

“In the News”

by Jacqueline Weir, Jasmine Ng and Sukh Mantel

China and International News can be accessed on the web version of *Porcupine!*

Greenpeace has objected to plans for processing contaminated soil from the Disneyland project at the Tsing Yi incinerator. The soil contains dioxins and may pose a health and environmental risk. **(SCMP, 30.7.03)**

Dolphin watching trips in Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Tan Marine Parks have been breaking regulations and causing disturbance to groups of dolphin. Numbers of tour operators have increased, with the number of boats present peaking during the SARS outbreak. **(SCMP, 3.8.03)**

A Chinese white dolphin was being held at Ocean Park after it was stranded on a beach in Yan Chau Tong Marine Park, Sai Kung. This was the first time one of the animals had been found stranded live in Hong Kong. The animal had skin infections and possibly also a lung problem. **(SCMP, 10.8.03)**

Poultry traders have rejected all options proposed by the bird flu task force ‘Team Clean’ to prevent avian flu, and called for a top-level committee to be set up to work out details, before any action is taken. **(SCMP, 17.8.03)**

Although claimed to meet the Environmental Protection Department’s discharge quality standards, untreated sewage resulting from a pipe blockage, and a missing end cover, was found pumping directly into the Victoria Harbour. **(SCMP, 8.9.03)**

Friends of the Earth sought recycling of mooncake tins, of which 3 million are dumped in landfills each year, and packaging, which could reach 21 items of paper and plastic per tin. **(SCMP, 9.9.03)**

Researchers from the University of Hong Kong gave fresh evidence linking the SARS coronavirus to civets and racoon dogs from Guangdong’s wet markets, but stopped short of calling for a ban on wild animal trading, as the findings did not confirm that the virus found in civets directly caused the SARS outbreak. A top mainland health official speaking after the opening of the 54th session of the World Health Organisation’s regional committee for the Western Pacific said that it was too early to say whether eating civets should be banned. **(SCMP, 9.9.03)**

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department was considering banning the use of natural seawater by live-fish wholesale markets and restaurants. Artificial seawater should be used instead to minimize the risk of cholera outbreak in the region. A new licensing system would also be in effect for all

fish wholesalers, whether or not they are selling live or chilled fish. **(SCMP, 19.9.03)**

The Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Garden is planning to include new species, for example sea otter, Romer’s tree frog, Hong Kong newt, etc., and other endangered species for display and educational purposes. **(Oriental Daily, 19.9.03)**

Eggs of *Aedes albopictus*, the dengue-spreading mosquito, topped a breeding detection rate of 7.7 percent, exceeding the WHO standard of 5 percent and putting Hong Kong at “high-risk” for dengue fever transmission. **(SCMP, 20.9.03)**

An ageing female Chinese White Dolphin was found dead off Tsuen Wan coastal area. This 20-year-old dolphin was valuable for full-skeleton preservation and research purposes. **(Oriental Daily, 20.9.03)**

Hot summer and flooding in Shanghai lakes were believed to be responsible for smaller but more expensive Chinese mitten crabs out in the market last autumn. **(SCMP, 22.9.03)**

Exotic seafood and snakes, in addition to hi-tech equipment, are the hottest items to be smuggled to the mainland via Hong Kong’s open-waters. Hong Kong police and customs are co-operating in sharing of intelligence and deployment of officers to curb the trade. **(SCMP, 26.9.03)**

The demand for live seafood in Hong Kong and southern China, worth hundreds of millions of dollars each year, is leading to the decimation of coral reefs in Southeast Asia. Fish are stunned using sodium cyanide, a practice that although illegal in Philippines is hard to police. Approximately 20,000 tonnes of live reef fish caught in Southeast Asia are eaten each year in Hong Kong, and for each fish that is caught using cyanide approximately 1 m² of reef is destroyed, according to International Marineline Alliance in Manila. **(SCMP, 26.9.03)**



Fig. 1. Large humphead wrasse are often caught with cyanide. This one was on sale in Shenzhen. (Photo: Liu Min)

Green Power urged the regulation of hidden ingredients in pesticide sprays and mosquito repellents from the government. Ten of the unlisted volatile organic compounds found in these household pesticides are the subject of concern by the USEPA and two of the ten, toluene and methylene chloride, are suspected to be potentially carcinogenic in

animals and cause undesirable effects in human pregnancy. **(SCMP, 02.10.03)**

Despite preservation concerns, wild water buffalo in Lantau Island resulted in complaints from villagers for creating nuisance and might be destroyed if no permanent home for them can be found **(SCMP, 13.10.03)**

A wild boar was seen fleeing in Tai Po, dodging into the Tolo Harbour and swimming for 400 m. It was finally captured by the AFCD after getting trapped by a sidewalk fence. **(Ming Pao, 13.10.03)**

Hoi Ha Wan beach in Sai Kung Country Park is to be cordoned off from speedboats that have been disturbing the marine park, allegedly destroying coral and putting swimmers at risk. Tai Po District Council and AFCD pledged that a barrier of buoys would be erected. The beach attracts up to 3,000 visitors per day at weekends. **(SCMP, 13.10.03)**

Professor Brian Morton called for protection of the marine environment in Hong Kong to be increased. Reclamation, development and pollution as well as exploitation of marine life have had devastating effects since he arrived in Hong Kong in the early 1970s. Despite the establishment of marine parks and a marine reserve, only 24.8 hectares of Hong Kong's sea area are protected compared with 40,000 hectares of its land area. **(SCMP, 13.10.03)**

Two tonnes of ivory worth \$2.7 million was seized from a container from Tanzania, Africa, on its arrival in Hong Kong. This is largest seizure ever in Hong Kong. The ivory was supposedly intended for the mainland, which has the highest worldwide demand for ivory. **(SCMP, 15.10.03)**

Increased dolphin-watching was blamed for the high number of dead dolphins recorded (14; double that of 2002) off Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau. Samuel Hung emphasized that such a number might also be related to ageing, pollution, by-catch and reclamation, etc. **(Apple Daily, 18.10.03)**

Since 1996, the Artificial Reef (AR) project by Agriculture Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) recorded an increase in fish diversity from 40 species to 220 species to date. In October 2003 the Department finished the second phase of the AR project. **(Apple Daily, 26.10.03)**

A spokesman for the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong declared that the \$61 million Hong Kong's first and only marine life centre at Hoi Ha Wan would open in mid 2004 even if no more funding could be raised. In this "phased" opening the basic facilities would be opened first; other features, including the aquarium and a touch pool, would be built at a later stage. **(SCMP, 27.10.03)**

China's first spaceman was greeted by smog and pollution readings exceeding 100, the threshold at which people with breathing difficulties are advised to not go outside. The Hong Kong Observatory said that the smog was one of the worst in the past few years. **(SCMP, 3.11.03)**

A 1.2 m long crocodile was found sunbathing in the brackish swamp of Nam Sang Wai, Yuen Long. AFCD experts tried netting and caging to capture the crocodile but to no avail. **(Apple Daily, 4.11.03)**

A proposed free-trade zone east of the Lok Ma Chau checkpoint was contaminated with thousands of tonnes of toxic soil containing organic compounds and heavy metals. Green groups expected that hundreds of millions of dollars would be needed to remove such toxic soil. **(SCMP, 6.11.03)**

Jade perch, which is believed to be cheap to raise, tastes good and is said to be beneficial to the heart, will be available in local markets. This introduced species from Australia is popular with local fish farmers, and hopefully would help revive the local market. **(SCMP, 10.11.03)**

Environmentalists feared that the Hong Kong-Shenzhen free-trade zone would hinder the development of a "new wetland habitat suitable for wildlife" in the abandoned river channel. **(SCMP, 13.11.03)**

A two-year-old Indian muntjac was "scared to death" when captured by AFCD officers in Sai Kung Highway. **(Apple Daily, 15.11.03)**

Two thousand chickens carrying the H5 bird-flu virus were returned to the mainland, according to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department. During the past two years, 10,000 infected chickens have gone through the same routine. **(SCMP, 15.11.03)**

Two short-clawed otters in Ocean Park serve as new attraction boosting the educational atmosphere in the Park. **(Apple Daily, 27.12.03)**

Ocean Park's Dolphin Encounter attraction has raised concerns by conservationists about safety, animal stress, possible disease transmission and the mercenary use of marine mammals. Animal protectionists, however, thought that this activity raised public awareness towards the threats to this animal. **(SCMP, 2.1.04)**

262 black-faced spoonbills were recorded in Mai Po by the World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong, which was the highest since 1992. **(Oriental Daily, 3.1.04)**

The secretary for the environment, transport and works Dr. Sarah Liao Sau-tung has vowed to seek prosecution of those responsible for devastating a section of the Tung Chung river on Lantau island. Removal of 400 tonnes of boulders and pebbles from the site was ordered illegally by the Tung Chung Rural Committee, supposedly for flood protection, and a village contractor was hired for the work. A meeting is being held between the government and green groups to discuss its restoration. Dr. Bosco Chan Pui-lok, river ecology expert of Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden asked why ecology academics were not invited to the meeting. **(SCMP, 11.12.03, 15.12.03, 5.01.04, 13.01.04)**