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APEC Seminar on Managing Fishing Capacity

The APEC Symposium on Sharing Experiences in Managing Fishing Capacity took place May 8 and 9, 2006 at the Ambassador Hotel in Kaohsiung, south Taiwan. Over 50 delegates from 17 nations took part in the symposium. Representatives from academia, government and industry in Taiwan also participated. During the meetings, speakers from America, Canada, New Zealand, Chile, Thailand and Taiwan gave a number of reports discussing fishing capacity development trends and management experiences from global, regional, and APEC member standpoints.

Officials from the Fisheries Administration (FA) of Taiwan said that the symposium came about after Taiwan submitted a proposal via the APEC Fisheries Working Group. The issue of fishing capacity management had recently become the focus of

the international community. According to United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) data, almost three-quarters of global marine fishery resources have already been completely exploited or over-exploited and excessive fishing capacity is one of the main reasons for resource depletion and over-exploitation. In 1999, the FAO passed its International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity (IPOA-Fishing Capacity) and reiterated its demand that international and regional fishery organizations urgently complete all the tasks specified in the IPOAs by the year 2005, including fishing capacity assessment, the adoption of management measures, regular adjustment of measures, etc., through the development and implementation of national and regional action plans. However, judging by the current state and ongoing deterioration of global fishery resources, these objectives have clearly not been achieved and the international fishing community still has a long way to go in

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improving the management of fishing capacity.

Having been subject to severe limitations on the number of Atlantic tuna vessels registered to the island and a massive reduction in its annual bigeye tuna quota by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), last year, Taiwan has had time to consider the problems of appropriate fishing capacity and sustainable fishery in more depth. In addition to continuing to promote its policy of buying-back old fishing boats, the Taiwan government intends to greatly increase its mandatory reduction of large-sized long-line tuna boat numbers this

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year. To reach the target reduction of 160 vessels over the years 2005-2006, a further 97 vessels will be cut from Taiwan's tuna fleet this year, effectively reducing the pressure from excessive fishing capacity faced by the world's tuna resources, in particular, bigeye tuna. In the future, Taiwan's Fisheries Administration said it would not rule out further policies for fishing fleet reduction in order to maintain and protect the sustainability of tuna resources.



International Sea Turtle Rescue Seminar Held in Penghu

The two-day International Symposium on Sea Turtle Injury and Bycatch Reporting and Causes of Death in Taiwan Seas, organized by the Penghu County Government, National Taiwan Ocean University, and the Taiwan Forestry Bureau and Fisheries Administration of the Council of Agriculture (COA), was held May 2 and 3, 2006 at National Penghu University. Almost 100 people attended the symposium, including National Taiwan Ocean University professor, Dr. I-Jiunn Cheng, and three foreign academics from University of Hawaii System: professor George H. Balazs (Leader of the Marine Turtle Research Program), Dr. Robert Morris and Dr. Thierry Work. In addition, National Penghu University

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Principal Dr. H. J. Lin, Penghu County Government Agriculture and Fisheries Bureau Director Mr. L. T. Hu and representatives from local and foreign marine conservation and research organizations, NGO conservation groups, and government conservation agencies, and members of Taiwan's coast guard administration and police were also invited to exchange opinions and put forward relevant research in the hope of establishing a comprehensive mechanism for the protection and conservation of sea turtles.

Penghu County Governor Wang Chien-fa said that the various county and city authorities in Taiwan each had completely different methods of dealing with reports of accidental bycatch of sea turtle and other species, at present. He pointed out that Penghu County was unique, in that it is the only place in Taiwan where sea turtles appear year after year. Consequently, his county government had established a Sea Turtle Rescue and Research Centre. Sick or injured turtles that had accidentally ingested garbage, become ensnared in longlines and fishing nets, or had been attacked by natural predators during their annual migration via Penghu's neighboring seas could be quarantined there and taken in for observation and medical attention.

The main topics of discussion at the symposium were sea turtle rescue and sanctuary

operations in Taiwan, case history research on sea turtle beachings and deaths in the Penghu Area, reports on the medical treatment and release of live turtles, and beached turtle rescue experience. The American turtle experts also gave reports on the clinical assessment of beached live turtles, the Hawaiian Island Disentanglement Network, and the principles for sea turtle disease surveys, among other subjects.

COA representatives pointed out that, currently, five species of sea turtle, including Leatherback turtles (*Dermochelys coriacea*), Green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*), Loggerhead turtles (*Caretta caretta*), Olive Ridley turtles (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), and Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), are found in Taiwan's oceans, all of which are protected species listed on the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species (Red Data Book) as 'endangered' or 'extremely endangered'.

In order to conserve and protect sea turtles, the COA has already established a system for the reporting of sea turtle beaching and illness. However, sea turtle research in Taiwan has so far focused predominantly on the breeding ecology of Green turtles. Research on other species and in other areas is still scant. In discussing such issues as sea turtle rescue and sanctuary procedures, and sea turtle disease research, the seminar should significantly help

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local efforts to conserve sea turtle populations active in the oceans surrounding Taiwan.



2006 National Sustainable Development Conference

The 2006 National Sustainable Development Conference took place on April 21 and 22, 2006 at the Civil Service Human Resources Development Centre in Taipei. The President and Premier of the Republic of China attended the meeting, as well as representatives from various NGOs, industrial organizations, academia, government, and the National Council for Sustainable Development, and other distinguished members of society.

Organized into several separate meetings, the Conference discussed eight key issues: ‘Sustainable Taiwan—Passing Sustainability on to Future Generations’, ‘Establishing Taiwan’s International Eco-image—Becoming Environmentally-responsible Global Citizens’, ‘Appropriate National Land Usage—Ensuring Environmental Protection’, ‘Rethinking our Industrial Structure—Striding Towards a Sustainable Economy’, ‘Establishing Environmentally-conscious Communities—Creating Eco-towns and Villages’, ‘Preserving Biological Diversity—Maintaining Ecological Balance’, ‘Reducing Environmental Risks—

Building a Healthy and Safe Environment’, and ‘Expanding Civil Participation—Improving Citizens’ Green Awareness’.

The 2006 National Sustainable Development Conference was held in response to a high-level meeting between President Chen Shui-bian and various environmental protection and conservation groups on July 5, 2005, and was the first national-level sustainable development meeting ever held in Taiwan. The Conference was hosted by the cabinet-level National Council for Sustainable Development and organized by the Environmental Protection Administration, Executive Yuan. In order to increase community participation and solicit opinions from all levels of society, four stages of pre-conference meetings, including ‘topic gathering’, ‘regional forum’, ‘preparatory meeting’ and the ‘main assembly’ were planned and implemented. More than 3,000 people participated in the conference and pre-assembly stages. This strongly reflects the high expectations of people in Taiwan for the development of sustainability on their island.

President Chen Shui-bian said that, on account of its limited area, high population, scarcity of natural resources and extremely fragile geographic environment, the island of Taiwan needed to develop in a sustainable manner more urgently than many other nations and regions. He said that the people of Taiwan

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must effectively utilize sustainable economic methods founded on a sustainable environment whereby environment and natural resources are protected with the goal of creating a sustainable society in which standards of living are continually improving.

A National Sustainable Development Declaration was made at the Conference, stating that 'National sustainable development is founded on a bottom-up democratic process, is a long-term commitment to protecting people's relationship with the land and preserving it for future generations, and requires joint cooperation between government and citizens with the aim of enabling all levels of society throughout Taiwan to build on the foundation laid by this consensus and to stride towards the goal of national sustainable development.'

The eight group discussions at the Conference reached consensus on 248 topics, which will be incorporated into the National Sustainable Development Action Plan and actively implemented by various levels of government under the coordination of the National Council for Sustainable Development of the Executive Yuan.

There was little or no consensus on 72 topics, including such contentious issues as whether or not Taiwan should become a

non-nuclear region, the reduction of greenhouse gases, the construction of the Su-ao-Hualien Freeway, construction of a new steel mill and naphtha cracker plant, environmental assessment of new dams and a flood-prone area management plan, reducing automobile and motorcycle usage, and the health and risk assessment of oil refineries. Conference delegates agreed to make concrete resolutions on these issues and to pass them on for more in-depth discussion by the National Council for Sustainable Development.



Conservationists Amazed at Endangered Damselfly Discovery

In April this year, a damselfly discovered last year by a six-year-old boy at Wugu Wetland Ecological Park in Taipei County was formally verified as being the globally endangered species *Mortonagrion hirosei* Asahina. The astonishing discovery was made 34 years since this damselfly species was first discovered in 1971 in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan.

Belonging to the order Odonata, family Coenagrionidae, *Mortonagrion hirosei* Asahina has appeared on the IUCN Red List of threatened species since 1986.

The rare damselfly's discovery in Taiwan was made in August last year when two

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brothers were playing near a flood channel within Wugu Wetlands in Erchong, Taipei County. The younger of the two boys was fascinated by a tiny damselfly he saw there. A volunteer guide accompanying the boys took a photograph of the insect and sent it to Ms. Tsou Mei-hwa, the editor of *An Illustrated Guide to Dragonflies*, thus bringing the discovery to light.

Mortonagrion hirosei Asahina is extremely choosy about its habitat. Its distribution is mostly limited to mixed fresh and saltwater reed marshes (e.g. *Phragmites* sp.) around coastal estuaries and lagoons, areas that are vulnerable to development as industrial zones and harbors. The water bodies where larvae grow appear to contain some salt. Very few odonates coexist with *Mortonagrion hirosei*, apart from *Ischnura senegalensis*, which often feeds on it.

Since its first discovery in 1971 at Hinuma, Ibaraki Prefecture, by Mr. M. Hirose and his colleague, giving the insect its specific epithet *hirosei*, the salt-tolerant species was then found in about 25 sites along the Pacific coast, from Fukushima to Osaka prefectures in Japan. In 1989, it was also discovered at Tsushima Island, Nagasaki Prefecture, in the Japan Sea. In 1991, the species was found in Hong Kong. Subsequently, in 1992, it was also discovered along the Japan Sea coast in

northern Hyogo, northern Kyoto and Fukui.

Mortonagrion hirosei Asahina has a black back and four apple-green spots on the top and bottom, which are the main identifying markings. These give the species its alternate name in Chinese of ‘four spot Mortonagrion’. Because it can only adapt to specific habitats, its distribution is extremely limited. Its 1996 status of ‘endangered’ on the IUCN Red List was based on the known distribution at that time, which was confined to a just a few locations in Japan. It is now known from more than eight sites in Hong Kong where it occurs in coastal, brackish marshes, but many of these sites are close together. Although new populations have been found in Hong Kong, a decline in area has been observed in Japan.

Since the discovery of a male *Mortonagrion hirosei* in Taiwan in August 2005, researchers have subsequently found females at Wugu Wetlands and have observed pairs mating. This year, the species was sighted again at Wugu, verifying that *Mortonagrion hirosei* do indeed breed there.



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Melodious Laughing Thrush Listed as Endemic

A joint research project between the Taiwan Endemic Species Research Institute (ESRI) of the Council of Agriculture (COA) and the Life Sciences Department of National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) has discovered that the genetic difference between the Melodious laughing thrush (*Garrulax canorus taewanus* Swinhoe) and the Hwa-mei originating from China is over 3.5%. This means that the Melodious laughing thrush is a separate species endemic to Taiwan. This major finding will be published in the internationally-renowned ornithology journal IBIS. The Melodious laughing thrush has now formally been recognized as the 16th bird species endemic to Taiwan.

When first discovered in 1859 by the British naturalist Sir Robert Swinhoe, the Melodious laughing thrush was originally listed as a unique bird species. However, the species was subsequently classified as a sub-species of the Chinese Hwa-mei by later ornithologists on account of the similarity of its habitat and behavior with that of the Hwa-mei. Both types of bird forage, search for mates, build nests and rear young within shrub thickets at the edge of low-altitude forests and woods. Furthermore, unlike most other birds, both stick with the

same breeding partner for life and both have similar call structures. The recent research findings by ESRI and NTNU, however, prove that the DNA sequences of the two birds show a level of discrepancy of 3.5%, meaning that the two became genetically distinct species as early as 1.5 million years ago.

In terms of appearance, the Chinese Hwa-mei's plumage is quite distinct from that of the Melodious laughing thrush. The former shows a white eye-circle that is not present in the latter. In addition, the Chinese Hwa-mei can be heard all year-round, whereas the Melodious laughing thrush only sings to attract a mate during the breeding season.

The Melodious laughing thrush is mainly distributed in the Kenting area in southern Taiwan. Populations in the wild have declined significantly because its relatively low-lying habitat has been seriously reduced by human development. Furthermore, in recent years, several exotic Hwa-mei have escaped into the wild due to negligence by breeders and owners. These non-native species have interbred with Melodious laughing thrush in the wild resulting in genetic contamination. To prevent the endemic Melodious laughing thrush from being threatened by extinction due to contamination of its gene pool, ESRI researchers called on people not to import exotic Hwa-mei into Taiwan and urged them not to wilfully release

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them into the wild if they already have them as pets.



Taiwan Tops Global Black-faced Spoonbill Census

Population numbers of the globally-threatened bird species the Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) are gradually rising, as evidenced by the new record high of 1,679 individuals counted during this year's International Black-faced Spoonbill Census, representing an increase of 14% on last year's figures. Of these, 826 individuals were recorded in Taiwan, constituting 49% of the total known world population, putting Taiwan at the top of the list of known spoonbill habitats.

The three-day census is coordinated every January by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society. Over the past few years, volunteers, including experienced bird watchers, researchers and ornithologists, in known and possible spoonbill habitat areas have been asked to simultaneously count Black-faced spoonbill numbers as part of a global population census. This year's count took place from January 6 to 8, 2006.

The results of this year's global census were as follows: Taiwan: 826 Black-faced

spoonbills; Deep Bay, Hong Kong and Shenzhen: 397 birds; Hainan Island, China: 206 birds; Xuan Thuy National Park, Red River Delta, Vietnam: 74 birds; Imazu-Higata, Fukuoko Prefecture and Manose River Delta, Kagoshima, Japan: 155 birds; and Seongsanpo and Hado-ri fishponds, Jeju Island, South Korea: 21 birds.

Of the 826 Black-faced spoonbills recorded in Taiwan, 815 were spotted at the Zengwun River Estuary in Cigu, Tainan County, while the remainder were scattered along the Bajhang Creek and other areas.



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