and apprehension of National Parks, as well as achieving the goal of resource conservation, a set of conservation guidelines needs to be established.

The Yushan National Park Headquarters has collected opinions from all six National Parks and has formed a consensus in the proposal of the draft version of the "Plan for the

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Implementation of National Park Conservation Guidelines.” The draft clearly stipulates that the guidelines are for use regarding National Park Conservation Areas and Reserves, Special Scenic Areas, and Historical Preservation Areas. The guidelines are aimed at individuals and parties not engaged in authorized research and public duties entering the above-mentioned specified areas. The draft also states that such individuals and parties should be accompanied at all times by an approved conservation guide and that anyone found in breach of these regulations might be punished according to Article 19 of the National Parks Law. The main duties of conservation guides would be to provide activity guidance and environmental education, and to maintain visitors’ safety and conservation of the environment.

The draft proposal will be sent to the Ministry of the Interior and the first stage of conservation guide training will begin. If the guidelines are approved, it is expected that they will come into full effect starting next year.



## **Conservation Society: Society of Streams**

The aims of the Society of Streams are to maintain the natural ecological balance of Taiwan’s streams, to prevent environmental pollution, to ensure the quality of stream environments and safe water quality levels, to

advance the reasonable use of natural stream resources, and to promote suitable stream activities. Its duties include:

1. Conducting surveys and research into stream organism resources, improving fish habitats, and preparing directives and projects for the reasonable use of stream resources;
2. Conserving the native species of Taiwan’s streams;
3. Strengthening the protection of stream habitats, ensuring the cleanliness of water quality and the safety of water resources, and assisting the government in eliminating activities that destroy the ecology of Taiwan’s streams;
4. Disseminating and publishing information about stream environment conservation and other educational affairs;
5. Assisting in the promotion of suitable recreational stream activities;
6. Contacting and fostering exchange and cooperation with other related organizations at home and abroad.

The society has been commissioned by the Executive Yuan’s Council of Agriculture, the Tourism Bureau of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications, the

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National Park Headquarters of the Ministry of the Interior's Construction and Planning Administration, the Taiwan Endemic Species Research Institute, the Taiwan Forestry Bureau, and other agencies to undertake the organization of various seminars and stream and ecology education. In this way, it is hoped that the society can accumulate knowledge about the natural characteristics of Taiwan's streams and their organisms so that a set of principles for the reasonable use of stream resources can be drawn up. It is also hoped that the society can strengthen communication and cooperation between government, academia, and the public to improve the effectiveness of Taiwan's conservation efforts.

The Society of Stream's website is located at: <http://wagner.zo.ntu.edu.tw/sos/>



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