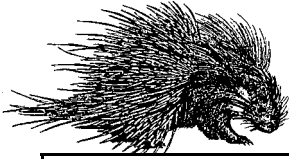


Porcupine!



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Editorial

Once again, many articles in this issue of *Porcupine!* reflect, in one way or another, concerns over losses in biodiversity and explore solutions to the various problems. Conserving biodiversity (a piece of the planet as David so aptly puts it) in the face of mounting human pressures requires teamwork. The biologists who understand the systems need the funders and administrative support to carry out their work. We need the appropriate legal framework and enforcement capacity to implement protective action. Public support for natural resource management and conservation is essential, as are the roles of the media and NGOs in raising public awareness and understanding of the importance of, and need for, protecting biodiversity. Political support is also needed, and, sadly, it is here that there is often little joy in Hong Kong. As a major importer of an enormous range of flora and fauna, a significant proportion of them potentially (if trade is not regulated) or actually threatened, government support for local and international conservation initiatives is critically important. Yet, for several recent CITES Appendix II proposals of species for which Hong Kong is a (if not the) major importer, and about which there is clear evidence of declines due to international trade (seahorses and humphead wrasse are examples - see p. 16), there was no government support. Appendix II listings do not prevent trade but ensure that whatever trade there is comes from sustainable practices and sources. As a major beneficiary of natural resources, there is no good reason not to take some responsibility and support such initiatives. Clearly there is a weak player; the challenge is how to strengthen the team.

Yvonne Sadovy

News from DEB

The duty of writing these columns seems to come around with increasing frequency. Is it because *Porcupine!* is being published more often? I think not. More likely, it is one of the bi-products of age: the feeling that life seems to be speeding up relative to childhood when time (especially schooldays) seemed to drag. So what has happened since the last *Porc!* Can I get away with saying that there is no new news? (Knew news? Or Gnu news?) Perhaps I can get away with some old news. Or, at any rate, same old news. To be specific, I am still Head of DEB, and have just been re-appointed for another three years with effect from January 1, 2003. Why am I doing it? I began my career as an ecologist with an interest in field research, and some vague sense that I should be communicating my fascination about what I was finding out to others. Why is it that I now find myself primarily an administrator and manager (both tasks for which I have received no prior training), essentially desk bound, and teaching about none of the things that I spent almost 15 years studying in the field? Clearly, I must be barmy, or bonkers, or both. There may be some truth in that, but it is also a fact that no one else wanted the job. Well, why would they? It is no fun. But that doesn't mean that it isn't worth doing. What makes it worthwhile is the fact that it is important. I write this not as a result of some megalomaniacal urge to convince you of my significance. (After all, if you have read this far) The real reason is that DEB has an important role to play in Hong Kong. What is it, exactly that we do? First, we teach students, at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Second, we carry out research on the plants animal and squidgy things (i.e. fungi *et al.*) in Hong Kong and the region. Thirdly, we try to apply what we have learned (and what we teach) in the local and regional context so as to make a contribution to the conservation and management of biodiversity. That application can occur in a number of ways. It may mean sitting on government advisory committees. It may mean assisting NGOs. It may even mean sitting for hours and hours on a jet plane on the way to an international meeting that consists of acrimonious and lengthy debates about whether one species or another not only deserves but actually gets legal protection. (I am referring here to Yvonne Sadovy's recent experiences at the CITES meeting in Chile, p.16.)

In short, work of DEB is about making a difference. It is neither hubris nor exaggeration to say it is about saving the planet – or at least bits of it. We try to change how people see the natural world and, by so doing, alter the way that they treat it. My job as Head is to ensure the smooth running of DEB so that Billy and Richard, Kenny and Benny, Yvonne and Kevin and all the others can do what they do best, without having the hassle of wondering if there will be a research budget for next year, or even if there will be any headed notepaper in the stationary drawer. Someone *has* to do it. Prosaic: yes. Fun: no. But it matters.

David Dudgeon