

Dr. Billy Hau and Dr. Kenny Leung have graciously accepted the *Porcupine!* challenge. They will be expertly assisted by Ms. Rachel Wong and Ms. Laura Wong, who, over the years, have assembled, massaged and webbed-up *Porcupine!*, learning with us as we moved from hard to soft formats and completely into the electronic age. Rachel and Laura have been, and will continue to be, invaluable members of the *Porcupine!* team, and we are most grateful to them both for all their hard and patient work over the years. Thank you! Finally, a big 'thank you' to all who have contributed articles, letters, insights, comments and materials over the years. Please continue to support *Porcupine!*

Over and out, Yvonne and Richard



News from DEB

Welcome back, to a new semester, a new academic year, a new Dean of Science, and some exciting postings for several of our 'old' colleagues. The Faculty of Science welcomes Professor Sun Kwok to HKU from the University of Calgary in Canada. Professor Kwok joined the Faculty in February, and is a renowned astronomer. We congratulate Dr. Andy Cornish for his move from DEB and SWIMS to WWF-HK in the important role of Director of Conservation, and Dr. Yixin Zhang, until very recently a Research Assistant Professor in DEB and our salamander expert, who has just started his new Faculty position at the State University of Texas at San Marco. Congratulations and good luck to both Andy and Yixin in these important moves. Dr. Yvonne Sadovy is now the Deputy Head of DEB with a special responsibility to work towards our integration into the new School of Biology. The School, which will unite the three biological departments under one umbrella, will become a reality on 1 July 2007. The current scheme for organization of the School (as approved by the University Senate) envisages that DEB will largely continue as a 'Division of Ecology & Biodiversity', along side two other Divisions. I am also pleased to announce my reappointment as Head of DEB.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye and thank you to Richard Corlett and Yvonne Sadovy as co-editors of *Porcupine!* After presiding over 12 issues, both feel it is time to pass on the pen (or, increasingly, the PC) for others to shape the issues. Dr. Billy Hau and Dr. Kenny Leung have, generously, taken up the *Porcupine!* challenge.

David Dudgeon

Feedback

Dear *Feedback*,

We refer to the book review on "A Field Guide to the Amphibians of Hong Kong" published in the latest issue of *Porcupine!* 33. We are pleased to see that our book has captured the attention of your reviewer and will make good use of his constructive comments in a future revision of the book. Nevertheless, we are deeply disappointed by the approach adopted which, to our concern, would prejudice fellow readers of *Porcupine!* against the field guide before they have the opportunity to read it. Wording and remarks such as "some hooligan at AFCD or Cosmos Books", "migraine-inducing dog's dinner", "ghastly, clamorous jumble of overlapping amphibian photographs" and "recommend it to non-epileptics" are certainly out of place for a newsletter of the reputable Department of Ecology and Biodiversity of The University of Hong Kong.

We respect *Porcupine!* as a highly acclaimed newsletter which has a large readership in particular among fellow ecologists and nature enthusiasts in Hong Kong. However, we regret to see that a book review with such inappropriate wording is being published. We sincerely hope that any book reviews in *Porcupine!* in future could be done in a constructive and respectful manner.

Simon Chan, K.S. Cheung, C.Y. Ho, F.N.
Lam, W.S. Tang
(Herpetofauna Working Group, Agriculture,
Fisheries and Conservation Department)

Michael Lau
(Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden)

Anthony Bogadek
(St. Louis School)

Authors of "A Field Guide to the
Amphibians of Hong Kong"

[**Editor's note:** It should be noted that views expressed in all articles published in *Porcupine!* represent those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Ecology & Biodiversity.]

Dear *Feedback*,

I refer to Graham Reels's review of the 'Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Hong Kong' by Keith DP Wilson in *Porcupine!* 32: 20-21. Although Graham was, on the whole, complimentary about the book, for which I am grateful, he gave the impression that the book was largely a one-man production. The book, now in its second edition, was written in collaboration with Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

Department's (AFCD) Dragonfly Working Group (DWG). I must acknowledge their significant input into the publication of this field guide. The DWG, comprised of TW Tam, Boris SP Kwan, Karrie KY Wu, Bryan SF Wong and Joyce K Wong, surveyed many areas not previously covered by dragonfly surveys resulting in considerable updating of distribution and conservation status of HK's dragonflies. In addition the DWG was responsible for the discovery of two species not previously recorded from Hong Kong, the discovery of a new gomphid species (*Fukienogomphus* sp.), editing both the English and Chinese texts, and reviewing the keys, drawings and photos. The field guide was very much a collaborative effort with AFCD's DWG rather than 'the result of one man's efforts.' I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of T.K. Woo & W.L. Hui who both work in the country parks branch of AFCD. They provided new information on the distribution of Hong Kong's dragonflies and were responsible for the discovery of *Cephalaeschna klotsi* Asahina.

Keith DP Wilson
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All about James True – a new Post-doc at SWIMS

by James True

The sea has always been special to me. I grew up in the wide brown lands of inland Australia; in towns where wheat, sheep and cattle were the basis and the focus of almost everyone's existence. The world changed for me when I learnt about SCUBA diving at the famous surfing beach of Cronulla. My brief glimpses of the sea as a child had not prepared me for the sudden fascination I discovered for the underwater world. Slowly the idea dawned on me that there must be a way to combine my fascination with the sea and some sort of career. At age 24, I hitched 2000 km up the east coast of Australia to North Queensland, where James Cook University was happily juxtaposed among vast mango orchards, a thriving fishery and the Great Barrier Reef.

Now I was in my element! I threw myself into tropical marine science and university life with a passion – working nights as a kitchen hand to pay my fees and volunteering for any researcher who needed a diver. Despite having no background in biology at school (apart from that which comes naturally with agriculture), I managed quite well; I achieved a First Class honours in marine science with a secondary major in computer science and a minor in biometrics. In the typically laid back way of North Queensland, I felt no hurry to get into post-graduate study straight after my degree – I logged nearly 200 diving hours per year up and down the Great Barrier Reef (mostly volunteering for research projects), had a small catering business, and kept my IT skills alive by managing the collection databases for the Museum of Tropical Queensland. While there, I learned from old-school museum people and curated animals from almost every group found in the tropics. During the 'quiet' months I was a dory fisherman in the (then) just-started artisanal live coral trout fishery, catching beautiful

fat coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*) with hook and line for live export to Hong Kong. Eventually, however, I was confronted with the harsh reality that I would either have to undertake some post-graduate study, or get a real job.

As a fisherman, I was encouraged by many to undertake a fisheries-based degree. More fascinating, however, was what lies beneath – the corals that form the structures where the fish live. James Cook University has been a centre of coral research for more than twenty years, and I was, by this stage, regularly working or volunteering for some of the most prominent coral reef scientists on the planet. I had become involved with AUSCORE – the Australian Coral Records working group – comprising geologists and climatologists and the very occasional biologist working to reconstruct environmental histories based on coral skeletons. An opportunity to work at the nexus between the living animal and the permanent record of its struggle through life was exactly what I was looking for. As an added bonus, the heavy underwater drilling rigs used to extract the long cores preferred in paleoclimatology research required me to undertake some serious industrial diving training.

My first major experiment coincided with the largest mass-bleaching event ever recorded. This later provided me with many valuable insights, but at that stage merely delayed any possible physiological experimentation for 18 months – until the confounding effect had dissipated. My project changed to a more descriptive study examining spatial patterns in coral growth. I still had my extensive commercial diver training to fall back on, so I was often called on by the department head to chaperone new graduate students through their first few field trips. My industrial diving training led me to be invited on many amazing field trips, often as far afield as the Hermit Isles, off the north coast of New Guinea (a place so remote it was last visited by Jacques Cousteau). I was also involved in a survey of North Queensland ports targeting invasive species brought in ships' ballast waters. This survey often involved diving under the piers of tropical ports, chipping off fouling organisms from pylons in pitch-blackness while imagining that the large crocodile one just saw sunning itself on the mud bank nearby might come for a closer look.

During the same period, the Museum of Tropical Queensland received a substantial facelift, investing heavily in new display and collection technology – and, coincidentally, someone to drive it all. I spent the next three years as a computer systems administrator for the museum, doing my PhD research part-time, and spending my weekends and holidays doing lab experiments or traveling to laboratories in different parts of the country to analyze my samples.

After I handed in my thesis, I spent a year in that peculiar limbo that PhD candidates occupy – waiting for the examiners' reports, writing addenda and elucidations to the thesis and helping my wife with her PhD fieldwork in the Gulf of Thailand. Subsequently, I spent more time in Thailand, becoming involved in several post-tsunami surveys and in some of the increasingly progressive ecological research being undertaken by Thai academics.

My position at SWIMS is my first time in China. I am excited by the possibilities to do science here – the reefs of the South