

“In the News”

by Jacqueline Weir 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!*

Customs officers at the airport confiscated three stuffed crocodiles, each 1.2 m long, from a passenger from Thailand. Eight crocodiles were confiscated last year at the airport. (SCMP, 23.1.03)

Plans to make a “green” public estate at Shui Chuen O (Sha Tin) were dropped by the Housing Authority due to claims of high cost and because the government’s Home Ownership Scheme has now been scrapped. Seventy million dollars has already been spent on the project. (SCMP, 25.1.03)

At the end of January, Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food Yeoh Eng-kiong stated that chicken was safe to eat and the better hygiene at chicken farms meant it was unlikely that there would be an outbreak of chicken flu. However, in the first week of February, 8300 chickens were killed after testing positive for H5 avian influenza virus, although it was not confirmed that it was of the H5N1 strain. (SCMP, 25.1.03, Reuters, 3.2.03)

A consultancy firm has recommended to the government that 68,000 light trucks should not be converted to liquified petroleum gas because of lack of LPG storage and re-fuelling facilities. Legislators criticized the government for dropping its policy on cleaner fuel. Thomas Chow Tat-ming, deputy permanent secretary for Environment, Transport and Works, said this was not true and that cleaner fuel policy will be promoted whenever possible. (SCMP, 7.2.03)

A government study has proposed that only 1% of Hong Kong’s energy be renewably generated (including through waste incineration) by 2012. The reasons listed for such a low target include constraints of conventional power prices, operation regulations for power companies and accessibility to the electricity grid. Greenpeace is concerned about considering incineration as renewable, since it may be harmful through release of toxic gases and chemicals. (SCMP, 7.2.03)

Kadoorie Farm has launched a campaign to save Asian turtles from extinction. Of the 90 Asian species 46 are endangered, critically endangered or extinct, and 21 are vulnerable at present. The demand for turtle products is increasing due to rising economic status of people in China and other Asian countries. Although Hong Kong is primarily a transit place for illegal turtle trade, local turtlesoup and pet shops might have turtles that are not farm raised and therefore consumers are recommended to confirm the origin of the turtles from the vendors. Last year 10,000 wild turtles on the way to mainland

China were confiscated by Customs and rescued by Kadoorie Farm. (SCMP, 22.1.03)

A \$44.2 million pipeline is being built through Plover Cove Country Park by the Water Supplies Department to supply water to only 300 people in Wu Kau Tang, Ai Chi Wo and the islands of Kat O Chau and Ap Chau. Trenches that are being dug in Wu Kau Tang are near a wooded stream where migratory birds nest. A Water Supplies Department spokesman said that EPD and the Country and Marine Parks Authority had been consulted, however Financial Secretary, Town Planning Board, AFCD, Lands Department and Planning Department did not reply to inquiries. (SCMP, 10.1.03)

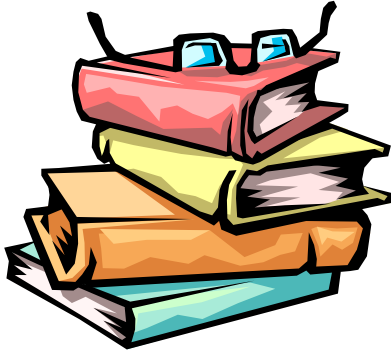
Hong Kong is planning to set up desalination plants and recycle water in order to supplement the supply of 810 million m³ of Dongjiang water from Guangdong. The demand for fresh water this year is expected to be 910 million m³. Two small desalination plants at the cost of \$5 million will be set up in Tuen Mun and Sai Kung by the Water Supplies Department and recycling of water will initially be started on Lantau Island by 2005, however these are not expected to replace water coming from Dongjiang in the future. The cost of desalinating water is approximately \$7-8 per m³ in comparison to \$3.08 for Dongjiang water. (SCMP, 3.2.03)

A Siberian Tiger on the cruise ship SuperStar Leo has been the center of attention by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) for the animal’s poor living conditions. Alex Yau of WWF said that there might only be 437-506 Siberian tigers in the wild. One of these wild tigers was photographed for the first time in northeastern China at the Hunchun nature reserve in Jilin province by a “camera trap” placed by the Wildlife Conservation Society. Most of the tigers in this area have been poached for Chinese medicine to cure everything from rheumatism to improving sexual performance. (SCMP, 30.1.03, 8.2.03)

Stonecutters Island sewage treatment plant has resulted in increased *E. coli* counts instead of decreasing bacteria levels in western Victoria Harbour, during the past 14 months of its operation. The plant is discharging partially-treated sewage into the sea until other stages of the Harbour Area Treatment Scheme are operational. Sewage treatment reduces *E. coli* levels by half, however the large volume of the sewage has led to increased bacterial levels. As a result four Tsuen Wan area beaches have been closed for the summer bathing season. (SCMP, 4.3.03)

This year 30 attacks on people were made by wild Rhesus Macaques in Sha Tin, in comparison to only five in the same period last year. The monkey colonies in Tai Wai have spread to Mei Foo and possibly further. The district councillors believe the policy of banning people to feed the monkeys is resulting in them being hungrier and more aggressive towards people. The AFCD is responding by increasing its sterilization program to control the primate population. (SCMP, 7.3.03)

Jill Robinson, founder of Animals Asia Foundation, recently took food to four endangered brown bears in Yulin Zoo in Guangxi province, after reading a *Los Angeles Times* story about the starving bears. The private zoo was supposed to receive a subsidy from the local government for zoo maintenance, which didn't come through. There are 200 private animal parks in China which are proliferating since keeping wild animals is considered prestigious and the situation is made worse by the fact that legislation on preventing cruelty to animals, including endangered species, is lacking. (SCMP, 11.2.03)



BOOK REVIEW

Restoring China's Natural Vegetation

by Xie, Yan, 58 pages. China Forestry Publishing House, Beijing, 2002.

The main aim of this small colourful book is obvious – to raise the public's awareness on the importance of natural vegetation in China. The book was supported mainly by the ex-Biodiversity Working Group of the China Council on International Cooperation on Environment and Development and the State Environmental Protection Administration of China. In addition, it was also supported by several international NGOs and the Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden in Hong Kong.

The book has three main sections. The first part is a brief account of the vegetation cover in China and the function of natural forests in soil and water protection. It has an interesting table listing the current and potential economic values of various services and products provided by natural vegetation in China.

The next part points out the main problem of forest restoration in China in the past, i.e. monoculture. Of the 16.55 % forest cover in China now, more than 6.55 % is forest plantation, mostly in monoculture. Referred to as "green desert" in this book, monoculture plantation is reported to be weak in soil and water protection, poor in nutrient recycling and

enrichment, low in biodiversity and susceptible to pest attack. It then discusses 7 main flaws in vegetation restoration. The most important of these are the overwhelming use of introduced species such as *Eucalyptus* spp. and the ignorance of "diversity" in restoration projects. Traditionally, coverage is the only criterion used to measure the success of reforestation projects, which is somewhat misleading. This section puts forward several other criteria. Firstly, the soil and water protection capability should be determined by measuring the changes in stream flow in dry and wet seasons and the sediment level in watercourses. Secondly, the changes in biodiversity, especially species richness, should be monitored. The third criterion is to monitor the changes in ecosystem function such as nutrient flow and productivity. The last section of the book introduces various principles and techniques for restoring native forests in China.

Although the title of this book implies that it is about vegetation in China, it focuses mainly on forests. It is the first book I have come across in China that has so explicitly highlighted the importance of native species and diversity in forest restoration. This book is inadequate as a resource book for foresters and students, but would be a good book to change people's perception about tree planting and reforestation. Hong Kong has also made some of the reforestation mistakes stated in this book, so it is worthwhile to have it published in Hong Kong. Currently, it is only available in simplified Chinese in China. For those who are interested, I have a few spare copies with me. First come, first served!

Billy Hau

Artificial Reefs and Reef Fish in Hong Kong

by K.D.P. Wilson, 176 pages. Friends of the Country Parks, A.F.C.D. and Cosmos Books

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department has placed an increasing emphasis on producing education materials in the past couple of years and this is the latest in the Marine Conservation Series. An attractive little full-colour hardback, it is well priced at \$60 and achieves its aims of providing a brief account of the use of Artificial Reefs (ARs) in Hong Kong, and of the fishes inhabiting them. Pages are well laid out and care has gone into making the bilingual text far less obtrusive than is often the case. The first third of the book will be invaluable to anybody interested in AR deployment in Hong Kong with detailed timelines, maps and descriptions of the various types of ARs, including numerous colour photographs. Consultancy studies and relevant scientific literature are also listed.

The latter two thirds of the book are devoted to a guide of some 200 species of fish found around local ARs (including the High Island Dam dollos), with notes on seasonality, abundance, reproduction etc. Keith has put considerable effort into obtaining colour pictures of most species *in situ*,