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Fishing Vessels on Tuna, Swordfish and Shark Are to Install VMS

According to the Council of Agriculture's (COA's) Fishery Agency, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) passed a resolution to implement a set of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) Standards, Specifications and Procedures in its fifth annual meeting. In addition to that, fishing vessels working at High Seas will have to report their VMS position directly to the WCPFC Secretariat, beginning on April 1, 2009. Those who fail to do so will be put on the illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing list.

Because global resources of some highly migratory species (HMS) have been depleting, regional fishery regulatory organizations have been set up in the three major oceans to put the exploitation of those fish resources under control. In 2004, the WCPFC was established for

management of the western and central Pacific's HMS. Taiwan is a member to the WCPFC. To fulfill requirement of the commission, the COA has stipulated that fishing vessels on tuna, swordfish and shark install the VMS no later than Dec 31, 2008 and file regular report. To encourage longline fishing vessels between 20 to 100 tons to install the device, there has been a three-year subsidy program, launched from 2006 to 2008. About 1,300 fishing vessels already installed the device. By far, only less than 10% of the fishing vessels failed to comply with the measure.

According to the Fishery Agency, fishing vessels on tuna, swordfish and shark that fail to install the VMS and to keep regular report on their position will be asked to stop operation and to return at local ports by the end of March. For those working near or around seas of Taiwan, owners of the vessels will need certificates to prove their catch load and fish sold are not tuna,

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swordfish or shark. After signing an affidavit specifying that they will not catch tuna, swordfish or shark, they will not be asked to install the VMS device immediately for the time being.



A Record Low Global Black-faced Spoonbill Population in 15 Years

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The latest report of the international black-faced spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) census was made public on Feb 26. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) estimated global black-faced spoonbill population to be declining, for the first time in 15 years, to 2,041.

This year, the international census of the global black-faced spoonbill population was carried out from Jan 10th to Jan 11th. The latest figure was compiled by the HKBWS and later sent back to surveyed conservation groups around the globe.

Wild Bird Society of Tainan pointed out, of this year's census figure, Taiwan accounted for 53% of the global black-faced spoonbill population at around 1,104. That figure is followed by 335 in Hong Kong, 247 in China, 215 in Japan, 63 in Vietnam, 52 in Macau and 25 in South Korea.

According to the Wild Bird Society of Tainan, the number of the bird's overall population dropped from last year's 2,065, leaving a gap of 24. However, it pointed out that, behind the first population decline since the international consensus began in 1994, there might exist some discrepancies.



Inter-ministerial Meeting Reaches Consensus on Protecting Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin

The Council of Agriculture (COA) met on Feb 26 to discuss an action plan to protect the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin (*Scousa chinensis*) population. The plan has been undertaken by the Biodiversity Working Group of the National Council for Sustainable Development Network (NSDN), Executive Yuan.

The COA invited NSDN council members, the Academia Sinica, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA), the Council for Economic Planning and Development, and six conservation groups, including the Wild at Heart Legal Defense Association.

Together, they discussed influence of development projects over the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin population. Every ministry brought up plans to lessen impacts on the dolphin for later discussion. The COA will carry on further conservation plan to form alliance with the public to protect the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin.

In the meeting five conclusions were reached. First of all, threats to the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin need to be solved by competent ministries. As experts, scholars and the conservation groups pointed out, those threats include land reclamation, the species' entangling to fishing gears, decrease of freshwater input, underwater noises and waste water discharge. Ministries concerned need to include in their agendas measures that help to lessen impacts on the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin. In addition, the EPA was asked to pay more attention when it conducts environmental impact assessment on related development projects.

Second, because information is lacking on the distribution, habitat and population of the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, the COA will grant more budget to study the species' distribution in the area and its population size. The COA hopes, by closer monitoring and compiling necessary information, better policies to conservation will be made in the future.

Third, the COA asked its Fishery Agency to promote conservation of the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin among people of the fishing industry. In addition, operation measures will be explained in a way that helps to protect the

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species and the fishing resources.

Fourth, to promote awareness of the valuable and rare status of the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin among the public, the COA will make a promotional video clip on the species. In addition, a website detailed with information and studies of the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin will be put up for the public to visit.

Finally, about whether to promulgate the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin's habitat as the "Major Wildlife Habitat" according to the Wildlife Conservation Act. Because information on the species' distribution in the area and its population size is still lacking, the Forestry Bureau and the Fishery Agency will join to set up a task force, and evaluation on the conservation plan will be including in this (2009) year's agenda.



Dongsha Atolls to Tell Climate Change Impact on the Ocean

Taiwan's Dongsha Atoll National Park—the first marine national park of the island—made itself one of the best places for oceanography study because it is less affected by human disturbance and because it is located in

northern part of South China Sea where multiple ocean currents meet and active air flow swap in the atmosphere.

The Marine National Park Headquarters (MNP) under Construction and Planning Agency, Ministry of the Interior has joined forces with Academia Sinica's Research Center for Environmental Changes for a two-year project, starting this January, to unlock mysteries linking the ocean, atmosphere circulation and global warming.

The project features on-the-spot ship survey, anchored monitoring system, laboratory simulation, satellite or remote sensing and numerical modeling to conduct long-term research on the body of waters surrounding Dongsha and South China Sea. The results of the research will help people understand global warming and interactions among atmosphere, ocean life and geochemical cycles. In addition, the unraveling of the linking key to ocean and atmosphere interaction and that of global warming will foster MNP understanding to the marine ecosystem of the Dongsha Atoll National Park. That will eventually help making better conservation plans.

Priority projects for understand the ocean and atmosphere interaction and that of global

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warming include:

First of all, to investigate whether typhoons from the South China Sea and internal waves will help reduce carbon dioxide level in the atmosphere. Internal waves are gravity waves that oscillate under the surface of water. Internal waves arise from perturbations to vertical stratification of ocean due to different sea water densities, and they move the body of water either vertically or horizontally and cause the ocean to mix and to transport.

The South China Sea is home to the strongest internal waves in the world and is notable for many typhoon occurrences. Both phenomena are products of atmosphere and internal ocean circulations, which help bring nutrient from bottom of the ocean to the photic zone for the phytoplankton to live on. As a result, it boosts photosynthesis and allows carbon dioxide to be absorbed. Therefore, studying carbon dioxide decrease and its relation to typhoons and internal waves in the South China Sea might help unlock the climate change mystery.

Secondly, to study whether nutrient input will sufficiently boost photosynthesis and reduce carbon dioxide. Every year in spring, dust storms originated from China and biomass burning from

Southeast Asia, carry nutrient through long distances of air travel and let it fall on upper layer of the South China Sea. It is important to find out if the nutrient can boost photosynthesis and reduce carbon dioxide in atmosphere. .

Finally, to find out how severe ocean acidification can impact on the Dongsha atolls. As carbon dioxide level continues to rise, ocean acidification has become one of the most worrying issues facing the world's ecosystems. Coral reefs are composed of calcium carbonate (CaCO_3). Acidity increase will hamper calcium carbonate production and accumulation, which affect coral growth. Coral reefs might face serious disintegration. Therefore, it is critical to investigate whether acidity might be a disintegrating force for the Dongsha atolls.



Cape No.2 the Grey-faced Buzzard Returns from the South

One among three Grey-faced Buzzards (*Bustastur indicus*), each deployed with a GPS tracking device to initiate a project to map out their migration route via satellite, finally made its appearance in central Taiwan on March 19.

The project has been carried out together by the Forestry Bureau, the Academia Sinica and

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the Raptor Research Group of Taiwan (RRGT). In October, 2008, they deployed on three Grey-faced Buzzards, each with a GPS transmitter, and brought the buzzards to Kenting and set them free. The one that just flew back, nicknamed Cape No.2, continued its journey to Zhejiang, China on March 25 and is scheduled to return home by late April. The mystery to the Grey-faced Buzzard migration may soon be uncovered.

Around 15,000 to 35,000 Grey-faced Buzzards stop over in Taiwan on their migration during spring and autumn, according to the Forestry Bureau. The Grey-faced Buzzard is listed to the Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (CITES), and is protected under Taiwan's Wildlife Conservation Act as "Rare and Valuable Species."

The buzzards' migration is limited in Southeast Asia. In summer, they stay in eastern Asia, such as Northeast China, the Korean Peninsula, areas south-east to the Ussuri River of Russia, and Japan. In autumn, they migrate south to south-eastern China, the Indochinese Peninsula, the Philippines, Borneo, the Sulawesi and New Guinea for winter. A small majority of the buzzards, however, will make their winter stay in Ishigaki Island, Japan.

In Taiwan, around 43,516 Grey-faced Buzzards stopped over in Kenting last year. The number has hit Taiwanese record in 20 years. Cape No.2, among three released buzzards equipped with GPS transmitters, already made its swift return to central Taiwan. The other two, Cape No.1 and Cape No.3, are in Philippines' Manila and Mindoro, respectively. Both continued their journey north-bound.

Compared with the others, Cape No.2 made the shortest trip. It was the last to arrive in the Philippines, but the first to return north. Four days after its release on Oct 12, 2008, it started a journey, leaving Kenting. It then departed Philippines in early morning of March 19, 2009, and made subsequent arrivals in Cape Eluanbi the same afternoon, later in central Taiwan on March 21, and in Zhejiang, China on March 25. In general, it flew across the Bashi Channel at an average speed of 43.5 kilometers per hour.



First Mandarin Chinese Handbook on Corals of Taiwan Published

Taiwan has a great variety of coral species, which account for around 40 percent of the world's coral species. Chang-feng Dai, Professor of the Institute of Oceanography at National

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Taiwan University, has devoted 30 years to coral research, and finally made his efforts public with the first illustrated handbooks on corals of Taiwan, written in mandarin Chinese.

Around 400 to 500 species of corals live in the waters surrounding Taiwan. Among them, 281 are Taiwan endemic species. However, some corals, such as *Anacropora forbesi* and *Fungia sinensis* which were in existence ten years ago, can no longer be found, which reflected the fact that over the years the ocean and the existence of corals have been seriously affected. Without keen conservation efforts to keep the ocean away from the threats of pollution, over-exploitation and global warming, many valuable species will only exist in the book.



Taiwan Butterflies on Display in Denmark

Following great popularity of butterflies going on exhibitions in Poland, Sweden and Hungary, Copenhagen Zoo, the most popular zoo in Northern Europe, with a total of 1,400,000 visits alone last year, opened an exhibition featuring on Taiwan's butterflies, starting on March 5.

The first 350 pupas given by the Taipei Zoo took air journey to Denmark and stayed there before hatched in two months' time for display in Copenhagen.

Flemming Nielsen, head of the animal department of the Copenhagen Zoo, said in the opening ceremony that the butterflies, as gifts from Taiwan, have not only reinforced the biodiversity exhibition of the zoo, but also made the Danish public more aware of Taiwan's efforts on butterfly conservation.

Taiwan's Government Information Office staff in Denmark also pointed out that major daily news in Denmark all gave reports, detailed with Taiwan's geographical information and the butterfly pictures, in length, featuring the exhibition.



CEPD Opens Meeting on Spatial Strategic Planning

The Council for Economic Planning and Development (CEPD) held national conference on "Spatial strategic planning" on March 25 and 26, hoping to reach consensus among all sectors on the issues.

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The CEPD pointed out that the Executive Yuan had approved national integrated development plans in 1979 and 1996 respectively. For years, with changes brought in the social and economic environment both in Taiwan and on the global scale, the plans, however, had long ceased to meet the many challenges of sustainable development. In this conference, the CEPD first made a report on the future prospect of national spatial structure and its strategies for ministerial discussion.

The CEPD Chairman Chen Tain-jy said the national spatial planning has four main prospects, which reinforce security, better living, the natural and ecological aspects, and knowledge-based economy. Chen said the core value of the spatial planning is to construct a place of sustainability which emphasizes equality among generations based on four principles. For places that are unsuitable for development, the land will be reserved for conservation. However, plenty of room will be granted to places which need development plans. Cities and towns will be developed in accordance to their natural characteristics. Moreover, efficiency and quality will also be attended to, without any partiality tolerated.

When it comes to innovation and economic

development, the two-day conference reached conclusions on activating existing industrial parks, but be cautious on establishing new industrial areas giving the limits of available water and electricity supply. Under the principle of protecting agricultural land resources, only areas either by the rims of the city or those unsuitable for agricultural use would later be released to industrial development of other use.

On land conservation issues, conclusions were made to set up protected areas and to form Ministry of Environment and Resources and Council of Marine Affairs respectively.



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