

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION

NEWSLETTER

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2010 Taiwan Action on International Year of Biodiversity Kicks off

The United Nation has stipulated year 2010 International Year of Biodiversity (IYB) to enhance people's understanding of biodiversity and to make people aware of the impact following by the gradual loss of biodiversity. The UN hoped it will help initiate more action worldwide.

A Taiwan version of the IYB event was launched in Taipei Botanical Garden on May 22, the International Day for Biodiversity. The event was planned by the Biodiversity Working Group, National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSA), Executive Yuan.

To cope with loss in biological diversity, in 2002, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) put forth the 2010 Biodiversity Target in order to achieve by 2010 a significant reduction

of the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level. To attain the goal, the Convention has planned a strategy and evaluated progress made in 7 focal areas and related targets and sub-targets.

The NCSA Biodiversity Working Group has initiated National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) since 2001 with a coordinating effort from 22 ministries and councils. To introduce Taiwan's effort in biodiversity work to the public and the world community, the NCSA planned an Exhibition on the Implementation of the NBSAP, the 2010 Taiwan Biodiversity Expo, and many other activities for the celebration of IYB.

In the Exhibition, it introduces protected area system of Taiwan, which includes 85 protected areas, including 20 nature reserves, 34 major wildlife habitats, 17 wildlife refuges, 6 forest protected areas managed by the Forestry Bureau of the Council of Agriculture, and 8

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national parks managed by the Ministry of the Interior (MOJ), which take up a total of 19% of Taiwan's terrestrial area. In addition, the Forestry Bureau has taken up 6 years to map out the complete Taiwan Vegetation map. The MOJ announced 75 important wetlands for future conservation and management of the wetlands.

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Other achievements of the implementation of Taiwan's NBSAP include: establishment of a biodiversity clearinghouse mechanism, i.e. The Taiwan Biodiversity Information Facilities (<http://www.taibif.org.tw>); coordination of the National Germplasm Banks; development of new biotechnology to improve artificial propagation of several important medicinal and ornamental plants and help sustainable utilization of natural resources and habitat protection; implementation of several measures to reduce the impact of invasive alien species; promulgation of "the Indigenous Peoples Resources Joint Management Act" and drafting of "the Protection Act for the Traditional Biodiversity Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples"; provision of funding, knowledge and technical support to encourage the establishment of sustainable local communities, etc.

To increase the public awareness over biodiversity issue and the May 22 International Day for Biodiversity, the NCSD has invited ministries concerned, local governments and non-governmental groups to join the "Expo of 522 International Biodiversity Day." At the scene, there were biodiversity related games, pop quiz, speeches, and film screenings.



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***The Avifauna of Taiwan* Makes Its Way to Publication**

The first encyclopedic research on Taiwan's birds has made its way to the publication of *The Avifauna of Taiwan*. The Forestry Bureau and the Academia Sinica had worked for 6 years on the project and the end product *The Avifauna of Taiwan* was officially launched in May 2010. The book marked a milestone on Taiwan's bird study.

The three-volume books with each volume covering nearly 700 pages have compiled bird studies and observations in the past 60 years. It lists over 533 bird species appeared in Taiwan. In the book, there are about 2,000 hard-to-get pictures which will give readers more updated knowledge with detailed picture on the birds. The books are particularly precious because it holds a collection of pictures about rare sea birds.

The Forestry Bureau planned to translate the books into English for readers around the world. The book will not only provide the variety and rarity of Taiwan birds but will also become the main documenting source on Formosan bird study.



Seal and Fur Seal Products under More Severe Scrutiny

In response to an earlier report which stated that seal and fur seal are generally regarded as common wildlife in Taiwan, the Forestry Bureau emphasized that seal, fur seal and sea lion oil products have never been allowed to import under current *Wildlife Conservation Act*. And from now on, there will be stricter regulation applied to future application.

Among 47 species of seals and sea lions in the world, about 14 of them are listed in the appendices of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). To protect these species, Taiwan has included them in the list of protected animals, according to Article 4 of the *Wildlife Conservation Act*, in sync with the CITES.

As Article 24 of the *Wildlife Conservation Act* stipulates, people will have to file application to the Council of Agriculture (COA) when they import protected seal and sea lion or related product. By law, people need to have permit before carrying on any import procedure. At present, the COA has not approved any application on importing oil products getting

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from seal and fur seal. In the future, if application is filed, the COA will follow through with more severe scrutiny. In addition, according to article 35 of the *Wildlife Conservation Act*, protected animal product will not be allowed to trade or display on public without prior permission from authorities concerned.



Kenting-Sponsored Eco-documentaries Garner Global Honors

Marine Exploration, *The Wildlife of Kenting National Park*, and *The Story of Gray-faced Buzzard* (or *The Story of Haruka*), three documentaries about Taiwan's ocean, land and wildlife have won global honors!

The Kenting National Park had commissioned the projects and the final products headed right into the 33rd International Wildlife Film Festivals (IWFF).

All three documentaries went into the final list of the IWFF awards. The *Marine Exploration* garnered honorable mention in the following categories: Cinematography, Sound Design, Underwater Cinematography and Educational Value. *The Wildlife of Kenting National Park*

received honorable mention for both Cinematography and Educational Value, while *The Story of Gray-faced Buzzard* received honorable mention for Educational Value.

Among these films, *The Story of Gray-faced Buzzard* also won itself Platinum Remi in the 43rd WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival.

The Kenting National Park emphasized that these documentaries have paved the way for public understanding of the environment. For example, the *Marine Exploration* gives the public a guide to the coral ecosystem of the Kenting National Park. Watching the documentary will help people know more about the coral breeding, how different species live together in a competitive way, and the current threats that coral is facing.

The Wildlife of Kenting National Park, on the other hand, introduces the terrestrial wildlife and the ecosystem. The director incorporated the seasonal changes into the storyline when narrating abundant wildlife living in Kenting. The filming closely presented how wildlife interact with the environment and would eventually empower the tourists with first hand experience on the ecosystem.

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The Story of Gray-faced Buzzard documents and details with many different stages facing the Gray-faced Buzzard during their lifetime, which include wooing, mating, nesting, parent-feeding and migrating. What is worth noticing is that the documentary includes valuable shots featuring the Gray-faced Buzzard in flight.



Environmental groups urge to Save the Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin

Seven major environmental groups in Taiwan have called for the public to buy stake or land to safeguard the eco-corridor trust plan for the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin (*Scousa chinensis*) living near the wetland which is proposed to be developed by the plant of Kuokuang Petrochemical Technology Co (KPTC), a subsidiary of CPC, Taiwan Corp.

The Indo-Pacific humpback dolphins, with only less than 100 in number left near the west coast of Taiwan, has been regarded as critically endangered by the IUCN and has been in urgent need to be protected. The dolphins love to gather near river mouth and forage near shallow waters, which make them and their habitat prone to human disturbance.

It was reported that the government is likely to sell more than 2,000 hectares of wetland to KPTC on a price of NT\$100 for a square meter of land. The KPTC plans to build refineries on coastal wetlands in Dacheng Township, Changhua County, near the mouth of Jhuoshuei River.

The plan met opposition from the environmentalist fearing the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin might become extinct. The environmentalist has called for the public to buy the land on a price of NT\$119 per square meter of land in a bid to protect the species.

Taiwan Environmental Protection Union Changhua Division chairman Tsai Chia-yang pointed out that the public can buy land of around 200 hectares originally held for the Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin corridor. Tsai said, "We want to reserve the 200 hectares to be the species' corridors. By dividing the corridor into 10 pieces, we hope everyone will buy the land most suitable to his or her temperament. Those interested in the river mouth, Kurichio, or the ocean, they can place their bid in the ocean area. Those opted for oyster, will buy oyster area. Those opted for fiddler crab will buy those areas. Everybody get pieces of land on their preferences for the sea creatures.

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The public has eagerly taken part in the plan, and the number of people who have signed for stake-buying online jumped 7th bound for a single day. There have been more than 840 shareholders now, and they buy a total of 80,000 square meters of land on a price of NT\$119 per square meter. The total sum has now reached over NT\$9.5 million.

Tsai Chia-yang said, “if the trust plan fails, that means the public also agrees there’s no need for conservation. However, if the initial goal of 2 million stakes is reached, the government will have to listen to what the public have to say and stop the KPTC Development project.”



The First National Trust in Taiwan

The first national trust in Taiwan was set up on April 11th. Its very first bids were to welcome the old Beitou Station back home and to protect the Indo-Pacific Humpback Dolphin.

Taiwan National Trust (TNT) chair and professor of Tsing-Hua University Wang Chin-Shou said that a special account will be opened in the bank and a few supervisors will be appointed according to trust regulation. He said the public property will not be for resale, and will stay there forever.

The public welfare trust has been popular abroad. In Taiwan, however, the trend has just been taking shape. Environmental trust is one among many. With citizens and local organization become the trustees, trusted organization can manage the environment on the fund and resources gathered. Generally speaking, natural environment and heritages can all be trusted and managed.

Wang pointed out that the Taipei City Government has sold the old Beitou train station for NT\$1 to Taiwan Folk Village of Changhua in central Taiwan when Taipei built its new Beitou station for the mass rapid transit system. In the future, Wang said the TNT will raise a fund of NT\$19 million 160 thousands and 401 in memory of the station’s official launch date in history, April 1, 1916. The TNT hoped to give the station back to where it was once belonged to.



17 Beached Pygmy Killer Whale Sent Back to the Sea

More than 100 people from Kaohsiung and Tainan Fire Department came to the rescue of 21 Pygmy Killer Whale (*Feresa attenuata*) beached near Kaohsiung late at night on April 18. In spite of rescue effort, 4 were eventually dead and were

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sent to Taijiang Whaling Rescue Center for future study. The rest of the Pygmy Killer Whale were later released back to the sea.

Director of the Whaling Study Center at National Cheng Kung University Wang Jiann Ping pointed out that the 4 Pygmy Killer Whale later died were first found stuck on wave energy dissipating concrete block along the beach. He also said that to witness so many Pygmy Killer Whale beached at a single time were not common in Taiwan.

Wang said the Pygmy Killer Whale generally has family of around 10 to 20 in number. From October to March in the following year, whales are frequently found beached ashore.

The beached Pygmy Killer Whale was as large as 2 meters in length and as small as less than a meter. Professor Wang said they might belong to the same family, though the real reason behind for such a huge number to get beached is still unclear.



First and Only! Sea Snakes Eggs Found in Orchid Island

In the tidal flat area near the Orchid Island,

there is estimated tens of thousands sea snakes. For that, the Public Television Service along with Professor of Life Science at National Taiwan Normal University Tu Ming-Chung, went to Orchid Island to track current status of Taiwan sea snakes. The trip to Orchid island also brought them rare chances of witnessing sea snake eggs.

Laticauda sea snakes appeared to be the most common sea snakes in Orchid Island. According to Professor Tu's research, the 3 most common ones are *Laticauda semifasciata*, *Laticauda colubrine*, *Laticauda laticaudata*. These species need to take in fresh water on regular basis. The observation comes in contrary with general concept that sea snakes drink ocean water and use gland under their tongues to eliminate salt and keep fresh water.

Laticauda sea snakes are different from others because they are oviparous, not viviparous. For that reason, they need to go onshore for caves so that they can lay eggs hiding in moist. When the island is running short of fresh water supply or locations, the species would have a hard time maintaining a stable population there. The Orchid Island, having well-developed coral ecosystem, rich freshwater

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supply and environment suitable habitat for egg-laying, therefore, appears to be particularly abundant in species and numbers of sea snakes.

People know little about the sea snakes. The most common knowledge about them is that they live only about a dozen years, each snake will lay around 4 eggs every year, the egg measures around 5 centimeters and that it takes 4 months for the eggs to get hatched.

Most of the time, the sea snakes live in the ocean. Recently, people speculate that climate change has jeopardized the existence of the sea snakes who need fresh water for their survival. Unstable rainfall, shortage of water and torrential rain all affect their living.

The 4 sea snakes of the Orchid Island, *Laticauda semifasciata*, *Laticauda colubrine*, *Laticauda laticaudata* and *Emydocephalus ijimae* are relatively weak in their ability to turn aggressive. Most individuals (73%) ignore the existence of human. When encountering human, they do not flee nor come over. Basically, they only spit their tongue for sensing purpose and then leave. Never a snake there has been found aggressive. The *Emydocephalus ijimae*, in particular, only feeds on fish eggs and their

venom gland and teeth have become useless. Professor Tu believed, that the Orchid Island finds itself to be a rare spot to come close and observe the sea snakes.



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