

# INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION

## NEWSLETTER

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### Minister of the Council of Agriculture joins APEC meetings

Minister of the Council of Agriculture Chen, Wu Hsiong led a delegation to Beijing to attend the First APEC Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Forestry between Sep 5<sup>th</sup> and Sep 8<sup>th</sup>. The meeting discussed the sustainable forestry operation in the Asia-Pacific. Two-way meetings with forestry department leaders from China, US, Japan, Korea, and Malaysia were held. Chen offered proposals to establish a forest disease prevention network and to strengthen the forestry operation and technical collaboration within the Asia Pacific.

According to Chen, the contributions from the forests, and the problems facing them, have gained global attention in recent years under the backdrop of the climate change issue. The United Nations announced Year 2011 as the International Forest Year. It was especially

meaningful for forestry ministers of APEC to jointly discuss the future developments of forestry management and environment. Among the five growth strategies announced by APEC, the section on inclusive growth, carbon-reduction in forestry, and carbon storage are very important components of green growth.

Chen was invited to give a speech in the meeting. The topic was “Strengthening practical operation for inclusive growth in forests in Asia Pacific.” Taiwan’s experience in forestry management was shared with the 21 economic entities in the meeting. The contents included “promoting community forestry to jointly involve in the management and conservation of forest”, “promoting eco-tourism and environmental education to facilitate green growth in communities”, “developing diverse uses of forests and promote the development of forestry economy”, and “recycle and reuse of driftwood to develop industries and forestry

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culture.

Chen also mentioned that Taiwan has promoted the initiative “green forestation” to expand upon aforestation in response to the 2007 Sydney Declaration by APEC leaders. Until 2011, 15,559 hectares of new forests have been planted. The goal is to plant 60,000 hectares of new forests by 2016. In the inclusive growth dimension, local indigenous people are invited to join in the natural conservation, resource survey, eco-tourism, forest conservation, forest fire prevention, and illegal logging prevention.

During the meeting, Chen specifically

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proposed to establish a network for forestry disease prevention and quarantine in the Asia Pacific region, and to exchange information on the monitoring, warning, and prevention techniques of cross-border forestry diseases, pests, and invasive species, in order to prevent the degradation of forests. The meeting has decided to adopt this suggestion as the 8<sup>th</sup> point of the “joint statement by forestry ministers”.

According to Chen, Taiwan began building monitoring and prevention systems for forestry diseases since 1996. The Forest Disease Information Center was established in 2010, and the Invasive Species Reporting Center was established in 2011. Taiwan has accumulated considerable experience in responding to all kinds of forestry diseases and pests, and the threat of invasive species, which is willing to share with other countries.



## Taiwan expands the satellite tagging program for whale sharks

Director-General of the Fisheries Agency, Council of Agriculture Sha, Chih-yi announced in a news conference on Sep 19<sup>th</sup> that 100 satellite tags will be collected in five years to expand the scale of whale shark research, which

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is also the largest satellite tagging program for whale shark over the world.

In order to understand the ecological behavior of whale sharks and their migration paths in the Pacific Ocean, The National Taiwan Ocean University (NTOU) established the Shark Research Center. The center conducts biological research on whale sharks under the commission of the Fisheries Agency, and coordinates with trap net fishing operators to tag and release the whale sharks. The first whale shark was tagged and released in April 2002. Subsequently, 353 whale sharks were tagged and released afterwards, including 323 traditional tags and 30 satellite tags. Signals from 9 satellite tags are successfully received.

According to Associate Professor Joung, Shoou-Jeng from the Department of Environmental Biology and Fisheries Science, NTOU, satellite tags usually have enough electricity to sustain for 3 to 4 months, which allows continuous tracking of the migratory path of whale sharks. The satellite tags have helped discover whale shark behaviors such as travelling back and forth between Penghu and Luzon islands in the Philippines. The longest tracking lasted 7 months, with the path going thousands of kilometers long. The research also shows that the

furthest north appearance was between the Tokyo bay and Okinawa in Japan, while the furthest east reaches the mid-Pacific region around 150 degrees east longitude.

Whale sharks are highly migratory fishes, and are often found in the seas around Taiwan. It is exploited by many fishing countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The mild temper and slow movements make them easy targets. Compounded against the fact that they give birth very small number of young each time and take a long time to reach maturity, the population is under gradual decline. To promote conservation of whale sharks, the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP) of Mexico proposed to mark Aug 30<sup>th</sup> as the International Whale Shark day every year in the second international whale shark conference to strengthen international links on Aug 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008. The conference now includes more than 40 countries that work together on whale shark conservation internationally.

Since 2008, catching, selling, owning, and exporting whale sharks has been completely banned in Taiwan. The Fisheries Agency has announced the National Plan of Action Plan on Sharks (NPOA - Sharks) in 2006, which includes data gathering, use, research, resource

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assessment, education and awareness, international cooperation, and fisheries management on sharks. Measures such as requiring the shark body to be transported and unloaded with the shark fin intact, declaring the shark body and fin unloading quantity, dispatching observers to collect statistics of shark proportion in mixed catches are further implemented. The initiative in promoting “whole shark utilization” and “fin intact on body” are measures that mark a higher standard in shark fisheries management than many other advanced fishing nations.



## **Green Sea Turtles and Chinese Egrets show up in Dongsha Islands**

The Marine National Parks Headquarters (MNPH) and the Dongsha Coast Guard Command found a green sea turtle to have laid eggs at midnight of Sep 23<sup>rd</sup>. Measurements indicate the dorsal carapace length of this green sea turtle to reach 105 cm. It is estimated to weigh over 100 kilograms, and considered to be fairly large and strong. It departed back into the ocean after laying the eggs.

Dongsha Island is located at the northern end of the South China Sea, and holds wide stretches of undisturbed beaches. The seas

surrounding the Dongsha Atolls include large areas of sea grass beds and coral reefs, which can provide food and shelter to sea turtles. This great environmental condition made Dongsha the best location for sea turtles to lay eggs.

For decades, however, there were very few sightings of sea turtles laying eggs on the beaches of Dongsha, largely due to the illegal fishing by foreign-owned fishing boats and heavy poaching. The only record was in 2003, where the Dongsha Command saw a female turtle land on the beach to lay eggs, and another incident where the crawling mark left by the sea turtle’s landing was discovered.

Green sea turtle is a large size sea turtle, which is distributed widely among the temperate to tropical zones of the great oceans in the world. In Taiwan, due to the heavy threat to its survival, it is listed among the endangered wildlife species. Egg laying records are only known in Penghu, Lanyu, and Little Liuchiu islands. On the coasts of the Main island in Taiwan, there has been very few records of landing to lay eggs.

Since the Dongsha Atoll National Park was established, the MNPH cooperated closely with the Dongsha Command. In addition to forcefully expelling fishing vessels that cross the boundary, the land environment in Dongsha Island is also heavily protected. This egg laying visit by the green sea turtle is extremely precious. As a single

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green sea turtle may lay one to seven litters of eggs in the same egg-laying seasons, there is an opportunity for this sea turtle to lay further eggs on the shores of Dongsha. Surveillance and protection for the egg laying ground and the female turtle will be continued.

Conservation workers in the Dongsha management station of the MNPH also found *Egretta eulophotes*, or the Chinese Egret, , which is considered as vulnerable by IUCN, in the lagoons of the Dongsha Islands during the bird survey conducted between July and September.

According to MNPH, previous studies and the internal research surveys from MNPH this year show that Chinese egrets appear in the lagoon area of Dongsha Islands between April and September every year. They are considered migratory birds, which usually stays in mixed habitation with other birds of the Ardeidae family and rarely appears alone.

Chinese egrets are also called yellow-beak egrets. They were originally fairly numerous and widely distributed over east Asia, including Korea, coastal China, Taiwan, Philippines, and Indonesia. In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the demand for bird feathers for raincoats increased, the Chinese egrets were hunted en masse, which led to a drastic decline in population. Currently, only coastal China, South and North Korea, and some small islands or Russia show breeding

records.

Documents show that only 2600~3400 individuals are estimated to exist in year 2000, which is still reducing. The reduction rate for the past ten years reached 10%~19%. This shows the Chinese egret to be under grave danger of survival. In Taiwan, although Chinese egrets are recorded during their migration every year, they are few in numbers. This put them in the list of protected rare wildlife, and under the protection of Wildlife Conservation Act.

The Dongsha Management station started conducting internal bird surveys since March, 2011. During this period, the monitoring and surveys from the conservation workers recorded four new bird species, namely *Elanus caeruleus*, *Acridotheres cristatellus*, *Pericrocotus cantonensis*, and *Pericrocotus cantonensis*. This increased the recorded bird appearances in the Dongsha Atoll National Park to 240 bird species.



## The “Green Oscar” film festival from UK moves to Taiwan

The Wildscreen film festival from UK, known as the “Green Oscar”, came to Taiwan for the first time. In this film festival, 21 movies were shown, which includes most of the issues on natural environments and were produced with

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new technology. The opening movie “The Legend of Pale Male” described the interaction between human and raptor. This movie stands in an interesting parallel with the film “Bee Hawks of Jiu Jiu Mountain”, a production of Taiwan Forestry Bureau and recipient of the best animal behavior award in the wildlife movie festival in Japan this year.

This special event, named “WildView Taiwan Film Festival 2011”, is held by the WildView Taiwan Nature Communications Society with the support of the Forestry Bureau. The content of the event included the film festival, conferences and workshops.

The film that caught the most attention was the low budget film “GREEN” by French director and cinematographer Patrick Rouxel. This film won the WWF Golden Panda Award in Wildscreen 2010 and the Environment Award from the Museum of Natural History in UK. It depicts the final journeys of life of a female orangutan named “Green”. The film showed the cold blooded destruction of precious rainforest to build oil palm plantation by mankind, which caused devastating impact to the rain forest and made Green a victim of logging and resource extraction.

The Wildscreen Film Festival has been held

biannually since 1982, and is the most renowned wildlife and environmental film festival.



## **ID cards are now required for pet birds**

In July, the Forest Bureau consulted zoologists and ornithologists on the management of artificially hatched second-generation parrots. The decision is that effective immediately, parrot owners in Taiwan should start to apply to the certified shops for the leg bands on their birds and the identity cards. The leg bands and the identification cards are like the personal ID of the bird. Such identifications are meant to protect the bird and the owner. If parrot owners are found to hold no ID for their birds during inspections, they will be fined according to Article 40 of the Wildlife Conservation Act.

According to Mr. Kuo, Chairman for the Council for Promotion of Wanhua Bird street Special area, in the past only one legal permit was given by official for the birds imported by traders. Without leg bands, there was no way to tell if the birds inspected in the shops had been legally imported. In addition, for the imported birds with identifications, their naturally bred second-generation offspring cannot get proof of identities as they did not arrive via import. These

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locally bred second-generation birds are then considered as smuggled, which gave the caring owners of such birds an undeserved blackened name.

The bird sellers all over Taiwan brainstormed for a way to legitimize the second generation birds produced from artificial breeding. They met for multiple times with the officials in Forestry Bureau who works on wildlife conservation, coordinates the industry, the government, and the academia. Finally, at the start of July, concrete measure was defined: effective immediately, all parrot owners should ask for identification to certified shops, and have their pet birds banded, and recorded with an identification card.

According to Clause 1 of Article 35 in the Wildlife Conservation Act, endangered species and their products cannot be sold, exhibited, or displayed in public without getting approval from the competent authorities. Parrot owners not holding proper bird identifications will be punished by six months to 5 years in jail and potentially also fined for 300,000 to 1.5 million NTD, according to Article 40 of the Wildlife Conservation Act.

Kuo called for immediate action on allowing second-generation birds to hold their own Identifications. Once the birds are covered

with proof of identity and became “legal citizens”, no more issues shall result from the lack of legal basis. This allows bird lovers to no longer need to hide in the dark. To improve efficiency in certification, the Forestry Bureau will also hold tests on the certified shops. Only bird sellers willing to provide certification services who have passed the tests are allowed to implement certification. Bird sellers are encouraged to take the test.



## Calling on the people to help build biological databases

In light of the swift pace of loss of biodiversity, the speed of survey cannot match the speed of disappearance for species. The Endemic Species Research Institute (ESRI) of the Council of Agriculture encouraged citizens to upload butterfly photos taken around the country. Over ten thousand records were gathered in just 3 months, with more than 260 species, approaching the total results from survey efforts in the past 11 years by the government. The Council of Agriculture will also push for information gathering on other species.

In the past, biological information were mostly kept by specimens. With the advent of

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digital technology, photography is now capable of keeping information, and can be used to build databases. The ESRI chose butterfly as the prime target due to its abundance of information.

From June to September in 2010, 9,870 photos were taken by citizens in just 3 short months, recording 258 species. According to Tang, Hsiaoyu, Director of ESRI, this record approaches the 20,968 records collected by the government in the last 11 years with 269 species. This result is surprising and commendable. Tang said: "This is a very important part for the ecological survey in Taiwan, as it is really too slow for researcher or us to take step by step inventory. This platform is also extremely important for future ecological analysis and influence on wildlife by climate change. The more complete and abundant the data, the easier to approach the issues by research."

This astonishing success prompted the ESRI to continue with other species, such as data gathering of frogs, fireflies, and plants. Establishing the database gives research a tremendous boost. The information will also be put online for learning purposes by the general public.



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