

“In The News”

by Jacqueline Weir, Gloria Chau and Sukh Mantel

Reuters News Service stories can be accessed at www.planetark.org. China and International News can be accessed on the web version of *Porcupine!* Please note the omission of Jacqueline Weir’s name as co-author of ‘In the News’ in *Porcupine!* 26.

Wind power plants may appear in Hong Kong in the future. The Hong Kong Observatory has identified six sites where wind speed would be suitable for generating electricity. These include Cheung Chau and Tai Mo Shan. A report by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department on the potential of renewable energy in Hong Kong will be made public within this year. **(Oriental Daily 9.9.02)**

The landfill area in Junk Bay is proposed as a site for a new park for leisure and educational purposes. The main theme would be ‘love animals, study plants’. Kwun Tong district office has agreed in principal to the proposal. **(Oriental Daily 9.9.02)**

Environmentalists from Green Power are calling for tighter controls on development after a controversial golf course built on breeding grounds of an endemic fish has never been used. The golf course in Sham Chung near Sai Kung Country Park was developed by Sun Hung Kai Properties. Over 200 endemic black paradise fish, *Macropodus hongkongensis*, had to be rescued from the site. **(SCMP 15.9.02; see *Porcupine!* 19: 1, 28-30 for articles on Sham Chung being destroyed)**

CLP Power and Hong Kong Electric are being urged by the Secretary for Environment, Transport and Works to join Mainland China in its emerging ‘emissions trading’ market. Emissions trading treats pollution as a commodity to be bought and sold by companies. Strict limits are imposed on pollutant levels, and emission reductions are given monetary value. Credits are given to a company that achieves reductions, and these can be traded with companies that do not meet the targets. This may help to reduce overall pollution, but has been criticised for allowing rich companies to pollute. Barriers to Hong Kong’s participation may include differences from the mainland markets and in environmental standards, as well as different approaches to enforcement. **(SCMP 30.9.02)**

The Singapore based environmental group Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is to follow up its previous shock tactics against consumption of shark fins. Post cards were recently distributed in various countries including Hong Kong, depicting a wedding party spattered in blood from butchered sharks. The new post cards, as well as posters in public areas,

will focus on the high mercury levels found recently in people who had consumed shark fin. **(Reuters News Service 11.10.02)**

China proposed regulating trade in endangered animals protected under CITES. Out of the 54 proposals for banning or regulating trade at the CITES meeting in Santiago, Chile (see p.16), eleven were proposed by China for regulating trade in turtles. This is encouraging news since China is the largest importer and consumer of turtles. In 2001, Hong Kong imported approximately 8.69 million kg of live turtles (mostly from Malaysia and Indonesia), which is approximately 18 times greater than in 1992. A spokesperson for AFCD refused to comment on the HK government’s position on the proposals. According to Dr. Michael Lau of KFBG, depletion of mainland stocks of turtles was leading to turtle supplies increasingly coming from Southeast Asia and this was leading to lowered number of turtles in these areas. Another species discussed at the CITES meeting was the humphead wrasse whose population has decreased by approximately 20% in the past decade (proposal from the United States). Unfortunately, Hong Kong, China, the major importer of this species, did not support the proposal. **(SCMP 3.11.02; see CITES CoP12 story under ‘International News’)**

Illegal ivory sales and smuggling have increased dramatically, with Hong Kong implicated as playing a major role. A 6.2 tonne haul of illegal African ivory was seized in Singapore in June, with links to a Hong Kong-registered company. A recent report by the Environmental Investigation Agency blames a Hong Kong based network of ivory dealers for numerous shipments since the 1990s. Demand for ivory in China is high, with Guangzhou a centre of illicit trade there. Following recent approval by CITES for a one-off sale of southern African ivory stock-piles, China is to carry out a nation-wide audit of its existing ivory stocks to help crack down on illegal trade. Increasing demand in the region has been blamed partly on a one-off legal sale to Japan in 1997. **(Reuters News Service 7.10.02; SCMP 10.11.02, 17.11.02)**

An endangered Green Turtle has been satellite tracked migrating from its breeding ground in Sham Wan, Lamma Island, to feeding grounds off Hainan. Sham Wan is the only remaining turtle breeding ground in Hong Kong, and is protected by law. AFCD also helped mainland counterparts track three green turtles last year, from Gangkou National Nature Reserve, Guangdong, to Hainan Island and Okinawa, Japan. **(SCMP 10.11.02)**

An attempt to smuggle around 600 live cobras through Hong Kong to Mainland China ended in the death of one smuggler. The endangered snakes were being transported from South East Asia to the mainland for consumption. During a marine police chase cobras were thrown at police. The police vessel and the smuggler’s boat collided and one smuggler died from internal bleeding. **(Reuters News Service 18.11.02)**

Ma On Shan district office is thinking of making deer the symbol for their district. At least ten deer can be observed there at night, close to the iron quarry. They are also looking into the possibility of captive breeding the deer. (**Oriental Daily 29.11.02**)

A study by the AFCD has documented rich animal and plant diversity in Tai Tam Country Park, including barking deer, wild boar and Chinese leopard cat. Twenty percent of the 540 man-made 'bird holes' there are now occupied by birds, and AFCD is planning larger ones for owls. (**Apple Daily 1.12.02**)

South African abalone is being massively poached by gangs controlled by Hong Kong triads. Once plentiful along the coast near Cape Town, abalone is now on the brink of extinction. Coastal areas where the shellfish is found have been taken over by poachers who intimidate locals and tourists. The illicit money this has brought is fuelling drugs trade and crime there. Triads branched into abalone smuggling due to lower competition, having previously smuggled poached shark fins. (**SCMP 1.12.02**)

PUBLICATION REVIEW

Hong Kong Biodiversity: better than Porcupine!?

by Richard T. Corlett

For more than 20 years, conservation and Country Parks in Hong Kong were the responsibility of a government department, the Agriculture and Fisheries Department, which considered these activities of too little significance to feature in its name. Agriculture and fisheries currently employ, respectively, 0.16% and 0.35% of Hong Kong's population, so the addition of Conservation to the name in year 2000, in recognition of the department's major function, was inevitable. Now the conservation tail wags the AFCD dog, and not only in the name. Over the last few years, there has been an explosion of new activity in both the Country and Marine Parks Branch, which manages the protected area system, and the Conservation Branch, which is responsible for conservation elsewhere in Hong Kong. There have been variety of conservation initiatives, a lively new website, and a lot of new publications, some of which have been reviewed in previous issues of *Porcupine!*

It is therefore with great pleasure that we welcome a new addition to the AFCD's growing publication list – and a potential rival to *Porcupine!* - *Hong Kong Biodiversity*. *Hong*

Kong Biodiversity is targeted principally at AFCD staff involved in the department's ongoing Biodiversity Survey, but it deserves a far wider circulation among Hong Kong's conservation community. So far, there is only a single, 16-page publication, consisting of the first three issues combined together. With its glossy paper and colour pictures, it looks, I must admit, more attractive than our environmentally friendly *Porcupine!*, but it has basically the same mix of contents: long articles (auto-trigger cameras, the history of Country Parks, an egret survey) and short items reporting new species records (two butterflies, *Acraea issoria* and *Chilasa agestor restricta*, and a bird, the Red-throated Diver), interesting sightings (Greater Painted Snipe breeding in an artificially created wetland), or survey results (fish in Country Parks). Rather surprisingly, most of the text is in English, with only summaries in Chinese. The contents reveal a knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, Hong Kong's native biodiversity that would have been unthinkable a few years ago, when such trivial things as wild species were left to amateurs and academics, while the department got on with its real job of collecting litter, fighting fires and planting exotic trees.

How can you get hold of a copy? At present, there appear to be no plans for *Hong Kong Biodiversity* to be circulated widely outside the AFCD, so I don't think I should reveal the Editor's name or email address in case he is swamped with requests from *Porcupine!*'s vast (?) readership. If you really need a copy, ask a friend in AFCD to smuggle one out. I hope that they will at least put future issues on their website. Hong Kong is big enough for both of us (and we are still the only local conservation publication with an exclamation mark in the name).

AFCD (2002). *Hong Kong Biodiversity: Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department Newsletter, Issues No. 1-3*. Hong Kong.

