



Porcupine!

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

Hong Kong Nature Conservation Trust!

The New Nature Conservation Policy of Hong Kong¹ was released in November 2004. The main aim of this new policy is to enhance the protection of private lands with high conservation value, and 12 sites were identified as priority sites. Two new schemes were proposed to enhance conservation on these sites which are a Management Agreement and a Public-Private Partnership (PPP).

Under the pilot Management Agreement scheme, NGOs can apply for funding from the Environment and Conservation Fund (HK\$ 5 million have been set aside for this scheme) to engage land owners of these 12 sites to manage the lands for nature conservation. Two projects at Long Valley and one at Fung Yuen were approved in December 2005 amounting to over 4.5 million dollars. Whilst the benefit of these habitat management work to biodiversity are yet to be assessed, local landowners and farmers are willing to participate in these projects by renting lands and premises to the NGOs, or work for the NGOs to manage the lands. These have shown that local communities are more open-minded to conservation than previous perceptions. However, funding for all 3 projects will finish by the end of 2007. There is no indication as to what will happen after these 3 pilot projects are completed.



Fig. 1. Important ecological sites on private lands in Hong Kong are usually small and fragmented, such as Long Valley in the foreground of this picture. Active management is needed to maintain their ecological values and a conservation trust is believed to be beneficial for such purpose.



Fig. 2. The graduation ceremony of the Long Valley local guide training by the Conservancy Association was held in February 2006 at the Ancestral Hall of Ho Sheung Heung. All 20 guides trained came from the local communities. This shows that local communities in the New Territories do support conservation initiatives.

For PPP, developments at appropriate scales may be allowed in the least sensitive parts of the 12 sites, or their surroundings, provided that the developers undertake long-term management of the rest of the sites for nature conservation. All PPP projects should generate net benefits to nature conservation, and land exchange under PPP will be considered by the government. At least 6 PPP projects, all on different sites, were submitted to the government in May 2005. To date, none of these projects has been approved. A recent news article on a local newspaper, Ming Pao, pointed out that the delay in the decision on these PPP projects was primarily due to worries amongst lands-related departments and the bureau. It was said that they did not want to set a precedent for land exchange, or plot ratio increment/transfer, for conservation causes. This is because, unlike many overseas administrations such as the UK, conservation is not considered a "public purpose" in the bureaucratic system in Hong Kong.

WWF Hong Kong has been proposing a conservation trust for Hong Kong since the early 1990s to enable better and more coordinated management in the long term of small and scattered biodiversity hotspots. When the new policy was announced in 2004, the government also indicated that the practicality of establishing a nature conservation trust would be investigated. The major advantage of a conservation trust is that long-term conservation management on these different sites under a Management Agreement or a PPP could be centralized for more effective and efficient implementation.

Recently, Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden (KFBG) has studied the National Trust and the National Trust for Scotland in the UK and produced an excellent report on the function and the legal, structural and operational requirements of a conservation trust for Hong Kong. KFBG also organized a workshop on this in March 2006, involving different stakeholders. Meanwhile, the New Territories Heung Yee Kuk (HYK), the official body representing the rural residents, especially the indigenous people of Hong Kong, also wants a conservation trust. The Vice-chairman of HYK, Hon. Cheung Hok Ming, tabled a motion in the Legislative Council on 15 June 2005 concerning the conservation policy. In his motion debate, he urged the government to set up a conservation trust for Hong Kong. In August 2006, in the HYK's submission to the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR concerning the 2006/07 Policy Address, the same request was made.

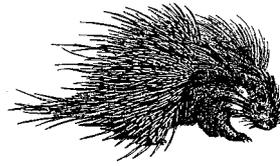
Environmental NGOs and the HYK used to stand on the opposite sides in previous conservation battles in Hong Kong, in fights between biodiversity conservation and land owners' rights for development. Despite differences in opinion on the structure, function and operation of the conservation trust between the two sides, it has been agreed that the first step is to get the government to agree to the establishment of a trust, other issues to be sorted out later. At the time of writing, the two sides are trying to come up with a joint statement to push the government on this issue. The consensus in the public domain is apparent. The major set-up funds of the trust, if not coming from the government, will come from the PPP developers. Now that the PPP scheme is stuck, the pressure is on the government. Hong Kong has long positioned itself as Asia's world city² and it is shameful that biodiversity conservation is not recognized as a "public purpose" in a world city in the 21st century.

Billy C. H. Hau

¹ <http://www.afcd.gov.hk/misc/NewNatureConservationPolicy/eng/index.html>

² <http://www.info.gov.hk/info/sar5/easia.htm>

Porcupine!



**NUMBER 34
September 2006**

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Hong Kong Nature Conservation Trust !	1
Editorial	2
DEB news	3
Feedback	3
All about James True — a new Post-Doc at SWIMS	3
Invertebrates	4
Vertebrates	10
SWIMS tidings	22
Miscellany	23
Wild Corner	34
Recent publications	36

Editorial

In August 2000, Richard Corlett and I first took over the reins from *Porcupine's* then-Chief Editor Graham Reels and his colleagues at KARC and DEB. DEB had recently moved into the new Kadoorie Biological Sciences Building and we were busy adjusting and adapting to our new living space. The legacy we took on with *Porcupine!* was one that sought to disseminate information on wildlife observations, provide (provoke at times) a forum for discussion, and communicate environmental and ecological research and issues. Going back over the 12 issues since we started, I am pleased to say that we have stayed fairly well on track.

What has changed since 2000 is the relative number of environmentally related articles, many of them reflecting concern for various environmental issues, increasingly articulated by students. We have also become web-based and this has meant that web searches have access to our articles, greatly extending our reach, and that we can make better use of the lovely colour photos that we formerly had to reproduce in black and white. We now have a new and vibrant Environmental Life Science Society, which formation clearly addressed a real need by ELS students, and, there is new editorship for *Porcupine!*