

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION

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Midway Home for Burmese Starred Tortoise

Originally found only in Burma, the Burmese Starred Tortoise (*Geochelone platynota*) has become a popular pet for the radiating star patterns on its shell. Poaching has been rampant throughout its native range. In order to move forward the conservation project for the endangered Burmese Starred Tortoise, Taipei City Zoo and the Forestry Bureau under the Council of Agriculture have jointly donated 10,000 USD to the Turtle Survival Alliance. The funds are for establishing a midway home prior to reintroduction into the wild for the Burmese Starred Tortoise in Burma. The donation ceremony was held on Feb. 28th, where Rick Hudson, chair of the Turtle Survival Alliance, came personally to Taiwan to receive the donation.

The wild habitat of Burmese Starred Tortoise has been disrupted by agricultural developments. Their star patterned shell also

made them popular in the pet market and has fueled continuous poaching. In year 2007, Burmese Starred Tortoise was listed among the top twenty five endangered turtles or land tortoise in the world.

Although the Burmese authorities have clearly ruled capturing Burmese Starred Tortoise as illegal, they are no longer seen in the wild habitats. Only a handful of individuals are kept as pets in zoos or in private hands. This species is facing an extinction crisis.

Seven years ago, a batch of smuggled Burmese Starred Tortoise was sent to the rescue center in Taipei City Zoo. Currently there are fourteen healthy adults in the zoo. The zoo authorities will select suitable individuals for reintroduction in Burma.

To rebuild the wild population by sending back the successfully bred Burmese Starred Tortoise from Taipei City Zoo, last year the Zoo sent professionals to Burma to investigate the current conservation effort in its original habitat, seeking to send the Burmese Starred Tortoise to

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

the midway home in Burma. During the trip, they also visited the Lawkananda Wildlife Sanctuary in Bagan, Myanmar. They are preparing to use this Sanctuary as a midway home during the reintroduction of the Burmese Starred Tortoise to its home habitat.



Three Thousand Km Journey Decoded from Leg Bands on Red-Bellied Thrush

On Jan, 19th this year, locals in Jia-Yi County found an injured Red-Bellied Thrush

INSIDE

- Midway Home for Burmese Starred Tortoise
- Three Thousand Km Journey Decoded from Leg Bands on Red-Bellied Thrush
- Interministerial Cooperation in Wetland Restoration
- Northern Pacific Fisheries Agreement Completed Negotiations
- BBS Taiwan Calls for Citizen Scientists
- Dam Removal for Ecological Restoration in Shei-Pa National Park
- Horticultural Exports Conceal Endangered Plants

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(*Turdus chrysolaus*) with leg bands. Researchers from the Endemic Species Research Institute examined the leg bands on the bird's right leg, and found the serial number "4C52389 TOKYO". The Banding Center of the Chinese Wild Bird Federation in Taiwan helped reach the Yamashina Institute of Ornithology from Japan to confirm that this bird was banded and released on Oct. 11th last year in Obihiro, Hokkaido. The flight south from Hokkaido to Jia-Yi reaches over 3000 kilometers.

"In recent years there were records of recovering banded birds in the Taroko National Park, including Blue-Rock Thrush released from Korea and Black Faced Bunting from Russia," said Li Hsun-Huang, Deputy director of Endemic Species Research Institute. "There are countless records of bird watchers observing water fowls with leg bands in the wild. This shows that there are no borders in conservation, and the importance of and pressing need for basic ornithology research."

Red-Bellied Thrush is also called Red-Chested Thrush. The main breeding grounds are in the northern Japan and the isles to the north. In non-breeding season they are found in southern Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, southern China and the Philippines. They are common winter birds in Taiwan.



INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

Interministerial Cooperation in Wetland Restoration

The Executive Yuan has approved the National Wetland Conservation Program (2011-2016) on July 1st, 2010. This program integrated the Construction and Planning Agency, the Forestry Bureau, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Water Resources Agency and the Ministry of Education into one team to promote survey, maintenance, ecological restoration and environmental education on the major wetlands.

The National Wetland Ecological Survey and Restoration Project spearheaded by the Construction and Planning Agency during 2009 and 2010 had been widely supported by county governments and local groups. To coordinate with the initiation of National Wetland Conservation Program this year and to keep expanding the environmental maintenance and restoration work for the wetlands, 98.7 million NTD worth of funding has been budgeted through the cooperation of involved agencies to subsidize wetland restoration work by local governments.

This multi-year program invited experts and researchers to help review and provide consultation. By considering the principles of integrity of the hydrological environment in the

drainage area, the integration of the management system, the rationality and thoroughness of the proposed projects and the restraint in expenses, 29 projects in 16 counties involving 28 nationally important wetlands were approved.

The National Wetlands Conservation Program initiated this year not only improved the venues of cooperation between central and local governments, but also expanded work on multiple fronts including wetland scientific research, wetland space planning, management systems, community involvement, education, training and expert consultation.



Northern Pacific Fisheries Agreement Completed Negotiations

During the 10th Multilateral Meeting on Management of High Seas Fisheries in the North Pacific Ocean, held in Vancouver, Canada between Feb 27th and Mar 4th, the countries involved has finalized the contents of the Convention on the Conservation and Management of High Seas Fisheries Resources in the North Pacific Ocean through many days of negotiations.

The first Multilateral Meeting on Management of High Seas Fisheries in the North Pacific Ocean was started by the four countries,

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

i.e. the United States, Japan, Korea and Russia, in 2006. Taiwan has been invited into the meeting since the 7th meeting during Aug 2009, and has continued attending the 8th and 9th meetings held in January and September of 2010. The current 10th meeting was attended by the United States, Japan, Korea, Russia, Canada, China and Taiwan.

On the last day of this meeting, an accord has been reached on substantial parts of Convention draft contents. The area under the future jurisdiction of this convention is the water in the North Pacific high seas area, excluding the Berling area high seas pocket. The southern boundary is defined in principle as 20 degrees north latitude. The westernmost boundary starts from the intersection between the outside boundary of economic waters from the Mariana Islands, under the U.S. jurisdictions, and the 150 degrees east longitude line, extending eastward following the 20 degree north latitude line, expanding southwards between 180 degrees east longitude and 140 degrees west longitudes to be bordered by the 10 degree north latitudes line. The target species intended for management are the bottom fishing fisheries of the North Pacific High Seas region and fishery resources not yet included in other international fisheries convention organizations, like saury and red squid.

The primary management target for the North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC), formed according to this convention, is the bottom fishing fishery management in the high seas of the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VMEs) including undersea mountains, deep ocean springs and cold water corals. To effectively regulate bottom fishing, UN has already adopted a resolution in 2006 (UNGA 61/105), which calls for countries to establish fishery management organizations, and to pass and enforce “interim management measures” in order to realize protective management for VMEs.

Corresponding to the said UN resolution, since passing the Mechanisms for Protection of Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems and Sustainable Management of High Seas Bottom Fisheries in the Northwestern Pacific Ocean in February 2007, the multilateral meeting has further adopted the Interim Management Measure for the Protection of Northeast Pacific Ocean Vulnerable Bottom Ocean Ecosystems during the latest meeting. This makes the bottom fishing industry in the whole North Pacific Ocean subjected to tight regulation of 100% observer participation, pre-submitted operational plans, limiting fishing effort, catch monitoring programs and data survey programs. This will be

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

strictly enforced by the public duty vessels and airplanes of all participatory states.

In this meeting, there was report on three fishing vessels conducting bottom gill fishing in violation of UN resolution close to VMEs in North Pacific Ocean. These three vessels are all registered under the flags of countries with lagging fishery management practices. All parties agreed to further investigate this illegal fishing operation and to possibly submit the incident to UN Food and Agricultural Organization.

Fisheries Agency highlighted that in future protective measures from NPFC will have to be obeyed. Conservation efforts will be taken and attention paid to the Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems in Northern Pacific. Fishing operators must abstain from “illegal, unreported, unregulated (IUU)” fishing activities. Even if Taiwanese nationals operate on foreign-registered fishing vessels, they will still be strictly regulated according to the Statute for Management of Investing and Running Non-ROC Registered Fishing Vessels. Offenders will be legally prosecuted and charged with large fines or even criminal sentences.



BBS Taiwan Calls for Citizen Scientists

The Endemic Species Research Institute, the Institute of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, NTU and the Chinese Wild Bird Federation have announced the initiation of Breeding Bird Survey Taiwan 2011 project (BBS Taiwan). The expectation is to monitor environmental change by using birds as biological indicators.

Breeding Bird Survey, BBS, is a long standing practice in many regions of the world. BBS Taiwan is the first team to involve civilian groups and combines governmental agencies, and academic organizations. It is also a large scale bird monitoring effort.

Due to the large number of bird species, and the ease of surveying and monitoring, there are already regular surveys internationally. Information obtained from bird surveys in many countries not only may serve as important references for conservation decisions, but also help evaluate the effectiveness and progress of biodiversity conservation policies, and is thus regarded highly by its scientific research value.

BBS begins by establishing survey points in fixed sampling plots. Afterwards surveyors will

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

go to observe and record the species and numbers of birds. These original data are preliminarily sorted and sent back to the research organizations. Researchers then analyze this information further to understand the bird distribution and current population status. Through accumulating bird distribution and population information, trends of change can be monitored from the related data. BBS Taiwan targets the common breeding birds in Taiwan main island, and monitor the current status of Taiwan local birds and long term trends, and releases survey reports on a regular basis.

Initially BBS Taiwan adopted the joint operation model between academia, civilians and the government. Aside from the regular participators of the NTU research team and local Wild Bird Federation personnel, it has planned to adopt the “Citizen Science” concept popular in Western countries. By involving in bird research work through such partnerships, civilians can not only help accumulate important ecological data for Taiwan, but also improve their own scientific understanding and enhance recognition of biodiversity through long-term field observations and help preserve birds in Taiwan.

BBS Taiwan started the preparatory plans in 2008. Lee Pei-Fen, Professor of the Institute of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from NTU, utilized Geographical Information System (GIS)

and various ecological information overlays to select 400 sampling plots. The survey officially began in 2009. The sampling plots are in units of 1 km by 1 km squares. If roadways are encountered in the sampling plots, then the border will have to be extended for another kilometer. Thus the size for each sampling plots may reach 4 square kilometers.

The chosen sampling plots are visited by the research team to confirm location onsite. In every sampling plot 6 to 10 survey points, 20 meter apart, are chosen. Many sampling plots are located far from human habitation and the research team worked over one year to complete the survey.

Through the active participation of over 170 surveyors from all over Taiwan in 2009 and 2010, surveys in 160 sampling plots and 1300 survey points have been completed, slightly more than one third of total survey points. Up to now 262 sampling plots have been adopted in 2011, with 175 participants. Of these, 164 are volunteers. Participating groups include 15 NGOs and two student clubs.

BBS originated in 1968 from the ongoing breeding bird surveys by the British Trust of Ornithology, the Scottish Ornithologists’ Club and the Irish Wildbird Conservancy.



Dam Removal for Ecological Restoration in Shei-Pa National Park

Through evaluation of ecological and hydraulic engineering experts, Shei-Pa National Park tore down dam no.1 of Cijiawan stream in order to restore the breeding corridor for the national treasure Formosan Landlocked Salmon, *Oncorhynchus formosanus*.

Oncorhynchus formosanus is a landlocked fresh water salmon living in high altitude streams in Taiwan. It is also officially announced as an endangered protected species. Currently it is only found in the Cijiawan Stream and Gaoshan Stream in the Wu-Ling region.

Due to the changes in environment in tributary area and stream ecology brought on by natural and human factors, the range for Formosan Landlocked Salmon has shrunk from mountain stream sections between altitudes of 1500m -2000m down to 1700m-1900m. Its range is further subdivided by check dams, which lead to the inability to exchange individuals between sub-populations and uneven water quality in its habitat.

Cijiawan stream is the main headstream of Tachia River. Cijiawan stream Dam No.1 was built in 1972 and was the furthest downstream

sand check dam in the Formosan landlocked Salmon Refuge area. The initial purpose of building this dam was to intercept the sands in the upstream tributary area of the Tachia River.

As the riverbed rises in response to Dam No. 1, the height barrier created prevented fishes from going upstream. And the sand-intercepting function of Dam No.1 is no longer effective now. To restore the habitat of Formosan Landlocked Salmon, a consultation task force made up of experts from hydraulic engineering, ecology and conservation made multifaceted evaluation. After two year, an enhancement plan was formulated for Dam No.1. The final decision was that the most economical and obviously beneficial conservation course of action is to remove dam No.1. The work is expected to begin this may during the dry season.



Horticultural Exports Conceal Endangered Plants

A horticultural business in Changhua County applied to export a full 40 foot container to Hong Kong under the name of exporting Horticultural products. Detecting possible conceit, the Mobile Inspection Brigade of the Taichung Customs Office found that the business

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION NEWSLETTER

was exporting 3000 concealed live plants, including large quantities of fertilizers and an endangered plant listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), *Sphaeropteris lepifera*, or the common tree fern.

The inspectors found that the exporter placed flower pots and sun shading nets on the outer portion of the container as deception decoys, while large numbers of live plants were concealed inside. Through a whole day of sorting by twenty people, 2938 plants of 19 species were found in the container. These included box-leaved syzygium, southern cypress, luo han cypress, Philippine ebony persimmon, Chinese ixora, texas sage, Chinese cane and the common tree fern.

Tzeng Wen-Liang, deputy captain of the mobile inspection brigade, said that the nearly three thousand live plants prepared for concealed export by the exporter were all of high economic value. There were also 60 sacks of fertilizer, totaling 7843 kilograms in weight and worth more than one million NTD by market value. Among these, the common tree fern was an endangered plant regulated under CITES, and could only be exported with permit from the Bureau of Foreign Trade. Neither declaring nor

applying for permit, the exporter faced fines as high as 3 million NTD and confiscation of all merchandise according to the Customs Anti-Smuggling Act.

Harvesting of the common tree fern has been prohibited worldwide. Yet there were still many people growing this plant in Taiwan. Amid the economic rise of China during the last few years, there were huge demands of horticultural plants. Add to this the fact that there were no common tree ferns in China, the prices had thus risen exponentially recently. Many people attempted to sell common tree ferns to China in the last few years.



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