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WARN to be Launched to Safeguard Asian Wildlife Rescue and Sheltering

The Pingtung Rescue Center for Endangered Wild Animals hosted 2009 International Conference on Wildlife Rescuing in East and Southeast Asia at National Pingtung University of Science and Technology from November 2 to 6, 2009. Around 18 animal rescuing agencies and wildlife shelters in Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, China, Korea, the UK, and Hong Kong sent representatives to attend the conference.

In the conference, Professor J.C. Pei from National Pingtung University and Director H.Y. Tang of the Endemic Species Research Institute signed a statement with participants to launch a “Wild Animal Rescue Network (WARN).” Prior to the official launch of the WARN at next conference, people will spend a year working on details.

The goal for launching the WARN is to encourage information exchange among member countries. The launch aims to reinforce expertise of its members. It will also help to set up standard operating procedure (SOP) when it comes to wildlife rescue, animal sheltering and the demand for animals’ welfare. On top of that, the launch wishes to increase awareness on wildlife conservation and brings the public to the attention of illegal trade on wildlife.

The fact that wildlife has been illegally transported abroad from many East and Southeast Asian countries makes the WARN task more urgent. According to Dr. Pei, the WARN undertakes responsibilities to increase exchanges on wildlife rescue information, to make governments more engaged in wildlife conservation, and to protect endangered wildlife by working with the rest of the world. To do that, first of all, it will need a more mobilized organization. In terms of exchanges on wildlife rescue information, the WARN will foster exchanges of techniques and information among

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wildlife rescue centers and shelters in the region. When it comes to make government become more engaged in wildlife protection, the WARN will need to promote more awareness and education targeted at local governments of member countries. Last but not the least, the WARN will need to work with wildlife rescue centers in the Americas and Africa to protect endangered wildlife in the world.

Next conference will be scheduled between

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November 2010 to March 2011 in Vietnam. Prior to that, a preparatory committee was already in place to make preparation for the upcoming conference. The committee will be responsible to set up an official website, go through contact list, prepare related documents, organize agendas, recruit new members, and organize next conference. In the meantime, the Pingtung Rescue Center for Endangered Wild Animals committee will carry on the task of coordination.



Publication of *Taiwan's Natural Vegetation Atlas*

The Forestry Bureau under the Council of Agriculture (COA) announced the publishing of *Taiwan's Natural Vegetation Atlas* on December 17, 2009. The book records findings of Taiwan endemic Wuwei Hawthorn and scientific breakthroughs in vegetation ecology studies in Taiwan. Scientists also found out evidences to climatic changes when they observed vegetation growing at higher elevation than before.

The book is also fruit from 6 years of studies with participation from 7 universities. Among them were National Taiwan University, National Taiwan Normal University, National Chung Hsing University, National Dong Hua University and National Pingtung University of Science and Technology.

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According to the Forestry Bureau, the atlas is unprecedented because it follows the National Vegetation Classification System to construct its 3,247 natural vegetation maps out of 1/5,000 scale. In addition, the atlas also benefits from using 3,564 vegetation sample plots and 12,857 survey spots. Data collected in the past, sample plot analyses, Orthorectified Aerial Photographs, data of different layers, vegetation map and survey spot standards were all included in this database to form links with the National Biological Information Database.

The atlas covers a total of 1.62 million hectares of land. 40.74% of them, about 0.67 million hectares is protected area. When doing the atlas, the research team found a new habitat of the rare and precious *Fagus hayatae Palib ex Hayata* in Yilan, which renewed the record of the lowest distribution of the species in Taiwan.

The *Fagus hayatae Palib ex Hayata*, one of the five rare and precious plants stipulated by the law, is in the family of Fagus, Fagaceae. There are only 13 of them left in the world, mainly in temperate zone in the northern hemisphere. The *Fagus hayatae Palib ex Hayata* is a plant dated back from the Ice Age. The finding to the plant's existence in Taiwan marks the most southern rim for the plant to grow.

Forestry Bureau Director-General Yen Jen-Teh said, the vegetation map is like a map

for treasure. According to Yen, it gives us an idea about where the vegetations distributed. Through comparison, certain vegetation groups show a clinging to certain habitat characteristics. These data are helpful when people gears up for policy-making of habitat protection.

The vegetation map, along with survey data, could be of use for long-term ecological monitoring as well. People will have clearer picture on how climate change will have impact on the vegetation.



2nd Bio-Asia Regional Conference in Taiwan

The 2nd Bio-Asia Regional Conference attracted scientists from France, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Cambodia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam to present at the National Taiwan Ocean University on November 26 and November 27, 2009.

The Bio-Asia Scheme was first initiated by France in 2007 and opened its first conference in Bangkok, Thailand. In 2009, with the sponsorship of the French Institute in Taipei, the National Science Council of Taiwan and in partnership with the National Taiwan Ocean University, the 2nd conference was held in Taiwan. The conference was arranged, first of all, to make public its Asian Program. In

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addition, there were a series of thematic and transversal workshops designed for participants to share their views.

The symposium addressed 5 main issues, namely natural products of aquatic origin, natural products of terrestrial origin, ecology and conservation, aquatic biodiversity, and terrestrial biodiversity. Moreover, it also attended to issues related to good practices in terms of intellectual property, biodiversity conservation and biological resources.

Scientists also shared their views on issues related to biodiversity, ecology and chemical ecology (systematic extraction, analysis), the Man and natural products (ethnobotany, species protection, sustainable development) and the applications in health, nutrition, agronomy and cosmetics.

Dr. Chang Ching-Fong from National Taiwan Ocean University noted that scientists from France and Asian countries exchanged ideas on biodiversity and biological resources studies in the symposium. He said the symposium also make sure possible ways for France to work with Asian countries on more tangible grounds.



Coral Reef Coverage in Orchid Island Declines

Typhoon Morakot made landfall carrying gusty surge, heavy rains and mudslide, devastating the mountains as well as the coral reefs under the sea. According to a general evaluation report on Taiwan's coral reef status in 2009, coral reef coverage in Orchid Island has dwindled from 69% in 2004 to 18% in 2009. Coral reef ecosystem has faced serious threats because of typhoon and food chain imbalance, as some important indicator fish like groupers and parrot fish have also been on the decline.

Chen Chaolun, Associate Research Fellow at the Academia Sinica's Biodiversity Research Center, pointed out that, for the coral ecosystem in Orchid Island and Green Island to recover, it will probably take 5 decades or even a century. He noted that in Orchid Island, a coral which weighed 2 tons was pulled out some 40 meters away from its root. In Taitung County's Shan-yuan Bay, he said driftwoods were crashed into corals. While in Beinan River, mudslide rushed right into the ocean.

According to Chen, the coral ecosystem was previously on the right track of recovery after going through the most devastating El Nino effects in 1998. Chen noted, the outbreak of *Terpios hoshinota* in 2006 and typhoons occurred in 2008 and 2009 all contributed to the decline of local coral coverage. Coral coverage in Green Islands suffered a one-fifth shrink, from 64.2% in 2004 to 45.1% in 2009. In Orchid

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Island, the coverage ratio suffered an incredible fall, from 68.86% to 17.8%.

The coral ecosystem in Lamay Island, according to Chen, will no longer be brought back to its original status. Overfishing, tourism and coastline pollution in Lamay Island have already hurt its corals. Since 1998, the coral coverage there has never reached the 20% level—being the worst in Taiwan. Though the situation has slightly changed for the better over the years, typhoons happened in 2009 again made that figure to go even further, to below 20%.

In addition, the research team found out that some indicator fish, such as groupers and parrot fish also appeared to be on the decline. Other large-scale invertebrate indicators, such as spiny lobsters, Giant clams (*Tridacna spp*) and *Tripneustes gratilla* also suffered great losses over the years. These could be seen as imbalance in the food chain of the coral reef ecosystem. In turn, it will come back to hurt the fishery and tourism industries as a whole.



Green Island Launches Eco-corridor for Coconut Crabs

To deal with the problems of the crabs being accidentally run over by traffic, an “ecological corridor” in Green Island has taken shape by 2009 to ensure the crabs a safe way

home. This is also the first bypass in Taiwan, designed exclusively for crabs.

The decision behind building a passageway by the Taitung County Government’s Urban and Rural Development Bureau was made following more than a hundred crabs often found crushed dead in the middle of the road. The deaths included the protected coconut crabs (*Birgus latro*). The problems got worse especially during their peak activity season in June and July.

After completion of the “ecological corridor,” monitoring showed a significant improvement of the crab survival in summer night. Many hermit crabs and land crabs benefited from the passageway. People also found that coconut crabs have used this special passageway around the Green Island lighthouse several times when traveling in between their homes and the sea.

Though this is the first bypass designed for the crabs, the crabs are not the exclusive users. Amphibians and reptiles such as *Duttaphrynus melanostictus*, *Japalura swinhonis*, and *Oligodon formosanus*, and mammals such as *Suncus murinus* and the “rare and valuable” *Paguma larvata taivana* also use this special passageway for crossing.

To make residents in the Green Island more aware of the existence of an “ecological corridor” for the crabs, Taitung County

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Government held night ecological tours with guides. The County Government also planned to document construction of the “ecological corridor” into a film to publicize its ideas to the public.



Cape No.1 Completes Journey of Some 12,000 Km

Cape No.1 the Grey-faced Buzzard (*Bustastur indicus*), deployed with a GPS tracking device to initiate a project to map out its migration route via satellite had completed a one-year migration journey of more than 12,000 kilometers on October 12, 2009. The bird had just flew over Taiwan to land on Philippines and stayed there for winter.

The project was initiated by the Taiwan Forestry Bureau, the Academia Sinica and the Raptor Research Group of Taiwan (RRGT). In the project, 2 among 5 Grey-faced Buzzards equipped with GPS transmitters had already died in their journeys. Cape No.1, the exemplary survivor among the trio, had flew over from Kenting, Taiwan in October, 2008, to spend winter in the Mindanao, near southern tip of the Philippines. In March, 2009, the bird flew back, struggling to get through under the big seasonal winds blowing from the North-East to islands spreading near Guangdong. After that, it arrived in early June, 2009 at the Russian-Chinese

borders near the Heilong Jiang before going southbound to land at its final destination in the Philippines via Taiwan on October 12, 2009.

Cape No. 1 is the first among the trio to complete the whole year’s journey of more than 12,000 kilometers. Researchers placed their hope on Cape No.1 again to carry on and finish the next round of its migration journey. By then, the scientific study will be grounded on those findings and scientists will have a more affirmative say on the migration of the Grey-faced Buzzards.



Taiwan Signs Wetland Action Plan with SWS

To promote Taiwan wetland conservation, Taiwan signed an MOU of 2010-2015 Regional Strategic Program of Action (RSPA) with the Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS) on November 30, 2009.

Under the MOU, both parties will work on promoting Taiwan’s wetlands, its publicity to the world, and the sustainable use of the wetlands. Moreover, the SWS will introduce exchanges and technical supports about wetland conservation to Taiwan.

Yeh Shih-Wen, Director-General of the Construction and Planning Agency (CPA), Ministry of the Interior, who signed the MOU on

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behalf of Taiwan, noted that the CPA has worked to make Taiwan's presence more notable in the international arenas. To do that, the CPA applied in February, 2008 for Taiwan to become SWS member. Taiwan also engaged itself to hold the first "Asian Wetland Convention and Workshop." In the workshop, Taiwan voiced its support of a "healthier wetland for healthier people" for all Asian wetlands. And starting early 2009, the CPA contacted the SWS about their plans to sign an MOU on the 2010-2015 RSPA.

Dr. Andrew H. Baldwin, President of the SWS, noted that wetlands are crucial for preserving biodiversity and in addition to conservation, they hold important economical values. In the future, the SWS will send wetland professionals to help Taiwan study, protect, re-habitat and implement a management plan on the wetlands.



Taijiang National Park Is Launched

Taijiang National Park, the eighth national park in Taiwan, was officially launched on December 28, 2009 and started operating under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. This is the first national park in Taiwan to feature on wetland ecology and at the same time combine history, culture and nature.

The park encompasses some 39,310 hectares of space both in land and at sea in Tainan county and Tainan city. For the 4,905 hectares of land, it runs north to meet the southern riverbank of Qingshan Fishing Harbor in Tainan County, south to southern riverbank of Yanshui Creek in Tainan City, east to Qigu Lagoon dike, and west to meet coastal sand banks. For the 34,405 hectares of sea area, it runs a 20 meter wide band along the coast and the Dongji Islet to Luermen, a stretch of the main route taken by the people who migrated from China and settled in Taiwan.

In the park, there have Qigu Lagoon, black-faced spoonbills (*Platalea minor* Temminck & Schlegel) reserve, and Sicao Wildlife Refuge, coastal protection forest and public land around Luermen Creek, Jianan Irrigation Channel and Yanshui Creek in Tainan City.

Taijiang National Park is also a place to unfold the contemporary history of Taiwan. In 1661, Koxinga (Zheng Cheng Gong) opened his first battle right here in the inner sea of Taijiang. He defeated the Dutch who had occupied the area at the time, and started the first Han rule over Taiwan. Speaking from the angle of cultural protection, the Taijiang National Park preserves the lifestyle of the ordinary Taiwanese people. The earlier salt industry and cultural fishing are well kept and preserved in the park.



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France to Initiate WCPFC High Seas Boarding and Inspection on Taiwanese Vessels

France is about to initiate high seas boarding and inspection of Taiwanese vessels, starting February 2, 2010. France will join New Zealand, the Cook Islands, the United States and Japan to become the fifth country to do that.

France has already notified the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) that it will soon initiate the scheme, according to Taiwan's Fishery Agency under the Council of Agriculture on December 27, 2009.

Thus, Taiwan's fishing vessels conducting long-line tuna fishing and skipjack and tuna purse seine fishing in the Western and Central Pacific high seas are all entitled to follow the WCPFC's 2006-08 Boarding and Inspection Procedures. The Fishery Agency recommended shipping vessel involved to accept on board check once the master of a fishing vessel validates the identity of the authorized inspector.

According to the agency, the fishing vessels should present their operating licenses, their harvest lists and daily log ready for check. Following the check, the vessels need to notify the Coast Guard Administration and Fishery Radio Station to bring further report to the Fishery Agency.

Any violation to the rule and failed

authorized inspection will prompt the WCPFC to list the vessel as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU). For those who appear on the IUU list, the government will immediately suspend them from operation.

The Fishery Agency also recommended fishing vessels to install vessel monitor system (VMS) and keep themselves alert for not breaking any rules. For example, catching sharks for fins is strictly prohibited. According to the agency, the shark fins and their body ratio must never exceed the 5% limit. As for wildlife conservation, fishing vessels need to attend to facilities and gears to safeguard sea bird and sea turtle from trapping.



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