

Feedback

Dear *Feedback*,

I would like to comment on the article “Fried water beetles” by Yvonne Sadovy in the recent issue of *Porcupine!* (issue 30) p.8. Yvonne reported on an article that discussed *Cybister* water beetles consumed in Guangdong. The article, from a book by Bodenheimer (1951), noted that the water beetles were hatched in special nursery because they were rare in the province due to insufficient habitats. However, I found Bodenheimer’s rationale to be weak since these beetles live in paddy fields, pools, reservoirs and streams (Hill *et al.*, 1982; Lin, 1991) and there are still plenty of suitable habitats left in Guangdong. *Cybister* water beetles used to be abundant in Hong Kong and were captured and sold as food (Hill *et al.*, 1982). This practice seemed to have stopped locally around 1970’s but even in the early 1990’s, whenever I walked under the Bonham Road flyover in autumn mornings, I could find several individuals under each street lamp. Even in fairly urbanised Hong Kong back then, this species was not rare. Raising wild animals for food has gained a lot of popularity in mainland China and many handbooks (ranging from raising scorpions to turtles) are now for sale in bookshops. However, none of the ones I have seen mention raising *Cybister* beetles, further suggesting that this is not being carried out.

Bibliography

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Lin, L. (1991). *Guangxi Medicinal Animals*. Guangxi Scientific & Technological Press, Nanning (in Chinese).

Michael Lau

All at sea-Introducing Cynthia Yau

by Cynthia Yau

I have a fascination for just about anything that lives in the sea. I also tend to be happiest when I am out at sea. I was born in Hong Kong but then I moved to Britain, when I was very young, where I grew up among the lush, green countryside of rural Shropshire. I developed a keen interest in nature from an early age and used to keep tadpoles and caterpillars in my bedroom just to watch them metamorphose, much to the consternation of my long suffering mum. But it was always the sea I loved the best and even as a teenager I was telling everyone I wanted to be a marine biologist. My parents owned a restaurant and take away business and, like most second-generation immigrants, I studied hard at school so I would not have to follow in their footsteps. Instead, I chose to take a joint Honours B.Sc. in Zoology and Oceanography at the University College of Swansea, Wales.

After graduating, I felt I still did not know enough to go out into the big, wide world looking for a job. Besides, I wanted to continue in education and learn more about my field, so I applied for a Ph.D. studentship at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland for a project on the ecology of cephalopods, i.e. squid, cuttlefishes and octopuses. My supervisor, Professor Peter Boyle, had already taken on another student for a different project but I was lucky enough that he changed his mind and accepted me as his second Ph.D. student that year. At that time, squid species were rapidly becoming a more important and valuable component of capture fisheries as traditional finfish stocks were declining around the coast of Scotland, so my project was to gain a better understanding of the early life stages of cephalopods from an ecological, as well as a fishery management, perspective. My study involved a great deal of boat work in inshore waters and offshore research cruises with the Scottish Office for Agriculture and Fisheries. One memorable trip was in a force 12 gale where I was convinced the ship was going to sink and I was going to die. “*Character building*” - as my supervisor used to describe it!

I learned a great deal during my Ph.D., including some surprising new skills ranging from building plankton nets to resuscitating sharks! One of my proudest moments was the day my supervisor, a student helper and I rescued a beached basking shark. We were conducting fieldwork on the West Coast of Scotland when a fisherman told us about a shark that had been caught in some salmon gill nets and was exposed by the low tide. We managed to drag the 3-metre long, juvenile basking shark back into the water between the three of us, then proceeded to swim it around in circles to force water through its gills (fish biology lectures do come in useful). After over an hour of this treatment the shark eventually revived, gave a few sweeps of its tail, then swam off into deeper waters on its own. To this day, I have way too much respect for these animals to eat shark fin soup!

I knew a lot of the theory behind fisheries science and fisheries management, in which I had become increasingly more interested during the course of my postgraduate studies, but I wanted to know how fisheries management actually worked in practice. So, after my *viva* and a summer stint as a volunteer crew for a whale-watching company in Scotland (it was my idea of a holiday anyway), I applied to the Falkland Islands Fisheries Department for a job because they reputedly have one of the best managed fisheries in the world. My role as a Scientific Observer mainly involved collecting biological information, working and living on board foreign fishing vessels for 3-6 week periods at a time. Much of the island’s revenue is derived from the sale of fishing licenses, so Falkland Islands Government invests heavily in fisheries management to ensure the stocks are sustainable. The work itself was mentally, as well as physically, quite demanding because often I was on a ship where most of the crew spoke no English and I don’t speak any Korean, or Japanese, or Polish. After a year I was promoted to the post of Observer Co-ordinator, where I was in charge of sending other Observers out to sea and collating the fisheries data from them.

Most people’s impression of the Falklands is from images of the conflict with Argentina in 1982 showing a cold, bleak land with more sheep than people. I loved living there! What I