

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION

NEWSLETTER

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ISC Annual Meeting Opens in Taiwan

The International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) opened its 9th annual session in Kaohsiung. Between July 8 and 14, the meetings were reserved for workshops on northern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus thynnus*) and albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*). Between July 15 and 20, the meetings were opened for all participants.

The ISC is an international and intergovernmental scientific organization, founded in 1995 in Japan. Its aim is to strengthen scientific studies as well as cooperation. In addition, it hopes to establish a multi-governmental management system of highly migratory species (HMS) in North Pacific. On top of that, it wishes to lay out a scientific foundation that leads to conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

Several working groups and statistics working group on bigeye tuna (*Thunnus obesus*),

bluefin tuna, swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) and mixed stocks were founded respectively under the ISC. Each working group is given the mission to monitor current status of the HMS and related population of the fishes. The statistic working groups, on the other hand, are to collect, exchange, and set up fishery and biology data and databases. The information, in turn, is used to evaluate resources and monitor fishery.

The ISC has members from Taiwan, Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Mexico and the US. Several organizations hold observer status for the ISC, including Food and Agriculture of the United Nations (FAO), Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC), North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES) and Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). Representatives from the US, Canada, Japan and Korea, and nearly 40 scientists from the IATTC, the SPC and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) attended the ISC's 9th annual session.

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The ISC plays a pivotal role on the management of the Tuna and Tuna-like Species in North Pacific Ocean. The meetings of this annual session were to evaluate the fishery resources and present reports in terms of scientific recommendation. These works were achieved on top of the information given by member countries about northern bluefin tuna and albacore. In addition, they were to present the final evaluation results to the WCPFC's Northern Committee (NC). The NC would have the final say on whether it would make

regulations governing management of the related fishes.

The North Pacific Ocean, abundant with fishery resources, is one of the most important locations for Taiwan's fishery. The main harvests, including northern bluefin tuna, swordfish and albacore, are of high commercial values. The Northern bluefin tuna with its recent annual harvest of 10 million tons, under series of promotional campaigns by local governments, has yielded commercial value that cannot be underestimated. It has also become one of the most important fishery resources for Taiwan.

However, according to the Fisheries Agency, international community has noticed declining stocks of the northern bluefin tuna and albacore and has started scientific evaluation on their resource status. Therefore, it is important for Taiwan to keep up with sustainability use of the resources.

By hosting the ISC event, Taiwan expressed its concerns over international studies and evaluations on the tuna species. In turn, it would also serve its responsibility to maintain sustainable use of the fishery resources. To meet that goal, it would have to strengthen its studies and carefully evaluate Taiwan's tuna resources. Hopefully, it would get scientists in Taiwan to work with their counterparts around the globe to make results more fruitful.



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Taiwan to Provide Yellowfin Tuna Migratory Information

One yellowfin tuna of last year's tag and release program was caught in the Japanese waters in late April this year. The tuna was, by far, the only one among 786 yellowfin tunas (*Thunnus albacares*) deployed with the device tracked to travel the longest migratory route. The Fisheries Research Institute under the Council of Agriculture (COA), which initiated the program, would continue to study its route and make that information available to the world.

The yellowfin tuna was caught by a fisherman in the western waters of the Amami Ōshima in Japan on April 28, 2009. It was previously released back to the sea by the Fisheries Research Institute near south-eastern waters of Lamay Island in Taiwan on October 25, 2008. The fisherman who caught the tagged tuna gave the tag to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries of Japan. The data recorded in the tag was transmitted from Japan back to Taiwan's Fishery Research Institute.

Director of the institute's Coastal and Offshore Resources Research Center, Wu L. J., pointed out that, the released yellowfin tuna had already broken existing record by traveling for six months to the Sea of Japan. What is more surprising, he pointed out, was that the tuna

remained unchanged physically in length and in weight. The reason behind it would need more study and evidences to uncover, he said.

Wu believed that knowing the tuna's migratory route helped to identify whether it had travel northbound via the Taiwan Strait from Penghu to Japan, or had gone eastbound instead, following the Kuroshio near Cape Eluanbi to arrive at its final destination. In addition, he wished to pave the way for satellite-monitored tag and release projects to uncover the yellowfin tuna migratory route. One day, he hoped that information could be shared with the global conservation community.



NSC Publishes *Biota Taiwanica*

The National Science Council (NSC) held press conference on July 29 to announce the publishing of twenty volumes of *Biota Taiwanica* after eight years of effort. The publication includes profiles of 11,800 species, which consist of fungus and permatophytes under the plant category and earthworm, coral, insect and crustacean under the animal category. However, the number of the species known in Taiwan has been more than fifty thousands, which means that still plenty of effort has to be made.

Biota Taiwanica not only keeps records of

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the basic scientific name and taxonomical status of various species, but also details with paintings, photos and descriptions of their characteristics, breeding environment, and geographic distribution.

Biota Taiwanica is an encyclopedia about species from a specific region. It could be used as a guide to resources development and management at national and local levels. In addition, it is important for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of the resources.

The National Council for Sustainable Development had put completion to editing information of species as an important work of the biodiversity action plan. The NSC had, so far, completed fungus and algae under the plant category, and earthworm and part of the large crustacean under the animal category. The editing to mammal was underway, while editing to amphibian was close to finish.



Coconut Crabs Reappear in Dongsha Marine National Park

Three coconut crabs (*Birgus latro*) were spotted appearing on Pratas Island. The Construction and Planning Agency under the Ministry of the Interior said the discovery was made when it conducted a monitoring survey

there. This was the second consecutive year to find these rare and protected animals on the island, which proved the Dongsha Marine National Park's efforts in conservation were effective.

The Institute of Wildlife Conservation, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, was requested by the Marine National Park Headquarters to monitor the rodents in Pratas Island. On July 17, 2009, its crew found out 2 coconut crabs in the heart of the island. Later on July 19, another coconut crab was discovered in the island's inner lagoon. The 3 juvenile coconut crabs were released immediately after measurements were made.

This was believed to be the second consecutive year that people had discovered coconut crabs after the national park set up a station there. It was almost a year from now that a coconut crab was found there. Last time was in June, 2008.

Coconut crabs live in tropical areas from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, according to the park headquarters. They are the largest crabs in size compared to many hermit crabs living on shore. Mature crabs can weigh more than 1 kilo, measure around 15 centimeters, and use large claws to open coconuts – that is also why they got their name from.

In Taiwan, coconut crabs distribute mainly

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on eastern coast, Hengchun Peninsula, Green Island, and Orchid Island. Coconut crabs are rarely seen in the island of Taiwan, however. Their population has faced serious decline in Green Island and Orchid Island due to habitat loss and hunting. As a result, they need to be protected.

To restore the crab's habitats, the Dongsha Marine National Park Headquarters began to set up a station in Pratas Island and sent up conservation crew to station there. In addition, they removed exotic plants, such as White popinac (*Leucaena leucocephala*) and grew plants that are native to the island, such as *Messerschmidia argentea* (L.) Johnston, *Pisonia grandis* R. Brown and Goodeniaceae.



SAVE Gives Thumb Up to Taiwan for Protecting the Black-faced Spoonbill

The Spoonbill Action Voluntary Echo (SAVE) issued certificate of gratitude to Director of the Southwest Coast National Scenic Area Administration. The certificate is given to Hong Dong-tao to appreciate his effort in preserving black-faced spoonbill's (*Platalea minor*) habitats and promoting local ecotourism.

Hong initiated a tourism development project for Southwest Coast National Scenic

Area 5 years ago when he was appointed head of the administration. The Qigu Black-faced Spoonbill Protected Area, located inside a scenic area, particularly attracted the attention of University of California, Berkeley's SAVE, he pointed out.

SAVE President and Professor Randy Hester, founder of SAVE and professor of U.C. Berkeley's Department of Landscape and Architecture, had asked the administration to give them copies of the development project. In June, 2009, they carried out a highly acknowledged research in Qigu, Tainan to study the protected area of the black-faced spoonbills and their habitats.

SAVE President gave thumb up to the projects. He said it protects black-faced spoonbill habitats, strikes balances among promoting culture, ecotourism and protecting wildlife, and addresses local needs for economic development.

The president said Taiwan, being the largest migrating locations for the world's black-faced spoonbill population, cannot shove off its responsibilities to protect the bird. He had also gave advices to address needs to better habitat planning.



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Kaohsiung Customs Office Cracks Down on Smuggled *Cuora Flavomarginata*

Inspecting staff at Kaohsiung Airport Branch, Kaohsiung Customs Office discovered protected *Cuora flavomarginata* among 59 boxes of *Ocadia sinensis* declared for export. It appeared to be the largest scale of smuggled protected wildlife found by the office. Kaohsiung Customs joined forces with Security Inspection Brigade of Aviation Police Office's Kaohsiung branch to make an inventory and found 1,255 *Cuora flavomarginata*.

The smuggled items were first checked by the Aviation Office by comparing with photos. They were later identified by the Center for Wildlife Conservation and Management, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology to be the "Rare and Valuable Species." And they were confiscated on violation of Article 24 of the Wildlife Conservation Act and Article 37-2 and 37-3 of the Statute for Customs Cracking Down Smuggling. Authorities concerned were also contacted to take care of the smuggle.



Taipei Zoo Works with Behler Chelonian Center to Breed Burmese Star Tortoises

The Taipei Zoo signed a "Conservation Cooperative Agreement for Endangered Turtle and Tortoise Species" with the US-based turtle conservancy Behler Chelonian Center (BCC) on September 16, 2009. Under the agreement, both will work to bring the critically endangered Burmese star tortoises (*Geochelone platynota*) bred in the zoo back to its original habitat in Myanmar.

In the agreement, both parties promised to work on turtle and tortoises breeding techniques, expand genetic biodiversity, and promote ex situ conservation. In the long run, they hoped, through international efforts, to bring the Burmese star tortoises bred outside their original habitat back to Myanmar and begin breeding there.

Taipei Zoo Director Jason Yeh pointed out that, in order to make the pact more feasible, a symposium on international breeding exchange of the Burmese star tortoises was conducted, with the help from the Forestry Bureau, prior to signing of the agreement, on September 12 and September 13. The zoo invited turtle and tortoises conservation experts from the US,

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Hong Kong and Taiwan to discuss the species' recent status and exchange ideas on how a framework of cooperation could be reached.

The Burmese star tortoise is considered "Critically Endangered (CR)" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. They only distribute in mountains and forests southwest of Myanmar, along rivers north of Yangon. Adult Burmese star tortoises can grow to 20 to 30 centimeters. Loss of natural habitat, illegal hunting and trading attracted by the Asian pet market bloom all contributed to its gloom. The Turtle Conservation Fund (TCF) had listed it among 6 critically endangered species of turtles and tortoises in the world.

The Wildlife Shelter of the Taipei Zoo, which was commissioned to set up by the Council of Agriculture in 1996, has taken in about 900 wild animals of some 102 species confiscated by authorities concerned including many critically endangered species. The Burmese star tortoise was one of them. In 2003, the Shelter had made first successful breeding of the Burmese star tortoise in the world. Up until 2008, there were only 4 zoos across the US where Burmese star tortoises were successfully bred.

However, the tortoise's hatching rate in the Shelter was exceedingly low with only one to 2 survived among 80 to 100 eggs laid annually, according to a research staff at the zoo.

To bring the Burmese star tortoise population for a steady growth, the Taipei Zoo, with the help from the Forestry Bureau was introduced via the Bronx Zoo to contact and seeking professional assistance from the New York-based turtle conservancy Behler Chelonian Center.

With the BCC's technical support, the zoo made subsequent adjustments to humidity and temperature, making the breeding environment more alike that of the tortoises' native habitat. The BCC had also provided the zoo with advanced hatching techniques and procedures that helped postpone hatching and had increased the zoo's population of Burmese star tortoises by 26 last year.

The zoo hoped the agreement would eventually help bring the Burmese star tortoises bred in the zoo back to their native habitats in Myanmar. The zoo also wished such working formula could be expanded to other critically endangered turtle and tortoise species.



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Asians Work Together on Public Trust to Preserve Nature and Culture

The 13th International Conference of National Trust (ICNT) conducted a 5-day meeting session, beginning on September 13, to launch alliances among national trust organizations. To meet the goal of cooperation is what the International National Trust Organization (INTO) had called for. The conference initiated regional meetings, breaking worldwide Non-Profit Organizations into groups according to continents, such as Europe, Asia, Africa, Americas, and the Pacific, in order to carry out more in-depth discussions on strategic cooperation.

Representatives from Taiwan, India, Indonesia, China, South Korea and Malaysia attended the conference. They decided in the meeting to form Asian National Trust Organization (ANTO) alliance under the INTO, exchange ideas and information on quarterly basis, and launch meeting every 2 years. The Taiwan Environmental Information Center (TEIC) had proposed to sent staff and volunteers to join working holidays of host countries for more exchange among alliances. All participants agreed.

C. S. Wang from Taiwan National Trust (TNT) pointed out in the meeting, the TEIC and

some conservation groups tried to incorporate efforts from all sectors via public trust to buy land in Indonesia to protect rainforests. He said Taiwan's alliance with Indonesia's trust organizations would become more intense. Moreover, he pointed out that Asian organizations could attain their goal through working on given subjects and giving each other support.

The ICNT will hold its 2010 Asian regional meeting either in Japan or in India. In time, it would be able to incorporate national trust in Asian countries to pave the way to preserve more natural and cultural heritages.



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