

## NHS VISIT TO KADOORIE FARM AND BOTANICAL GARDEN

SUNDAY 3 APRIL 2016

Our party of 18, including four 'first-timers', arrived in good time at KFBG on a brighter, warmer day than had been expected in this cool and wet spring of 2016. We were soon met by Dr Chiu Sein Tuck, our guide for the day, who began our tour with an introductory visit to the small Farm Museum that told the story of the Kadoorie Brothers and the establishment and ongoing life of the Farm.

We then tried to make our way quickly to the Wild Animal Rescue Centre as we were fortunate enough that one of the staff was going to spare us some time there, but there is always too much to see en route to where you are heading at this place! So we took in the large Da Hua Bai pigs and several trees in glorious bloom, including Queen's Wreath (*Petrea volubilis*) before we got there.



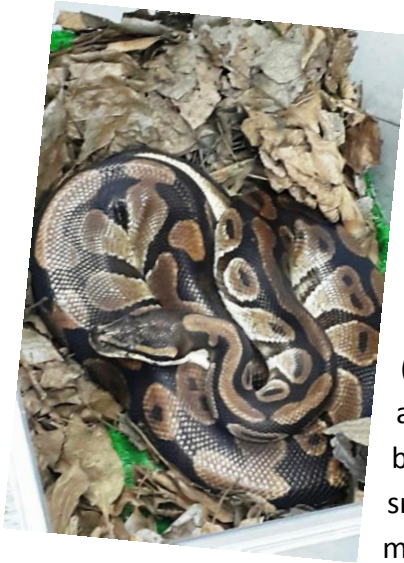
NHS members always consider it a real treat and a highlight of the visit to be allowed access to the animal hospital, as it provides sightings of such unusual fauna. On this occasion, Debbie was able to show us some very cute little Indian Star Tortoises, which sadly are often smuggled into HK by the suitcase load. We heard about, but did not see, the Golden Coin Turtle that Chris B and friends had had a hand in rescuing from a stream in Lantau and which



was now being looked after at the Farm. Another cage held a Slow Loris, a member of the Prosimion family (like lemurs), which looked a bit like a cross between a koala and a sloth to me! Most of the animals that end up here are either abandoned exotic pets, many of which would have been obtained illegally anyway, or those confiscated at the point of illegal entry by Customs.



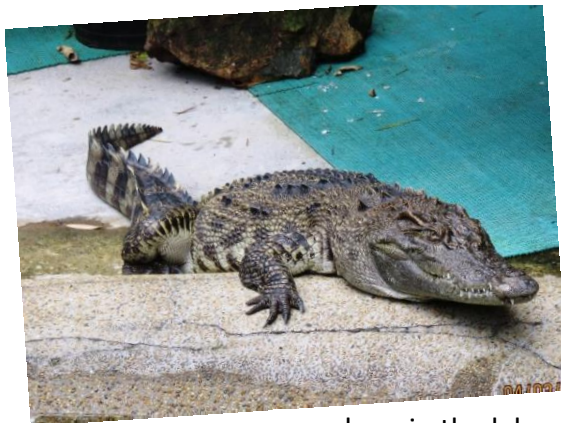
The next exhibit was a Royal Python from Africa who had 'lived' at the Farm for many years now. Whilst Debbie would not use the word 'tame' to describe him, we were invited to touch him – some did, some politely declined! Debbie went on to tell us about a recently introduced project of the AFCD, the government department that can be called in to



catch a snake. The Dept is micro-chipping Burmese pythons that it catches so that the snake can be traced. This enables them to keep track of how many wild pythons are caught and released, information not previously held.

In the holding area outside the hospital we saw a Siamese Crocodile (WHY would anyone try to keep one as a pet???), an injured but huge and beautiful Brown Fish Owl, a spitting snarling fierce-eyed Leopard Cat, and many white mice which serve as food for

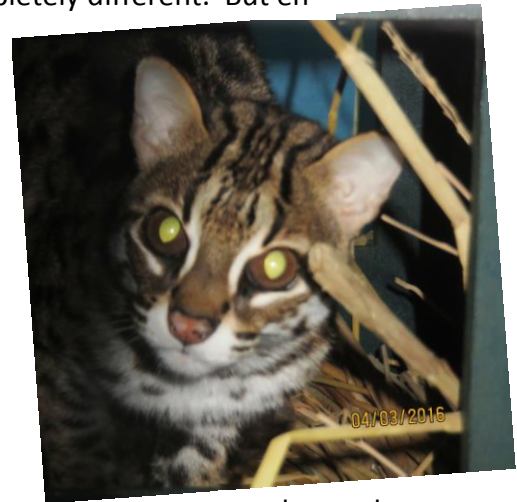
the pythons and others. Interestingly, the mice are gassed first rather than being put into their predator's cage live so as to minimize their trauma - an act which I found very touching.



Dragging ourselves away from Debbie and her delights, it was time for something completely different. But en

route we spotted the Orchid Greenhouse..... Tuck explained that a lot of scientific work

was done in the laboratory buildings



nearby, as they were 'finger-printing' orchids from around the region. KFBG does not concern itself with work such as creating new orchid hybrids but sticks to helping to answer the many still-unanswered questions about existing species.





He then led us into the Fruit Forest which was set on terraces on a hillside. This relatively small area served as a model of agroforestry and as such was like a miniature version of a project that KFBG are working on in Hainan where soils have been depleted by misguided mono-cropping. The local villagers living in the hills there were being taught how to do multi-storey plant cultivation that made much better use of the land, with shorter plants growing below the fruit trees, for example, and other ground covering plants providing natural mulch. The Farm worked as a long-term friend on projects such as this, with patience a requirement. Results are being seen, not just in farming methods but in associated wildlife factors, as there is less reliance on and harvesting of forest products and less disturbance to the forest areas.

Finally Tuck showed us a “One Dao Farm” – this traditional measurement refers to a size of paddy land approx 7000 sq ft and can support the growth of sufficient vegetable produce to feed five people all year round with only a couple of man-hours input per week. It was a bonus to spot some White-backed Munia flitting about, landing on the reeds and grasses.



After saying our goodbyes and thanks to Tuck, we then tucked in (sorry!) to our picnic lunches before catching the shuttle bus to the very top of the Farm, where we enjoyed the magnificent views of nearby hillsides and Shek Kong below. The majority of the group spent the rest of the afternoon ambling back downhill, taking in as many delights as possible on these



wonderful scenic pathways, often with the stream and small waterfalls running alongside us. The variety of flora there is a naturalist’s delight; this beautiful lantern-shaped blossom was a favourite for me. Can anyone help to identify it?

It was a very happy bunch indeed who then enjoyed more fauna-watching at the mule sheds and aviaries back at the lower levels, before we had to depart.

*Report by Jan Campbell / Photographs by Alan Goldstein and Julie Moffat*