



Porcupine!

Newsletter of the Department of Ecology & Biodiversity, The University of Hong Kong

How protected are marine protected areas?

Editorial

Among the many contributions made by John Hodgkiss to the local community over the last few decades has been his 17 years as Editor of the *Memoirs of the Hong Kong Natural History Society*. For the last 11 of those years, the *Memoirs* and *Porcupine!* have played complimentary roles in promoting interest in and understanding of the ecology and biodiversity of Hong Kong. While *Porcupine!* has published the news - new species, new sightings, new ideas, new threats, new people, new publications - the *Memoirs* has had a basically archival role, publishing mostly checklists and the results of local surveys and ecological studies. With John's retirement, I will be taking over from John as Editor and the Department will be assuming responsibility for publishing the journal. The details still need to be worked out, but the plan is to rename it or, rather, to revive an old name - *The Hong Kong Naturalist* - while retaining links to the Society. We also intend to launch an electronic version and to strengthen the sister (aunt?) relationship with *Porcupine!* Overall, however, the role will remain the same as it has always been: the publication of significant information on local natural history that would otherwise remain unpublished.

Richard Corlett

Marine protected areas (MPAs) are widely considered to be a means of conserving vulnerable marine species or habitats, and are increasingly proposed as fisheries management tools, globally. In Hong Kong, we already have a marine reserve, several marine parks and the government is also considering 'fishery protection areas': all very different categories of MPAs that address very different objectives. So, what exactly is an MPA, what is its role in marine conservation and fisheries management and how much marine protection is there in Hong Kong through MPAs?

Ask family or friends what they understand by a 'marine protected area' and they are likely to respond that, if they think about it at all, they would imagine it to be a place where things cannot be removed; secondarily respondents might add that damaging input (like pollution) should also be avoided. IUCN defines a protected area (terrestrial or aquatic) as "An area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means". Six categories of MPAs are identified by IUCN, ranging in degree of protection from no utilization (Category I), to protected areas dedicated to the sustainable management of natural resources (Category VI). Categories I-V involve 'elimination and prevention of exploitation contrary to the purposes of the category designation', while Category VI is to promote sound management practices for sustainable fisheries production.

In Hong Kong we have one true MPA, the marvellous Marine Reserve at Cape d'Aguilar, where 180 fishes have now been recorded (p. 6) and no activities are allowed without a permit. Fishery Protected areas have been proposed (Category VI) for Port Shelter. So what about the 4 Marine Parks? These don't appear to fit any of the IUCN categories because significant fishing activity, except for trawling, continues within them. In 2002 there were 634 fishing licences, up from 551 in 1998, allowing for removal of fish and invertebrates and smothering corals with gill nets. The total area of the Marine Parks is around 1% of Hong Kong's marine environment which falls far short of the 20%, or more, recommended for MPA coverage if they are to contribute meaningfully to fisheries management and conservation; this should, in any case, be non-extractive use. By way of contrast, 40% of Hong Kong is designated as Country Park where no hunting is allowed. Our Marine Parks, it seems, do not even begin to fulfill any of their conservation, education or sustainable fishery production roles, leading one to wonder what exactly is being protected, and indeed, from what.

Yvonne Sadovy