

Hong Kong Natural History Society
April 2017 Sai Kung Hoi Ha Outing Report

The weather was unstable, but we had determined to hike along Tai Tan Country Trail which includes a challenging ascent and descent on wet days. After picking up the permit to enter the restricted area beyond Pak Tam Chung, our coach took us to Hau Tong Kai where we gathered at a picnic area for a quick briefing. Members were given details of the route with places for breaks and things to observe in Hoi Ha.



We descended along the creek from Hau Tong Kai to Tai Tan and arrived at the coast at 12:30pm. After a short break, we then hiked along the coast for another 30 minutes, arriving at a beach for our lunch break. Around here, members took time to explore the natural habitat. We found small crabs which we believe were Mud/Mangrove crabs (*Scylla serrata*), also called black crabs. After lunch, we began the more challenging ascent to get to our next regrouping junction at Lan Lo Au. On the way, members admired the beauty of the sea view with Sharp Peak in the distance. Later we saw some interesting fungi (below). Fungus produces enzymes with the unique ability to disintegrate complex



molecules of wood, fulfilling an important ecological role as a wood decomposer. This characteristic of fungi, whereby it produces enzymes to acquire its food, actually places it in a different kingdom to plants. This and other more recently discovered differences mean that fungus is now known to be more genetically related to animals than plants! (Source: Wikipedia). On both sides of the trail, we were greeted by budding Rose Myrtle bushes

(*Rhodomyrtus tomentosa*). What a glorious sight it would be if coming a week later to see the area covered by these beautiful rich pink blossoms! Luckily enough, for whatever reason its growth was more advanced than the rest, we did see one bush of purplish Rose Myrtle in full bloom!



We arrived at Hoi Ha at 3:00pm. First, we went coral viewing at the pier. With the sunlight reflecting on the high tide of this jade green water, we could just make out one brain coral (*Playtygyra sp.*). Here, members were also told the legend of the drumming rock seen a short distance away. This is a flat-topped piece of rock which villagers in the old days believed would bring forth bad luck affecting the livelihood of the fishermen if it was hit by a strong easterly wind (which bounced off the rock creating the drumming sound). We then moved on to see the kiln which shows Hong Kong's early industry of lime production, using oyster shells and coral skeletons. The lime kiln reflects the history and longevity of coral communities in this area. The final part of this mini eco-tour plan was to see three true mangrove species. First, to observe how *Exoecaria agallocha* has adapted to survive the salt content of seawater by gathering all the salt to ONE leaf, making this one leaf turn yellow and fall off. Also to feel the salt content excreted on the surface of leaves of *Aegiceras coniculatum*. We were also hoping to witness the dispersal of seeds of *Kandelia obovata*, with its seed pods having fallen into the sand and standing in water waiting for germination at the right time. However, by this time it was raining heavily, so most members skipped this part to go for a beer at the village store!

It was a blessing that rain only came at the very end of this hike during our eco-tour. All the participants were safe and well, and returned to town at our scheduled time.

As one member said, 'I'd rather walk in drizzle than under the hot sun'. This rainy day in Sai Kung Hoi Ha was not bad after all, and we accomplished our targets happily! (With an ambition to include the nature trail of Wan Chai Peninsula next time.)



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