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Shark Conference 2002:

Sustainable Utilization And Conservation of Sharks

National Taiwan Ocean University and WildAid organized the Shark Conference 2002 in Taipei, Taiwan, from May 13 to 16, 2002 with the sponsorship and support of the Fisheries Administration(FA) of the Council of Agriculture, Taiwan. Shark Conference 2002 brought together almost 200 participants from Taiwan and abroad, including shark experts, scientists, fishermen and representatives from the processing industry to discuss a wide range of issues concerning shark resource management in the hope of promoting the sustainable use of shark resources.

Issues discussed at the conference included the status of shark fishing in Taiwan and the rest of the world; a review of shark resource utilization through discussion of the use of shark fin and other shark parts, eco-tourism, aquarium displays, etc.; the request of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for individual nations to draw up guidelines for national plans of action (NPOA) for sharks and to monitor shark resource management; methods and models of usage for the collection of data required for assessment of shark resources and populations; the function and role of the media and projects in promoting awareness of conservation were discussed in seminars on conservation and education; in addition, a special seminar was given on seriously threatened shark species, highlighting the great white shark, whale sharks and basking shark, in particular, as well as research into their ecology.

Representatives from the Fisheries Administration said that sharks are an important global fisheries resource because they are distributed in most of the world's oceans and they are broadly used by most nations. Sharks are one of the fish species traditionally used for commercial purposes by fishermen and consumers in Taiwan. Every year, around 800,000 tons of shark is caught around the globe. Taiwan's fishermen are responsible for catching around 300,000 to 500,000 tons a year, accounting for a value of more than NT$1

billion. Shark meat is an important source of animal protein in the diet of the Taiwan people and shark fishery makes up a significant part of fishermen's livelihoods and the economy of many local fishing villages. Most importantly, FA officials pointed out that Taiwan tends to consume the whole of the shark. Taiwan's fishermen do not engage in the wasteful and cruel practice of cutting off the fins at sea and discarding the rest of the shark; therefore, Taiwan is probably one of the nations that uses shark resources most completely.

During the conference, COA Chairman Fan Cheng-chung said that, as a fishing nation, Taiwan naturally hoped that marine resources could be utilized in a sustainable manner. Furthermore, he introduced several research projects in Taiwan including the Shark Resources Management Working Group, the Shark Reporting Scheme, an Observer Program for distant warter Fisheries, etc. and explained that the primary aim of these projects was to collect information and to teach fishermen to use sharks in a sustainable manner. Mr. Fan also pointed out that neither complete protection nor unlimited fishing were effective methods of managing shark resources. He said that overall support could only be generated by encouraging shark research and by finding suitable systems of management for maintaining the sustainable use of shark resources.

While addressing the fact that Taiwan is one of several regions that produces shark fin foods and related products, the director of WildAid, Mr. Peter Knight, stressed that WildAid did not want to outlaw the shark fin market outright, but to reduce demand for shark fin because, at present, demand for this product far outweighed supply. He said that the best way to maintain sustainable shark fishery without harming efforts to conserve sharks was to reduce demand for shark fin. At the same time, he said that governments, fishery workers and shark fin suppliers should be encouraged to establish systems of practical fisheries management that could be implemented sustainably.

At the close of the conference, it was emphasized that the aim of the conference was not to call for establishment of a moratorium to completely ban the use of sharks, but to

INSIDE

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promote waste-free, sustainable utilization of shark resources.

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18th Meeting of CITES Animals Committee

The 18th meeting of the Animals Committee of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) took place from April 8 to 12, 2002 in San José, Costa Rica. The main themes of the meeting were a review of trade in four species of sturgeon and five species of freshwater turtles and tortoises; the drafting of processes and standards for significant trade reviews; trade in sharks, seahorses, Black Sea bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*), and hard coral; a review of captive breeding; a periodic review of animal taxa in the Appendices; a universal labelling system for the identification of caviar; sturgeon conservation; a definitive list of species traded for medicinal purposes; trade in wild species and alien species; and other issues. Representatives from 29 signatory nations around the world attended the meeting and representatives from 33 intergovernmental organizations and international and local non-government organizations (NGO) were present as observers. The deputy director of SWAN International, Dr. Ling-ling Lee, and Ms. H. L. Yang of the Resources Conservation Division of the Forestry Department of the Council of Agriculture participated in the meeting.

Regarding freshwater turtles and tortoises, it was recommended that the Black bellied box turtle or yellow-margined box turtle (*Cuora flavomarginata*) be listed under Category 1 or 2 because trade in the species on international markets is significant and illegal trade is difficult to assess. At present, there are no population estimates for the species, but populations are thought to have declined in all range States. Habitat degradation and loss, large-scale collection of the species for international trade, and inadequate legislation and enforcement are all serious problems. As there is too little information about the species, it has been impossible to place it under any particular Category. The IUCN stressed that despite little reported trade, any additional trade data would necessitate non-detriment findings to preclude categorization. *Cuora flavomarginata* is native to Taiwan. In the past, numbers declined due to habitat destruction; however, populations are now stabilizing or are gradually recovering in scattered habitat areas.

In 2000, the Indochinese box turtle (*Cuora galbinifrons*) was listed on Appendix II of CITES, but no CITES data exists for this species at present. The IUCN stated that the primary threat to the species is harvesting throughout range States. The species does not reproduce easily and distribution is already extremely limited as habitat continues to be destroyed. The species is listed by the IUCN as

Critically Endangered. Trading data is insufficient; therefore, it was recommended that the species be placed in Category 1.

The Indian flapshell turtle (*Lissemys punctata*) was placed on Appendix II in 1995, and that its main threat is habitat degradation and collection for domestic consumption and export. International trade is limited and the species can be bred in captivity; however, significant domestic use, which endangers sustainability of harvesting, the fact that the scale of captive breeding is limited, and the threat of illegal international trade are the basis for the recommendation that this species be placed in Category 2.

After extensive discussion, the Working Group on Freshwater turtles and tortoises recommended that the Malaysian box turtle or South Asian box turtle (*Cuora amboinensis*) be included in Category 1 because the species may be declining due to over-exploitation. Furthermore, it was recommended that *C. flavomarginata* be listed in Category 2 for China and Category 3 for Japan, and that *C.galbinifrons* and *Lissemys punctata* be listed in Category 2. In addition, the Flat-shelled tortoise or flat-tailed spider tortoise (*Pyxis planicauda*) was recommended for listing in Category 1 because the species does not breed easily in captivity, populations are small and illegal trade may be significant.

The Secretariat introduced the results of a workshop on freshwater turtles and tortoises held from March 25 to 28, 2002 in Kunming, China, in which it was agreed that all traded turtle and tortoise species should be included in the Appendices. Germany said that it intended to put forward four proposals to list traded freshwater turtles and tortoises in the Appendices. The United States said that it would put forward two proposals for the Appendices and India stressed its intention to propose all species of *Kachuga* for Appendix II.

Regarding the conservation of seahorses and other members of the family Syngnathidae, the working group hoped that nations would continue to collect biological and trade data on seahorses. In addition, further research was encouraged to promote long-term conservation and sustainable use. Ways to include fishermen, traders and consumers in the conservation and sustainable use of Syngnathidae resources were investigated.

As for the biological and trade status of sharks, a representative of the IUCN/SSC Shark Specialist Group and TRAFFIC reported a lack of progress in the International Plan of Action (IPOA) for sharks, which has been implemented since 1999. It was noted that only a small number of nations were preparing national plans of action (NPOA) for shark fisheries management and that those nations were those that already had effective strategies for managing sharks. Consequently, the IUCN Shark Specialist Group representative recommended that CITES adopt a more proactive role. For instance, CITES monitoring

of trade in sharks and their products was recommended as an agenda item at COP-12, as well as addressing the feasibility of presenting trade data to help the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) implement the IPOA.

Regarding captive production for commercial purposes, the secretariat emphasized that captive breeding should not have a negative impact on conservation and it was hoped that risk assessment methods would be adopted in the future. Previously, the secretariat had called on nations to put forward information and opinions about the relationship between the *ex- situ* captive production and the *in-situ* conservation and management of species on CITES Appendices; however, no response was forthcoming from any of the parties, except Mexico. The secretariat believes that this work is extremely important and should be continued. Representatives recommended the drafting of new guidelines for reporting, in which party nations would be requested to not only provide information about the negative impact of captive breeding, but also to supply data on its positive effect on conservation.

Based on discussions at the meeting, SWAN International put forward the following recommendations to the authorities in Taiwan:

1. To investigate the status of *ex-situ* captive breeding in Taiwan of those reptile species proposed for listing on CITES Appendices at the 18th Animals Committee meeting;
2. At the next Conference of Parties it is expected that there will be several proposals to list tortoise, freshwater turtle, shark and other species on CITES Appendices. Therefore, these areas must be the focus of future work in Taiwan. In particular, Taiwan's fishery authorities must plan and implement relevant surveys, monitoring, management and education work as early as possible;
3. The relationship between the *ex-situ* captive production and the *in-situ* conservation and management of species will continue to be an important issue in the future. In Taiwan, in particular, the positive and negative impacts of aquaculture on conservation are very significant; therefore, Taiwan could make a significant contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity of global aquatic species if it were able to develop assessment methods to review the positive and negative impacts of aquaculture on conservation and improve aquaculture operations methods to minimize negative impacts and increase the positive effect on conservation. This point also requires the increased attention of Taiwan's fishery authorities.

Notes: Category 1: "Species of urgent concern";
Category 2: "Species of possible concern"; and,
Category 3: "Species of least concern".

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Foreign National Caught Smuggling Wildlife

The Council of Agriculture announced that, on June 5, 2002, its Wildlife Protection Unit seized a foreign national attempting to smuggle wildlife into Taiwan at Kaohsiung's Hsiaokang Airport. Mr. Patrick Alain Jean Monchamp, a French national, is suspected of trying to bring large numbers of live wildlife illegally into Taiwan by airplane from Thailand. The 116 live animals included golden mantella (*Mantella aurantiaca*), Malagasy mantella (*Mantella madagascariensis*), panther chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*), California kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula californiae*), crocodile skink (*Tribolonotus cf. gracilis*) and others. At present, the wildlife specimens have been handed over to the amphibian and reptile rescure center at the Taipei Zoo. Mr. Monchamp has been fined NT$50,000.

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Large-scale Trade in Dolphin Meat Uncovered

Investigators from Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration Executive Yuan, Yilan County Government, Chiayi Military Police, Yunlin County Government and other agencies uncovered more than 6,000 kilograms of dolphin meat in independent operations in Yilan and Yunlin counties on May 15, 2002. The meat came from several species of dolphin, including long-beaked common dolphin, bottlenose dolphins, Pantropical spotted dolphins, and others. It was the largest haul of dolphin meat ever discovered in Taiwan in recent years.

Acting on a tip-off that traders in the east coast port of Su-ao in Yilan County were catching and killing protected dolphin species to sell the meat in Yunlin and Chiayi counties on the west coast, marine police investigators had been operating three months of undercover surveillance until the Yunlin District Prosecutor finally caught a woman surnamed Tsai selling dolphin meat at a local market in Ssuhu Township, Yunlin County in mid-May. After questioning the woman, investigators found more than 5,000 kilograms of whole and partial dolphin carcasses in a second refrigerated warehouse.

Yilan investigators discovered a further haul of over 1,000 kilograms of butchered dolphin meat in cold storage in Su-ao which was found to be owned by a fish merchant named S. L. Hsu. Following independent questioning and further investigation by investigators in Yunlin and Yilan counties, it was discovered that the dolphin meat being traded in the Ssuhu area of Yunlin County had been supplied by Mr. Hsu of Yilan.

According to the records of the Agriculture Department of Yunlin County Government and investigations by other relevant authorities, Ms.

Tsai and her husband, Mr. W. C. Wu, started butchering and marketing dolphin meat some six or seven years ago. Every year the couple had been caught and fined, but so far they had avoided prosecution because each time they were caught a different member of their family would come forward saying that they were guilty and would receive punishment.

Meanwhile, in Yilan, Mr. Hsu admitted that he did indeed own the more than 1,000 kilograms of dolphin meat in cold storage at Su-ao, but he refused to reveal the source of the meat and its marketing channels and distribution. At present, the case is awaiting further investigation and charges will be brought by the district prosecutor's office.

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Penghu Basalt Nature Reserve

Introduction to Taiwan's Nature Reserves

The Penghu archipelago, also known as the Pescadores, is located in the middle of the Taiwan Strait between the main island of Taiwan and Mainland China. Comprising 64 islands and islets stretching along the Tropic of Cancer, the Penghu archipelago is one of three major volcanic island groups in Taiwan. The geology of the islands is mostly volcanic rock like basalt. Lava from underwater volcanoes shrank and hardened into rows of tall columnar formations as it spurted out of the earth and was rapidly quenched by seawater. This rapidly quenched lava formed the spectacular hexagonal and multifaceted rock pillars that can be seen around Penghu and its islands. Erosion by the sea and the effect of geological movement have created pillars of different heights and in various shapes and sizes.

Many of Penghu's islands are uninhabited or are small coral atolls. The islands are mostly flat with no high mountains or hills, and few have any natural rivers. The coastline of Penghu is varied, however, and there are numerous islets of different sizes and coral reefs. The topography is slanted on a north-south axis with higher elevations being found in the south. Apart from a small handful of areas that are covered in a thin layer of dark-red earth, the upper regions of other areas have been covered in a fine yellowish-brown sand created by the wind erosion of the basalt. The coastal areas of most of the islands are composed of precipitous columnar basalt cliffs, but some have beaches that are mainly white sand made up of layers of finely ground, broken coral. The development of coral reefs on the neighbouring seabed is good and coral is distributed over a relatively large area and forms a fringing reef topography.

The Penghu Basalt Nature Reserve is located approximately north-east of the main island of Penghu and south-east of Bird Island (Niaoyu). The elevation of the reserve is from zero to 30 meters above sea level. The annual mean temperature is 22.3 °C. Precipitation is scarce, with annual rainfall reaching only around 1,000 mm. As the islands are located within the area

affected by seasonal monsoon winds, strong seasonal winds are one of the main features of Penghu.

The reserve is situated at the point where the Kuroshio (Japan Current), the South China Sea monsoon flow and tidal currents meet. The surrounding ocean provides habitat to an abundance of fish and other marine resources. Large numbers of seabirds inhabit and breed in the reserve, creating a unique natural spectacle. Most of the bird species in the reserve are winter migrants or transients including large numbers from the *Scolopacidae, Charadriidae*, subfamily *Turdinae* and *Sylviinae* families, all of which have been recorded in the reserve. The most commonly seen bird species are *Tringa Brevipes, Acrocephalus orientalis, Hirundo rustica* and others. Summer migrants are mostly *Sterna sumatrana* and *Sterna anaethetus*, followed by *Sterna albifrons* and *Sterna dougallii*. Bird species that are known to breed in the reserve include *Sterna anaethetus, Sterna sumatrana* and *Egretta sacra*, among others. Most of these species build their nests and breed in the columnar basalt cliffs. They can be seen at the reserve until August and September each year before they continue their migration.

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