

# The Hong Kong Natural History Society

## April 2016 Outing

### Pat Sin Leng Country Park and Fung Yuen Butterfly Reserve

Our April hike took us out to the north-east of Hong Kong to Hok Tau Wai. After readying ourselves at this pleasant country park “service station”, we started the 1 hour walk to the Hok Tau Reservoir passing some organic farms, wonderful scenery, and also spotting several butterflies. Alongside the banks of Hok Tau Reservoir we stopped at a picnic area for morning tea. The reservoir was built for irrigation purposes in the 1920s but now it’s a beautiful area to visit for a picnic or walk past whilst hiking.

Originally, we had planned to walk along the family trail to Sha Lo Tung but the wet weather during the week and the extra foot traffic from a movie shoot had made the trail a muddy unpassable track. So it was decided to take an alternative route that took us a little higher on a seldom-used village trail to Sha Lo Tung.

Although slippery in parts it proved to be a wonderful alternative as we stopped many times to spot butterflies with one member remarking that we did not need to go to Fung Yuen. We then passed through the deserted village of Sha Lo Tung, exploring some of the old buildings, before heading on and commencing the last leg to Fung Yuen Butterfly Reserve. It was just beyond Sha Lo Tung that some examples of the impressive flowering vine *Mucuna birdwoodiana* were seen.

Just before descending to the Butterfly Reserve, we could unfortunately see what most of Hong Kong has developed into today, with the skyscrapers of Tai Po straight ahead. With Cloudy Hill to the back of us, Plover Cove in the distance and Fung Yuen at the bottom of the hill, all are living together (at the moment) in relative harmony. I just hope the 21st century doesn’t devour the peace of the Country Parks as we know them today.

We made the short but steep descent into the Reserve, passing many hikers struggling with the ascent, and arriving at Fung Yuen in time for lunch. After lunch we listened to a talk and watched a film about the Reserve and its inhabitants, and were then guided through the different areas of the Reserve. Jan’s summary of the talk and video can be found at the end of this report.

I hope everyone enjoyed the last hike for the 2015/16 season and I hope to be back, but if I do move on I would like to thank Jan, Ken, Glenda, Malcom, Ming, Christine and all who helped and supported the NHS Outings over the last few years.

*Francis and Glenda Bradley*



The day was nicely rounded off with a beer at a nearby “café” where Members thanked Frank for all his good work at organizing hikes, and wished him well, in the event that he ( and Glenda) do have to leave us this summer. Cheers Frank!

From the talk and video we learned that:

- ✚ there are 20,000 species of butterfly worldwide, of which China has 2000 and Hong Kong 220, so quite a large proportion considering HK's small size. 200 of the 220 can be found at Fung Yuen
- ✚ the large (13cm) Common Birdwing, belonging to the Swallowtail group of butterflies, is protected by law, making it the only protected insect in HK. This group also includes the Common Mormon, the most common butterfly in HK
- ✚ traditional fung shui woods are one possible explanation for the high diversity of butterflies found in HK
- ✚ butterfly wings have "scales" which reflect light, which adds to their beauty
- ✚ how to tell butterflies from moths? The only true difference is that butterfly antenna have "bobbles" or clubs at the end. Not all moths are nocturnal, and some butterflies don't appear till after sundown
- ✚ the butterfly lifecycle is a complete metamorphosis of four stages: egg – caterpillar (larva) – chrysalis (pupa, which can undergo up to 5 sheddings) – butterfly (adult)
- ✚ the first thing an emerging larva eats is its own eggshell. Another example of the stunningly clever design of Mother Nature is that the butterfly emerges from the chrysalis upside down and hangs underneath a leaf so that gravity can help it to dry and spread its wings. It is also much safer from predators, hidden under the leaf. We watched a 2 minute video of an emerging Pale Awlet, whereas the whole process truly takes about 2 hours
- ✚ further fascinating tricks of Nature can be found in butterflies' different behaviours:
  - some butterflies have a symbiotic relationship with ants
  - some have flight patterns to attract the opposite sex
- ✚ caterpillars only eat one type of plant and would rather starve than try new food
- ✚ some butterflies are poisonous to their predators, although the toxic generally only results in diarrhea or similar symptoms, rather than death. Some clever birds that accidentally eat a poisonous butterfly have learnt to warn other birds before they follow suit!
- ✚ Poisonous butterflies tend to be the brightly coloured yellow and red ones. Some butterflies are copycats, in that they look very similar to a poisonous variety, but are not
- ✚ the group known as Greys have false tails, confusing their predators into thinking they are facing the opposite direction to what they really are
- ✚ butterfly camouflage is first class, with some looking like a dead leaf. A chrysalis also will reflect its surroundings, eg as a twig or even a bird dropping
- ✚ the pretty picture of butterflies eating the nectar of flowers is incomplete: they also eat tree sap, muddy water, some fruit eg lychees, and dog poo!

*Jan Campbell*