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Largest-ever Ivory Haul Seized in Taiwan

Customs officers in Kaohsiung, south Taiwan, recently confiscated more than five metric tons of ivory over three days, marking the largest-ever smuggled ivory haul in the island's wildlife crime enforcement history. A total of 1,228 pieces of ivory, including whole tusks, were discovered in cargo containers being transported from Tanzania in east Africa to the Philippines. Kaohsiung Customs Bureau officials and investigators will work with international conservation groups to track the source of the contraband in the hope of preventing similar ivory smuggling operations in the future.

In the more recent discovery, on July 6, 2006, customs inspectors uncovered 744 pieces of ivory, weighing 3,060 kilograms, after opening up a container that had remained in Kaohsiung Harbor unattended for three weeks.

Shipping documents showed that the illegal consignment originated from Tanzania and was held in transit at Penang in Malaysia before reaching Kaohsiung. The ivory, which was hidden in wooden boxes inside the container, was destined for Manila in the Philippines.

This seizure took place just two days after Kaohsiung customs officers found over two metric tons of ivory, also from Tanzania, in a shipment to Manila via Singapore. Both shipments were sent by the same exporter, but were for two different importers in the Philippines.

The re-routing of the cargo via Taiwan made officials suspicious that the containers were being used to smuggle goods into Taiwan, so they opened the 18 wooden boxes inside marked as containing sisal fiber and found a huge cache of elephant tusks instead.

The brown-colored tusks were bloodstained, indicating that they had not been processed since being cut from the dead

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

elephants. The tusks range in weight from one to 32 kilograms, and the longest measures 195 centimeters, while the shortest is just 26 centimeters. This size range implies that they were from a big herd of adult and young elephants, said officers.

African and Asian elephants are listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), and all commercial trade in these species has been banned globally since 1990. However, ivory is still used in some countries to produce expensive jewelry, so ivory smuggling remains a lucrative trade handled by highly-organized criminal rings. Experts estimate that 614 or more elephants

were slaughtered to supply the 1,228 pieces of ivory found in the two seizures at Kaohsiung Harbor.

A conservative estimate of the value of the 5,180 kilograms of ivory confiscated at Kaohsiung was put at around NT\$40 million, based on the value of HK\$2,000 per metric ton given to a haul of 3,900 kilograms of unprocessed elephant tusks seized in May this year in Hong Kong—the largest haul there in 20 years. The value of the Kaohsiung ivory after processing was, therefore, put at several NT\$100 million.

Representatives of CITES, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the Trade Record Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce (TRAFFIC) and other international conservation groups expressed grave concern about the seizures because they suggest that underground ivory trading is on the rebound. The director of TRAFFIC's program in Southeast Asia, James Compton, called on the Kaohsiung Customs officials to link up with the ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEAN-WEN), as well as the source in Tanzania, to ensure follow-up investigations. Only through international cooperation can Taiwan effectively tackle increasingly sophisticated wildlife crime syndicates.



INSIDE

- **Largest-ever Ivory Haul Seized in Taiwan**
- **Formosan Flying Fox Found on Green Island Again**
- **Taiwan Celebrates World Rivers Day in Ilan**
- **Five-year Survey of Tawushan Reveals Increased Biodiversity**
- **Draft Law to Cut Greenhouse Gases in Taiwan**

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INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Formosan Flying Fox Found on Green Island Again

Previously considered extinct in the wild, the endangered Formosan flying fox (*Pteropus dasymallus formosus* Sclater, 1873) has once again been spotted on Green Island southeast of Taiwan.

The rare Formosan flying foxes, also known as Formosan fruit bats, were seen close to dusk on the last day of a survey of Green Island's mammal species conducted by Dr. Hsi-Chi Cheng, chief of the Division of Zoology of the Endemic Species Research Institute of the Council of Agriculture (COA), and Chao-Lung Hsu, secretary general of the Bat Association of Taiwan, at the end of last year. The researchers said that two of the bats flew right by them, but there was no time to capture them on film.

Around 20 years ago, there were more than 2,000 Formosan flying foxes in the forests of Green Island, according to Hsu. Older residents of the island remember a time when groups of around 20 or so flying foxes could be seen flitting through the sky at dusk near people's homes. But from 1976 they were heavily hunted for food or for pets and numbers fell dramatically. The creation of plantation forests and the destruction of native forest also

accelerated the decline of the fruit bat to such a degree that younger residents now no longer know anything about the species' existence.

Green Island is the only native habitat for fruit bats in the Taiwan territory and the Formosan flying fox is Taiwan's largest bat. It is the only known species of Megachiroptera (megabat) in Taiwan.

Hsu and Cheng's sighting of two Formosan flying foxes resting briefly on a Horsetail tree (*Casuarina equisetifolia* L.) is particularly exciting because previous research failed to identify the species in the wild. In the mid-1990s, a two-and-a-half-year study on the Formosan flying fox in Green Island by Dr. Liang-Kong Lin, associate professor of the Department of Biology at Tunghai University, Taichung, failed to find any fruit bat colonies. A more recent study by Cheng and others also failed to sight the species. This led to the declaration of the species' extinction in the wild, perhaps the first extinction to be announced since the publication of a fruit bat action plan in Taiwan in 1992.

Although conservationists welcomed the flying fox sighting, Hsu said it was impossible to estimate how many Formosan flying foxes remain on Green Island. The widespread loss of the bat's habitat on the island makes him pessimistic about the species' future survival

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

unless measures are taken to protect it, he said. Already, large areas of *Ficus septica* previously growing beside streams and rivers on the island, the fruit of which formed the bats' major food source, has been chopped down and many of the river banks have been concreted over. Furthermore, any remaining flying foxes face huge competition for food from a population explosion of fast-breeding squirrels that were released into the wild on the island. Hsu called on the government to support basic research on the Formosan flying fox's ecology and other research on Green Island, so that a strategy can be devised to manage squirrel populations and maintain them at a level that does not interfere with the survival of this unique bat species.



Taiwan Celebrates World Rivers Day in Ilan

Taiwan announced its initiation into World Rivers Day by holding an international symposium on river conservation in the northeastern county of Ilan, September 24, 2006. During the celebrations, the founder of World Rivers Day, Mark Angelo, who was a special guest at the event, gave a bottle of Canada's crystal-clean river water to the director of the Water Resources Agency (WRA), Ministry of Economic Affairs, to

symbolize passing on the World Rivers Day legacy to Taiwan.

The idea of a rivers day began in the 1980s with the declaration of BC River Day as a result of a local river conservation drive led by British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) instructor Mark Angelo. Originally, this was intended as a local volunteer clean-up activity, but over several years, public participation gradually increased and the range of events grew dramatically to include school river projects, community river festivals, and exhibitions of art, photos and videos to help increase public awareness of rivers and the benefits they provide. The Canadian government made the notion nationwide in 2003 by designating the second Sunday in June as Canadian Rivers Day. Then in 2005, the United Nations also supported the idea and marked the last Sunday in September as World Rivers Day. This year, Taiwan decided to start celebrating World Rivers Day too with its own river-conservation and related events.

The theme of Taiwan's World Rivers Day was 'Water and Culture'. To reflect this, the 2006 International River Conservation Symposium was held at the National Center for Traditional Arts, which celebrates local culture and art and is located beside the renowned riverside beauty spot of Dongshan River. WRA

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

officials and water resource policy-makers, representatives from various NGOs and conservation groups were invited to exchange views at the symposium on river conservation and methods, and the planning and promotion of future World Rivers Day events in Taiwan.

To symbolize the passing on of the World Rivers Day legacy to Taiwan, Angelo brought a bottle of clean Canadian river water to the seminar, which he mixed with a bottle of Taiwan river water and gave to WRA director Chen Shen-hsien, who said that this act represented the intention of the people of Taiwan to coexist peacefully with nature.

In addition to bringing clean Canadian water to Taiwan, Angelo also gave a keynote speech on the idea of World Rivers Day. WRA and Ilan County Government officials shared their experiences of cleaning-up the Beinan Creek in Taitung and Dongshan River in Ilan. They also talked about efforts to promote community university custodianship of local rivers and implement local participation in river education and river control through NGO action, in the hope of spreading the concept of river education throughout Taiwan.



Five-year Survey of Tawushan Reveals Increased Biodiversity

Species diversity at Tawushan Nature Reserve has increased compared to 10 years ago, according to a five-year survey by researchers from the Taitung Forest District Office of the COA Forestry Bureau. In particular, the study revealed the presence of several rare and precious species, including 8 species of spider at Lijia Creek that were only this year recorded as new species in Taiwan and 24 species of spider that could only be identified to the level of genus.

The Taitung Forest District Office began the survey of Tawushan Nature Reserve in 2001, focusing on the regions around each of the five main watersheds in Tawushan for a period of one year each. The results of the survey, which were only recently released, found that the number of species discovered at Tawushan was higher now than 10 years ago.

During the first year, researchers surveyed the area surrounding Taimali Creek and recorded 9 species of fish, 8 species of amphibian, 8 reptile species, 56 bird species, 16 mammals, 88 butterfly species and 330 vascular plants. The second year focused on the area around Dajhu Creek. There, researchers recorded 21 fish, 15 amphibian, 19 reptile, 48 bird, 18 mammal, 94 butterfly and 812 vascular plant species.

In the third and fourth years, researchers surveyed the regions of Jinlun Creek and

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Jihben Creek, respectively. In both places, the number of wild species recorded showed a marked increase compared with survey results from 10 years ago.

The last year of the survey focused on Lijia Creek. This area showed the highest level of species diversity, particularly for spiders. Researchers discovered a total of 97 different species of spider in 25 families. Of these, 8 species, including the jumping spider *Phintella bifurcilinea* (Bos. & Str. 1906), were newly recorded species in Taiwan. In addition, 24 other species of spider could only be identified to genus level.

The director of the Tawu Working Station of the Taitung Forest District Office, Mr. Shih-Liang Tung, said that Tawushan Nature Reserve is Taiwan's largest nature reserve and the number of species there is impressive. Furthermore, the region's diverse gene pool is an extremely precious resource that may have important economic value in the future.



Draft Law to Cut Greenhouse Gases in Taiwan

A draft Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act approved by the Executive Yuan on September 20, 2006, will impose quota restrictions on CO₂ emissions by Taiwanese enterprises. The bill

also allows trading in CO₂-emission quotas.

The bill, which still needs to be ratified by the Legislative Yuan before becoming law, comes more than one year after the Kyoto Protocol designed to regulate greenhouse gas emissions worldwide came into effect on February 16, 2005. Before review by the Executive Yuan, the draft law, which was drawn up by Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration (EPA), was discussed at five meetings convened by Minister without Portfolio Lin Si-yao to incorporate the opinions of various government agencies. Those present at the meetings realized the urgent need to legislate and consensus was reached on the contents of the proposed law, marking a new chapter in Taiwan's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prevent climate change.

The legislative principles behind the draft law include joint, but differential, responsibility for emissions and the use of effective, low-cost methods to prevent climate change, while striving towards sustainable development. The law is being promoted by the Executive Yuan on behalf of all government agencies and stipulates that the EPA should be the competent central government authority responsible according to the law. While the bill is an indication of the Taiwan government's determination to reduce CO₂ emissions, it

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

provides only a framework for reductions without specifying emissions quotas or an implementation timetable. Implementation will be carried out gradually in stages to increase reduction capabilities by improving energy efficiency rates and developing renewable sources of energy. The bill stipulates that emissions controls will be imposed following the establishment of mechanisms for checking greenhouse gas emissions and putting in place systems for the registration and verification of CO₂ emissions, the allocation of emissions quotas, and the trading of quotas.

Furthermore, the draft law has the following characteristics; firstly, it serves as an early warning. Global climate change will threaten national sustainable development and industrial competitiveness in Taiwan; therefore, the government must heed this threat and take action to decrease emissions in stages; secondly, the law is cross-ministerial, involving all government agencies, and will be promulgated under the unified control of the Executive Yuan; and thirdly, the law includes mechanisms for full citizen participation and sets out the government bodies responsible for strengthening public education and awareness.

The main points of the law are:

1. As the competent central government agency concerned, the EPA must draft a

proposal for greenhouse gas emission reduction, then the relevant government agencies and local governments must form their own action plans based on this proposal;

2. The relevant central government agencies must regularly review and adjust their greenhouse gas reduction strategies and provide guidance to industry on emission reduction and related issues;
3. The relevant central government agencies must follow the pace of international emission control and regularly report total emissions for Taiwan, after establishing mechanisms for checking, registering and verifying CO₂ emissions and systems for the allocation of emissions quotas and for quota trading. In other words, the EPA will set an overall CO₂ emissions quota for Taiwan. Quotas for individual industries will be set by the regulatory agencies for those industries, such as the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Transportation and Communications.

The EPA will also set up a trading center for emissions quotas, allowing enterprises that reduce their emissions below their quotas to sell the excess to other enterprises which have not been so successful in cutting greenhouse gases. Even before the new program is implemented,

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

enterprises will be allowed to propose reduction plans for regulatory approval. Reductions below the quota ceilings can then be traded or used in carrying out new investment projects after the program is in place.

Due to its unique international status, Taiwan is unable to become a signatory party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or the Kyoto Protocol; however, it has promised to implement the most effective, low-cost methods to promote greenhouse gas reduction and prevent climate change, according to the spirit of UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol, while striving for sustainable development. The bill marks a major step forward in global environmental protection by Taiwan, which is the third country in the world to formulate such a law, after Japan and Switzerland, giving emissions reduction a legal basis on the island and eliminating uncertainty about Taiwan's position on greenhouse gases.

Taiwan is ranked 22nd on the global list of greenhouse gas producers, releasing over 2.17 million tones of carbon dioxide into the air each year, or about 1% of the global total.

As an island nation, the potential impact of climate change on Taiwan's environment cannot be ignored, said EPA Director-general Chang Kuo-lung. The reduction of greenhouse

gases is of critical importance, he said. Accelerating legislation for greenhouse gas reduction has been given top priority in recent energy, national sustainable development and economic sustainable development conferences and public hearings around Taiwan and the Executive Yuan's passing of the EPA-developed draft reflects this sense of urgency. Once it becomes law and comes into effect, the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act will give greater strength to Taiwan's efforts to fight global climate change, while helping maintain Taiwan's competitiveness in global markets.



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