Angling For Success

The expansion of Hong Kong’s MPA network has long been discussed – but what are the advantages? What groups will benefit? And how best to manage an expanded network? On a trip to Honda Bay in the Philippines, a WWF team attempts to answer these important questions.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

WWF People: Saving our seas for tomorrow  Launching Nature With No Barriers  Rewriting the future for elephants
Hong Kong’s waters stretch over almost 1,700 km² and contain a remarkable range of marine environments and species. Our waters and those of the wider region support an amazing diversity of sub-tropical marine life – corals and sea grasses thrive alongside many species of crustaceans, molluscs, fish and of course our famous marine icon, the Chinese white dolphin. Our dolphins are our proverbial “canary in the coal mine”: they have inhabited the waters of Hong Kong for centuries, but they are now at risk of disappearing. Ten years ago, the dolphin population stood at 158, but today only 61 remain. The cause of this terrible decline stems from multiple human activities which threaten the dolphins and the balance of our entire underwater ecosystem.

Today, 7,000 hectares of Hong Kong waters have been reclaimed for various infrastructure projects, yet only 1.5 per cent have been designated as marine parks or reserves. Years of unchecked pollution and overfishing have also devastated the biodiversity of our local waters. This damage can be reversed, but only if we create more and bigger marine protected areas (MPAs) – places where development is banned and fishing is regulated. Only this will secure the future of our marine life for the next generations.

In this issue, you will see how WWF is actively working towards this future. Members of our marine team and several stakeholders from Hong Kong’s fishing industry recently flew to the Philippines to conduct a study tour of MPAs in Palawan. There, they saw how a collaborative approach to MPAs can balance biodiversity conservation with sustainable economic development. Meanwhile, the respective aims of our future-focused Safe Haven and Sea for Future projects are to create MPAs and other safe spaces to ensure the survival of Chinese white dolphins, and create a network of MPAs areas covering 10 per cent of our waters.

Also in this issue you’ll read about how Hong Kong needs to step up and take action on climate change after the landmark Paris climate agreement; and about how WWF’s Rewrite Their Future campaign has changed the face of the ivory trade in Hong Kong forever.

Creating significant change requires broad, long-lasting support. Thanks to the people like you, we have rewritten the future for elephants. Now we need to do the same thing for our Chinese white dolphins and other marine species. WWF’s marine-related activities require your continued support. Please – get involved, tell your friends and family, and become part of the effort to save our seas!

Nicole Wong,
Acting Chief Executive Officer
WWF-Hong Kong
WWF TO WTO: END HARMFUL FISHERIES SUBSIDIES!

The ocean is a major contributor to the global economy, with billions of people depending on fish for their food security. But in spite of the fact that many fisheries are stretched past sustainable limits, subsidies that contribute to depleting fish stocks by driving overcapacity and hindering sustainable marine management continue to be doled out by governments around the world. Environmental organizations including WWF, Oceanau and others have worked for years to end these subsidies, yet experts estimate that fishing subsidies of USD 15-53 billion are still used each year in the fisheries sector. The tide may be turning though – recently 27 members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) issued a statement committing to reinvigorating their work to achieve ambitious and effective discipline in fisheries subsidies. WWF welcomes their statement, as addressing harmful fisheries subsidies will help stop global overfishing.

CHINA'S KEY CLIMATE COMMITMENTS ARE POSSIBLE

According to a new WWF report, China’s commitments to cut its greenhouse gas emissions and increase the share of non-fossil fuels in its primary energy generation mix are not only possible, but also economically and technically feasible. The China’s Future Generation 2.0 report says that China has the technical potential to generate 84 per cent of its electricity needs through renewable sources by 2050 – and at a much lower cost than coal. The report also found that China could meet its key international commitments of peaking overall carbon emissions and generating 20 per cent of its primary energy from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, potentially eliminating coal from China’s power mix entirely by 2050 or earlier.

DISASTER: SOUTH AFRICA LIFTS RHINO HORN BAN

WWF deeply regrets the South African High Court’s decision to lift the ban on the domestic trade in rhino horn. This decision means that individuals can now buy rhino horn within South Africa, although the horn’s international trade remains prohibited. “There is no domestic demand for rhino horn in South Africa, so it is inconceivable that anyone would buy it – unless they intend to sell it abroad illegally,” said Dr Colman O’Criodain, WWF’s Wildlife Crime Initiative. Welcoming the Minister of Environmental Affairs’ appeal of the verdict, Elisabeth McLellan, the head of WWF’s Wildlife Crime Initiative, pointed out that “reopening the national rhino horn trade will make it even harder for already overstretched law enforcement agents to tackle record rhino poaching.” WWF hopes to see a swift and decisive reversal of this decision.

AWARDING COMMUNITY-BASED CONSERVATION LEADERS

WWF presented the 2015 Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Award to two individuals who have made significant and unique contributions to marine conservation. Mr Alifereti Tawake and Dr Alasdair Harris were rewarded for their efforts to support local communities as they rebuild fish populations and restore marine habitats like coral reefs through community-based conservation. Mr Tawake’s innovative strategies to rebuild tropical fisheries through supporting the creation of locally-managed marine areas have brought tangible benefits to many communities, particularly in Madagascar and Belize. These strategies are now being replicated across other areas of the Indian and Pacific oceans. Congratulations to both winners!

SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATIONS FOR INNOVATIVE WWF SOY PROJECT

Nine farmers participating in the WWF-Brasil-supported “People who Produce and Preserve” project have achieved certification under the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) standard, a landmark for the two-year project. The project aims to improve management practices for soybean farmers in Brazil, one of the world’s largest soy producers, helping them to meet a pressing challenge: use the land to meet the country’s development needs and feed the world’s growing population while protecting biodiversity and carbon-rich land and respecting community and worker rights. Through workshops and other events, the project equips farmers with the knowledge and skills they need to improve their practices and meet rigorous RTRS standards. In July 2015 the farms underwent an audit and were evaluated for compliance with legislation and good business practices, good working conditions, environmental responsibility and other criteria.
Hong Kong’s waters used to be a paradise for our once-strong fishing community. That is, until decades of unregulated overfishing reduced our fisheries to mere shadows of their former glory. But the historic ban on trawling enacted three years ago has begun to turn the tide. According to those who still fish in Hong Kong waters, fish stocks have tentatively started to recover, though much work remains to be done before they flourish once more. There are many obstacles to overcome – illegal fishing still occurs, stakeholders face uncertainty about the best path forward, and fishing workers themselves are still reluctant to switch jobs or reinvent their careers.

**MPAs: A SAFETY NET FOR MARINE LIFE**

For conservation organizations like WWF, the primary recovery strategy for our fisheries envisages a network of linked marine protected areas (MPAs) stretching throughout Hong Kong waters. Like a safety net, these MPAs – where fishing is regulated and no destructive activities are allowed – will maintain and protect marine species, their habitats and the biodiversity of the entire ecosystem. MPAs provide a place for marine creatures to safely live and breed, and enhance the ecological resilience of the entire surrounding area, providing “insurance” against damage from storms and destructive human activities like coastal reclamation and development.

At the moment, less than two per cent of Hong Kong waters are protected by MPAs. With only four marine parks and one marine reserve, our seas offer little official protection for our fragile marine biodiversity. WWF is trying to improve this situation, working to protect at least 10 per cent of our waters by 2020. There is every reason to make a robust MPA network a reality: a recent WWF report called *Marine Protected Areas - Smart Investments in Ocean Health* shows that globally, each dollar invested in creating MPAs is at least tripled in benefits returned through improvements in employment, coastal protection and fisheries.
LEARNING FROM THE PHILIPPINES’ EXPERIENCE

Our efforts to expand Hong Kong’s MPA network are focused on encouraging the government, educating the public and most importantly – engaging the many stakeholders. As part of this engagement, in December 2015 we organized a “study tour” for 24 such stakeholders including leaders from fishing associations, academics and a legislator. They travelled to Honda Bay, near Puerto Princesa in the Philippines’ Palawan Island, where the participants visited and learned about a number of well-established and well-managed MPAs – getting a glimpse into one possible future for Hong Kong waters.

Why Honda Bay? Both the richness of the bay’s waters and the complexity of its marine problems are very similar to Hong Kong. The management approach taken in Honda Bay, however, has been radically different. Faced with rampant illegal fishing, the government of the Philippines responded early and adopted a forward-looking solution: set up new marine protected areas and empower people in the fishing sector by having them manage and patrol these MPAs.

The group's four-day visit saw the participants delve into the strategies and tactics of this initiative, gaining knowledge, ideas and inspiration from the successes achieved by these co-managed MPAs. For example, the group visited an ecotourism venture at the 17-hectare Pambato Reef Marine Sanctuary. Established in 2008, the Sanctuary employs fishermen as operators and guides, at wages which are higher than what they make from fishing; giving them another source of income, greater financial stability and stronger self-esteem. Encouragingly, the number of tourists has increased by a factor of 12 since the Sanctuary’s inception, assuring a stable future for the entire community.

The Hong Kong group brought several concerns with them – that despite the ban, our fisheries are still being depleted by illegal fishing, that Hong Kong’s MPAs create ineffective benefits to our fisheries, and the difficulties faced by fishermen as they try to switch to other careers.

These were all addressed in depth by local officials, NGO representatives, researchers and fishermen who had reinvented themselves as ecotourism operators. They discussed how involving multiple parties throughout the MPA planning and management stages had helped fisheries recuperate; while the former fishermen shared stories of how the unity of the community and financial and policy aid provided by NGOs and the government synergistically combined to help their new eco-tourism ventures succeed.

TOGETHER, WE CAN CREATE MORE MPAs IN HONG KONG

The group agreed that continuous communication is essential. Interdepartmental communication within the government is vital to moving the process forward, while communication between academics and fishermen will lead to better-quality observations and a deeper understanding of the marine environment. Strengthening enforcement is also direly needed – while one option is to allow the local fishing community to combat illegal fishing, their safety also needs to be prioritized. As for next steps, the group agreed that the government should take a leading role in establishing a "marine and fishery resources working group", and regularly collect opinions from the fishing community regarding conservation and sustainable fisheries.

We are glad that the Hong Kong fishing community has opened itself up and indicated its willingness to work with NGOs and academics for a healthier ocean. It is of the utmost importance to have the local communities and relevant stakeholders involved early in the planning, implementation and management of existing and future MPAs, so as to balance the need for biodiversity and sustainable socio-economic development. If more MPAs can be created in Hong Kong, our rich marine biodiversity can be sustained and preserved, while fish stocks will have chance to recover and our fishing industry can be rejuvenated".

WWF believes that our waters, our marine biodiversity and those who rely on our seas for their income all deserve a better system than the one currently in place. "The ocean is central to all of our lives. A healthy ocean safeguards our coasts, stores carbon, creates employment and feeds families," says Marco Lambertini, Director General of WWF International. "Marine protected areas have the double impact of contributing to a healthy ocean and creating important economic opportunities.” We have an unprecedented opportunity to do precisely this in Hong Kong in the near future – and now is the time to start.
WWF’s marine team takes their mission of saving our seas extremely seriously. We talked to three key members of the team about their life and work protecting Hong Kong’s marine environment and the lessons they learned on their recent trip to the Philippines.

A: Angel Lam, S: Samantha Lee, M: Michelle Luk

What does the ocean mean to you?

A: I’m fascinated by the marine world. At university, my major was biology and I studied Hong Kong reef fish and the effectiveness of marine parks. When I first started diving, it was much more challenging than I thought it would be because of unstable weather and big waves. Compared to nature, human beings are so small, and though I found it challenging, it was a great chance to strengthen my willpower!

S: My connection to the sea dates back to 2002, when I was an undergraduate student looking for a final year project. I ended up in studying coral ecology for five years. I love the ocean; it gives life and energy to every single creature on the planet; it regulates the climate and provides food and shelter to numerous species. I feel so carefree and relaxed when I go diving and enjoy the amazing, beautiful underwater world.

M: I started to appreciate the marine world when I began snorkelling and diving. By looking at the ocean’s beautiful yet mysterious creatures, I needed to know more about them. Research helps me to understand the importance of and need for marine conservation.

What do you do at WWF?

A: I assist with planning and executing programmes related to sustainable fisheries development and Hong Kong’s marine protected area network. I also assist with the Coastal Watch project in relation to education, promotion and shoreline clean-up activities.

S: I lead and manage the marine team and key marine conservation projects concerning dolphin conservation, sustainable fisheries development and marine protected area network. I develop strategies and implement local marine programmes, lead stakeholder engagement work with fishermen and sea-related business operators, and contribute heavily to government policy advocacy work.

What’s the most beautiful thing you’ve encountered in Hong Kong waters?

S: The dives at Victor’s Rock in the eastern waters of Hong Kong are amazing. Not many people have been here, so it’s kind of mysterious. Thousands of colourful soft corals and gorgonians live along the slope, and the coral coverage reaches up to 70 per cent, even at a depth of 30m. This secretive, pristine coral garden supports a rich and diverse soft coral community... it’s unforgettable.

What upsets you the most about Hong Kong waters?

A: I recently led a group of volunteers to Lap Sap Wan for a litter clean-up activity. After the outcry and media storm of last year, the government cleaned up most of the litter in the bay. But when we went back just six months later, we found vast quantities of litter strewn everywhere along the shore AGAIN. Our volunteers cleaned the bay for half a day, but barely reduced the amount of litter. I felt helpless and hurt.

S: I was very sad when the third runway EIA was approved. The report was full of flaws, meaning significant impacts will be caused to the dolphins with no effective mitigation measures adopted during the runway’s construction. We worked extremely hard to stir up public debate and fight for the dolphins, but the EIA was still approved, making me feel powerless and sad.

M: I work with Chinese white dolphin conservation, including stakeholder and community engagement, capacity building, and desktop and field research.

You recently visited the Philippines on a “study tour” with various marine environment stakeholders. Can you share some of the experiences from this trip?

A: In the Philippines, the local people have a very strong sense of conservation. One day, as we were going out to the ocean, the boat stopped and someone jumped into the water. I thought the boat had broken down and needed urgent maintenance. But actually, a plastic bag had fallen into the sea from our boat – the man had jumped overboard to retrieve it. This was unforgettable. Now I understand why their beaches are so clean with so little litter!
S: We earned a lot of trust from the stakeholders, in particular the fishermen. Before the trip, they were sceptical about the effectiveness of marine protected areas (MPAs) and were resistant to establishing them. After the tour and workshop discussions, they were much more open-minded, and agreed that effectively-managed MPAs could create benefits for them. This unexpected attitude change was one of the tour’s best outcomes.

Is it possible to apply the MPA policies you experienced in the Philippines here in Hong Kong?

A: Fishing communities in the Philippines co-manage local marine reserves. In some regions, the government gives law enforcement rights to fishermen, allowing them to conduct operations against illegal fishing in protected areas. This model is not possible in Hong Kong, therefore we would need to fine-tune the idea to make it work. For example, the Hong Kong government could invite the fishing community to co-manage marine reserves and have them take part in research and discussion about building future marine reserves.

S: The Philippines’ government cares about co-management and takes a participatory approach. They empower local communities and get them involved in the MPA design, implementation, management and enforcement process. They also have more resources to create awareness with the relevant stakeholders. The Hong Kong government usually takes a “top-down” approach and only involves fishermen at the later stages of the process. Hong Kong fishermen are unhappy with this approach and the lack of transparency, which is why the fishing community often opposes the establishment of MPAs in Hong Kong.

M: Small-scale fishing is prevalent in both places. However there is a crucial difference: the Philippines government is taking the lead and is determined to protect fisheries and help fishermen. While marine and fisheries resources protection is not a priority in Hong Kong.

What are your future plans for marine conservation in Hong Kong?

S: We will apply the lessons learned from this trip and continue to engage the local fishing community, visit more fishermen in different port areas and collect more feedback and opinions on how we can collaborate on MPA management work. Then we will explore opportunities to work with academics and help collect fisheries data, set up a marine and fisheries working group and conduct regular meetings.

We are currently identifying marine biodiversity hotspots which will identify the best areas for more MPAs in Hong Kong. We will also launch more public activities to raise awareness on the importance of and need for more MPAs.
By now you have heard the results: In early December 2015 after two weeks of tough negotiations, representatives from world governments finalized a global agreement which lays the foundation for long-term efforts to fight climate change. The thrust of the Paris agreement is that the global temperature rise should be kept well below 2°C or 1.5°C by the end of this century. This can only be accomplished by phasing out fossil fuels and reaching the goal of net zero emissions.

The Paris agreement also requests that the parties communicate or update their intended nationally determined contributions (the climate actions they intend to take) every five years. At the same time, the agreement urges developed countries to jointly provide USD100 billion for climate mitigation and adaptation measures by 2020.

During the climate talks, more than 180 countries brought national climate action pledges to the table. However, science tells us that even with all the current pledges, the world will see a 2.7 °C rise — leaving a 12 to 16 gigatonne emissions gap to the “2°C target”.

During the Paris talks, “climate marches” were organized all over the world, bringing people together to demand action on climate change. Thousands poured out onto the streets of cities around the planet — Rome, Los Angeles, Manila, Madrid, Hong Kong and dozens of other cities.

While world leaders and citizens agree that we should take ambitious action to combat climate change, Hong Kong lags behind. The city’s current plan is to reduce carbon intensity in 2020 by 50 to 60 per cent (from 2005), but that’s all. WWF urges the Hong Kong government to expeditiously set an ambitious carbon reduction target for 2030 and urgently change the Hong Kong’s electricity market by developing energy efficiency and renewable energy development. After all, we have only one planet and it is our duty to ensure it is habitable for the next generations.
Holding together the many components of WWF-Hong Kong’s work is a single, overriding purpose: connecting people with nature. Mai Po Nature Reserve is where nature comes to life in Hong Kong – its wetland habitats teem with wild birds and other mammals, reptiles, fish and insects, many of them found nowhere else in territory.

For over 30 years, we have welcomed thousands of visitors to the Reserve, introducing them to Hong Kong’s natural heritage and encouraging them to enjoy and respect nature. Up until now however, this life-changing experience has unfortunately been largely beyond the reach of an important segment of society – people with special needs and physical disabilities.

No longer. In November 2015, thanks to the generous support of HSBC, WWF launched our ground-breaking Nature with No Barriers project, a three-year programme of improvement work and activities that will allow us to reach out to and connect with communities that would not normally be able to visit Mai Po, including those with limited mobility and individualized needs.

The ultimate aim of Nature With No Barriers is to bring these communities to the Reserve and provide them with a unique natural experience, one which is specifically tailored to their needs. A project of this scale takes time to realize. To help us prepare for our new visitors, the Reserve’s core outdoor infrastructure will need to be enhanced to ensure a safe and comfortable experience, wildlife trails and other areas will need to be improved, and our nature interpreters will need to receive special training.

Upon completion, Nature With No Barriers will create a number of exciting changes at Mai Po. First, the existing facilities, particularly bird hides and visitor paths, will be upgraded to offer a safe, interactive and accessible environment for all visitors. In addition, sensory-enhancing shrubs will be planted and grown along the Reserve’s pathways and specialized exhibits and interpretation materials will be installed. These additions will allow special needs groups to enjoy deeper encounters with nature through sound, touch and smell.

At the same time, we will work with partner NGOs to build the capacity of the Reserve’s interpreters, carers and volunteers, ensuring that they will be able to run experiential nature programmes and cater to those with special needs. This training has already begun: an organization that provides sign language training courses recently visited Mai Po and gave our workers advice on how to communicate effectively with people with hearing impairments. One participant mentioned that the training gave them more confidence, saying that “sign language does not have a specific way to describe ‘conservation’, so it might be challenging to discuss this topic with them. But at the same time, such a discussion could be much more meaningful!”

Eventually, Nature With No Barriers will connect over 5,500 people with special needs with Mai Po and involve over 1,000 volunteers. Its positive effects will last long beyond the project’s three-year lifespan: the universally-accessible facilities, new programmes and the pool of trained staff and helpers will bring benefits to society well into the future.
All around the world, the effects of climate change and extreme weather are beginning to bit. At the beginning of this year, Hong Kong experienced the coldest day in 59 years, bringing frosty chaos to the city and reminding everyone that that unreasonable and unpredictable weather can result in adverse social and economic ripple effects. Some people may think that they are powerless and have a limited influence over global issues like climate change. However, the impact of meaningful behavioural change and the importance of collaborative effort should never be ignored.

The Low Carbon Changemaker kit (LCC) is one of the weapons in our fight against climate change. The “ready-to-go” user manual enables Corporate Social Responsibility specialists and Human Resources practitioners to kick-start company staff engagement activities. While the kit helps every staff member “do their part” to fight climate change. This encouragement begins in the office and spreads outwards to influence customers, business associates, families and friends.

The LCC comes in two parts – Part One provides a diagnosis of a company’s current low carbon practices and its “level of green”. Part Two is a collection of 75 different staff engagement exercises with three different levels of complexity; some of which encourage individual staff participation via an emphasis on experiential learning and collective action focusing on a range of sustainability issues. The LCC is a helpful and versatile tool for businesses at all stages of environmental awareness: from those that are just beginning their low carbon journeys, to those that already provide their staff with regular green engagement activities, have sufficient resources and are looking for further innovative activities.

Now, companies can upload their staff engagement activities to our website (wwf.org.hk/changemaker) and compete for the Low Carbon Changemaker award. They can also gain inspiration from ideas provided by other companies.

The performance of our two climate-focused business programmes continues to be highly encouraging: in 2015, 24 LCMP-accredited factories avoided a total of 134,000 tonnes of carbon emissions, the largest carbon reduction ever recorded since the programme was launched in 2009. Bolstering these results is the fact that these companies experienced a cumulative growth of 92 per cent in their business volume; showing that it is possible for companies to thrive and adopt robust carbon reduction measures at the same time. Also in 2015, 1,200 tonnes of carbon emissions were reduced through the LOOP. The average annual carbon emissions produced by each staff member of the 28 LOOP-verified offices was 3.01 tonnes – 25 per cent less than the same figure for 2010.

The success of both these programmes has created a positive environment for the LCC. WWF hopes that the toolkit will act as a catalyst for further positive change throughout Hong Kong’s business world.

The past year has seen a long-awaited yet incredible transformation in elephant conservation. In 2015, WWF-Hong Kong began our “Rewrite Their Future” campaign, calling on the Hong Kong government to ban the domestic ivory trade. In response to the appeals of WWF and over 90,000 citizens, Hong Kong Chief Executive CY Leung announced that the government will actively explore measures to ban the domestic ivory trade during his annual policy address in January 2016.

This is truly a milestone for the world’s elephants. As a next step, the government must rapidly develop a timeline and implement a ban to phase out the ivory trade.

Gavin Edwards, WWF-Hong Kong’s Conservation Director, responded to this encouraging news, “after today, it’s no longer a question of ‘if’ a ban is needed – we can focus on ‘when’ and ‘how’ we can end the ivory trade. With close to 100 elephants killed every day, there is no time to waste.” WWF has been actively campaigning for an ivory ban for the past year. At the start, the Hong Kong government denied that the city’s ivory market was causing the deaths of elephants. After we published our “The Hard Truth” report with evidence revealing how the regulatory loopholes in Hong Kong’s ivory market lead to illegal activities such as smuggling and laundering, the government’s position shifted to admitting that the ivory trade regulatory system was flawed, then pivoted to becoming “open-minded” regarding an ivory ban. Subsequently, the Legislative Council also passed a non-binding motion to ban the domestic trade in elephant ivory.

The campaign attracted immediate and impressive support from across society, particularly from the education sector – by the end of the campaign we had collected over 90,000 signatures on our petition and 4,000 amazing suggestions for a new character.

Global momentum is firmly with the elephants. Last September both Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Barack Obama announced that they would take significant and timely steps to halt their domestic commercial ivory trades. Our work will not stop here, WWF will continue to work with the government to ensure that a concrete work plan and timeline is in place to end the trade as swiftly as possible.

The Hong Kong government has listened to the voices of Hongkongers who have been clearly called for an ivory ban. Hong Kong can now play a leadership role and strike a major blow against wildlife crime and the global illegal ivory trade.

Rewrite Their Future – School Campaign winners

GLOBAL SUPPORT AIDS TO SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

The campaign attracted immediate and impressive support from across society, particularly from the education sector – by the end of the campaign we had collected over 90,000 signatures on our petition and 4,000 amazing suggestions for a new character.

INVENT A NEW CHINESE CHARACTER

The Chinese character for ivory literally means “elephant tooth”, creating an illusion that the process of extracting ivory is relatively natural or harmless. To counter this idea, WWF invited the public to design a new Chinese character for the world “ivory” that accurately reflects this reality to bolster our call for an ivory ban to help save the elephants.
The East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) is a critical pathway for migratory birds. One of the world’s eight major flyways, the EAAF extends 13,000 km from the Arctic Circle through Southeast Asia to Australia and New Zealand. The EAAF is home to over 50 million migratory waterbirds from over 250 different populations, including 28 globally threatened species. However, as the Flyway covers some of the world’s most densely populated and fastest-developing regions, birds traversing the EAAF face serious threats from the loss of wetland habitats, pollution and hunting.

As an active member of the EAAF Partnership, WWF runs numerous projects and initiatives which focus on preserving critical species and the sites they depend on. We also provide invaluable wetland management training to other wetland sites around the region.

Here are just a few examples of the recent successes our training participants create after the training in Mai Po:

- One participant assisted with habitat restoration and enhancement work in Hainan’s Dongzhai National Nature Reserve by recommending that areas of mudflats be kept free of aquaculture waste water so that they could continue to serve as feeding grounds for waterbirds.
- Another participant transformed a fish pond in the Guang-dong Nellingding Futian National Nature Reserve by clearing vegetation, de-silting the pond bed, draining it and regulating its water level. An increased number of shorebirds were then found feeding in the transformed fish pond.
- One participant used our Mai Po wetland environmental education teaching plan as a guide as they planned and organized promotional activities to celebrate World Wetlands Day 2015 at the Guangdong Zhaoqing Xinghu National Wetland Park.
- Attended a Mai Po training programme and then used this informative experience to write a development work plan for Zhaoqing Xinghu National Wetland Park in Guangdong, outlining the steps to restore wetland ecology and develop ecotourism.
- Based on the monitoring skills learned from Mai Po and recommendations from Mai Po experts, the methods and techniques for monitoring birds in the North Baxiao Wetland located in Shanghai Chongming Dongtan National Nature Reserve have been improved. More scientific bird surveys are now conducted to provide better baseline data for future habitat management.

Can you imagine a world without tigers, rhinos or elephants? This is unthinkable, and yet, the unthinkable is happening – at this very moment...

Wildlife trade is the second-biggest direct threat to species, of which a worryingly large proportion is illegal. The illegal wildlife trade is driven by high profit margins, vulnerable wild animals are pushed to the edge of extinction as nature cannot compete with the rate of human consumption.

To poachers, these animals are worth more dead than alive.

WWF we are working on the ground with local conservation authorities and governments to monitor animal populations and support anti-poaching rangers.

Join us in the fight to save these beautiful creatures from extinction!

Donate NOW!

Enquiry: 2526 1031
wwf.org.hk

We need your support:

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SPARROWS AND FIREBIRDS TAKE THE CROWN

WWF's Big Bird Race (BBR) has been a highlight of the WWF fundraising calendar since 1984. With its primary aim being raising money to preserve and manage the precious migratory bird habitats at Mai Po Nature Reserve, the premise of the race is simple: over a period of 12 hours between sunrise and sunset, teams compete to identify the largest number of individual bird species around Hong Kong – the team that spots the most birds wins the Race and bask in birding glory.

Timed to coincide with World Wetlands Day on 2 February, the Race was held this year on 30 January and attracted nearly 100 local and regional bird enthusiasts. Including birding heavyweights like Secretary for Food and Health Dr Ko Wing-man and his eldest son Dr Koel Ko, the birders formed 27 teams to compete for the title and the many prizes on offer, including four University Teams.

THIS YEAR'S RACE ICON: THE MANCHURIAN REED WARBLER

The icon of this year's Race was the Manchurian Reed Warbler, one of Hong Kong's rarest migratory birds and listed as Vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List since the year 2000. Though the Warbler's current global population is less than 10,000 individuals and in decline, researchers recorded no less than 29 of these birds in Mai Po's reedbeds between 2001 and 2011, illustrating that these reedbeds are of global significance to rare bird species during their annual migrations. Birdwatchers have also recently spotted two bird species at Mai Po that have never before been recorded in Hong Kong: Franklin's Gull and the Booted Warbler. These sightings are creating a snowball effect: as the Reserve becomes a prime regional bird-watching site, it is attracting more birdwatchers and citizen scientists and amassing more new bird records.

The 2016 BBR witnessed a new phenomenon: a pair of joint winners – Team Sparrow and Team Fire Bird from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. The joint champions triumphantly recorded 139 bird species and set new records in the process – Team Sparrow’s 12-year-old member was the youngest participant in Race history, while Team Fire Bird was made up of students who were new to competitive bird-watching.

ENHANCING MAI PO’S INCREDIBLE REEDBEDS

The funds raised from last year's race were used to successfully reconstruct Mai Po’s 20-year-old southern floating hide. The new structure was built with Forest Stewardship Council-accredited wood and materials taken from its predecessor to reduce the construction’s carbon footprint. It also sports an improved ventilation system and two ground-level hatches that allow wildlife photographers to be at eye-level with their subjects.

BBR 2016 successfully raised over HKD 800,000 which will be used to enhance Mai Po’s incredible reedbeds.

WWF hopes that this and future races will continue to raise public awareness about the vital importance of wetland conservation, and raise public interest about the interesting and pleasurable pastime of bird-watching. Congratulations to the winners!

Learn more about WWF’s Big Bird Race (BBR)

CLIMATE CHANGE ALREADY HITTING RARE SPECIES

WWF's Living Planet and Living Blue Planet reports, released in the last couple of years, are setting biodiversity alarm bells around the world. Both reports summarize how between 1970 and 2010, WWF monitored 10,000 populations of vertebrates – mammals, birds, fish, reptiles and amphibians; observing that in just those 40 years, the populations declined by over 50 per cent.

If climate change is allowed to work its dark magic on our planet, these declines may well continue. A new WWF report, The Impact of Climate Change on Species, outlines how this future might unfold – estimating that globally, 35 per cent of bird species, over 50 per cent of amphibians and more than 70 per cent of reef-building corals are vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

The report points out that the past century’s spike in global temperatures is already causing planetary-level effects: sea levels are rising, the oceans are becoming warmer and more acidic, intense droughts and unusual floods are threatening crops and freshwater supplies. We are now beginning to see marked ecological changes, including changes to plant growing seasons, the ranges of species and seasonal breeding patterns. Because these transformations are occurring so rapidly, some already-threatened species are unable to adapt; creating serious problems for them – and for us.

WWF is working around the planet to save these species and mitigate the worst effects of climate change on their habitats. The trouble is that while these charismatic species represent the most visible casualties of climate change, behind them lie millions of others – insects, marine micro-organisms and even microbes in the soil. The first step is to help shore up these vital components in the web of biodiversity in land- and marine-based ecosystems.

To do this, we must all dramatically reduce global carbon emissions. WWF is working furiously to protect forests, influence governments to enact climate-friendly policies and legislation, and engage businesses to cut carbon.

WWF is helping local communities and governments in many parts of the Earth prepare for the impacts of a changing climate – by increasing the resilience of communities, ensuring that the basic needs of populations are met during times of flooding or drought, helping transition countries to clean sources of energy and in a myriad of other ways.

WWF works to create a world in which humans live in harmony with nature. Climate change will create further disharmony in this equation, which will not only continue a negative spiral in the natural world, it will have long-lasting and dreadful effects on us as a species. To avoid this dark future we all need to work together.
Hong Kong Waters

The size of Hong Kong’s marine territory is square kilometres – 7,000 hectares of Hong Kong waters have been reclaimed for various infrastructure projects in recent decades, less than two per cent of Hong Kong waters lie in Marine Protected Areas.

The year WWF hopes to have protection in place for at least ten per cent of Hong Kong waters is 2020.

Chinese white dolphins remain in Hong Kong waters; about 1,700 remain. WWF is working to have protection in place for these iconic species by 2020.