

- “Village Type Development” (V-zone, 2.64 ha): villages in the east; coastal wetland; abandoned fields in the north, and part of a lowland stream, and
- “Coastal Protection Area” (2.64 ha): mangrove and coastal wetland

Drawbacks

1. Inappropriate zoning of habitats

According to the findings of a KFBG site visit on 29 March 2006, the coastal wetland is zoned as “V-zone” and “Agriculture”, while a lowland stream with mature riparian vegetation also falls within the boundary of “V-zone”. Coastal wetland and lowland stream areas are not ideal places to build small houses.

2. The environmental “vandal” benefits

Most of the previous freshwater wetland area is zoned as “Agriculture”. If it had not been converted to grow turf in 1997, no one could argue against the wetland being zoned as a “Conservation Area” due to its high ecological value. Areas zoned as “Agriculture” are often considered as ‘landbanks’ for further development.

3. Sham Chung - a small town?

Like similar planning forecasts in the rural NT, the projection of 570 residents at Sham Chung is unrealistic. No one is likely to build small houses at a place with no access road.

Taking the case of Tai Long Wan as an example, although the Planning Department’s population projections dropped from 200 in October 2001 to 117 in 2006, the actual rural population is still less than 10! This indicates that demand for small house development in remote areas with poor access, i.e., no road, is very low, although land has already been reserved for them.

So, why do we need to reserve a large area for a population of 570 residents that does not and is unlikely to ever exist? Also, how many small houses and how much infrastructure should be built for housing this expected population? Is this a good use of taxpayers’ money? Could the natural beauty, biological diversity and rural character of Sham Chung still be preserved if there are 570 residents?

4. Stream protection - buffer area

It is good to note that a lowland stream is zoned as a “Conservation Area” due to the presence of rare freshwater wildlife. However, as there is no buffer area to separate the stream from the nearby “Agriculture” area, any inappropriate agricultural activity could cause a direct impact on the aquatic wildlife in the stream.

Another side to the story

While green groups suggest keeping Sham Chung as natural as possible, the SCMP reported on 18 April that there is plan to include a helicopter landing pad (later denied by the planner), a holiday camp, a resort-style hotel, houses, a picnic area, a private club, a Catholic church, a recreation centre and

sport centres at Sham Chung. These urbanization developments are claimed to be compatible with the area's rural setting, and amazingly with the recognition of Sham Chung as one of the 12 sites under the New Nature Conservation Policy. This seems completely illogical!

Recommendations

Apart from zoning the lowland habitats as green zones, the “V-zone” boundary could be much reduced as re-development of old houses at the original villages in land zoned proposed as Green Belt may meet the demand, if any. It is also suggested that the Town Planning Board should encourage wetland restoration at the previous freshwater wetland area by giving a ‘green’ zoning to this disturbed area.

Further Information

An in-depth article on this issue has been published in the April 2006 issue of Green Country (volume 59, pp 2-9).



Fig. 6. Shum Chung today.

WILD CORNER

Any sightings of civets, mongooses, ferret badgers, leopard cats, barking deer, pangolins and porcupines – live or dead – should be reported. Rare birds, reptiles, amphibians and fishes, or unusual behaviour by common species, are also of interest, as are rare or interesting invertebrates and plants. If you think it is interesting, our readers probably will! Please give dates, times and localities as accurately as possible

MAMMALS

Anton Webb reported the sighting of a large **Barking Deer** near his home in Sai Kung. He was driving along Tai Mong Tsai Road at approximately 10.30 pm on 25 May 2006 when he noticed what he initially thought was a large dog standing at the side of the road. He slowed down and as he drew nearer he realized that it was a Barking Deer. The deer remained quite still and he stopped the car 1.7 m from the deer. The deer was approximately 50-60 cm at the shoulder.

A Small **Indian Civet** *Viverricula indica* was seen by Bosco Chan foraging close to the 'barbecue restaurants' in the evening of 15 April 2006 at the mudflat of Tai Tam Harbour by the outflow of the Tai Tam Tuk Reservoir.

Janet Walker and Richard Brooks saw a **Masked Palm Civet** in Barker Road, The Peak, (near no. 28) on Wednesday 6 April 2006 at around 4 to 5 pm. It was estimated as at about 160-180 cm long from head to tail.



(Photo: Janet Walker)

On 11 January 2006, Dr. Lawrence Chau was undertaking a *Podocarpus* survey in Sai Kung when he came across a barking deer caught in a gin trap that subsequently had its hind quarters eaten by **Feral Dogs**. The WARC received photos from Mr Choi He Man of a barking deer that was killed by feral dogs in Lai Pin Road, Sha Tin, on 12 March 2006. Both events provide further documentary evidence of the impact of feral dogs on the native fauna.

Professor D. Helmeste, a visiting professor staying at Robert Black College, HKU, took a picture of this **Masked Palm Civet** visiting the nearby *Ficus variegata* var. *chlorocarpa* tree on 25 April 2006.



(Photo: D. Helmeste)

Fiona Somerville reported that the **Malayan Porcupine** population is alive and well on HK Island. Having seen a couple on Lugard Road in January 2005, she saw a large pair in the storm drain opposite Haking Mansions on Barker Road at around 9 pm. They were probably drinking out of the drain.

BIRDS

Bosco Chan saw a group of seven **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* (including three subadults) in the afternoon of 15 April 2006 at the mudflat of Tai Tam Harbour by the outflow of the Tai Tam Tuk Reservoir; blurry photographs were taken. It is apparently the first Hong Kong Island record for this species.

Karen Barretto made the fourth observation in Hong Kong of the **Barred Cuckoo Dove** (*Macropygia unchall*) on 25 April 2006 at Casa Pequena, Girassol, Tai Po Kau Headland, some 46 years after the first record of this species on 24 January, 1960, on Girassol Lane, by Cdr. Jim Humphreys. The other records were on 6, 7 & 12 December, 1989, at Hok Tau and on 5 May, 1998 at Cape D'Aguilar. These records may indicate the need for research on migratory birds utilising coastal and under-recorded locations. These data also illustrate the importance of long-term biological recording of wildlife conservation. The Tai Po Kau Headland Conservation Study & SSSI Proposal is nearing completion and will provide a mechanism for assessing sites requiring protection under the existing zoning legislation in Hong Kong. It will also extend the area of forest conserved in the Tai Po Kau area to include what is possibly the best remaining example of well-established coastal forest in Hong Kong.

Kwok Hon Kai saw two **Ancient Murrelets** *Synthliboramphus antiquus* in Port Shelter (near Yeung Chau) on 3 April 2006. He also saw a **Ferruginous Flycatcher** *Muscicapa ferruginea* in Tai Po Kau on 5 April 2006.

Amphibians and Reptiles

Guy d'Auriol spotted a **Python** in the Plover Cove Country Park, somewhere near Sam A Tsuen, in June 2006. The head was the size of a man's hand and the middle part of the body was distended, possibly because the unresponsive snake was digesting a large animal. The snake was over 20 cm in diameter and estimated to be over 5 metres long. Thanks to Markus Shaw for passing on this exciting report.