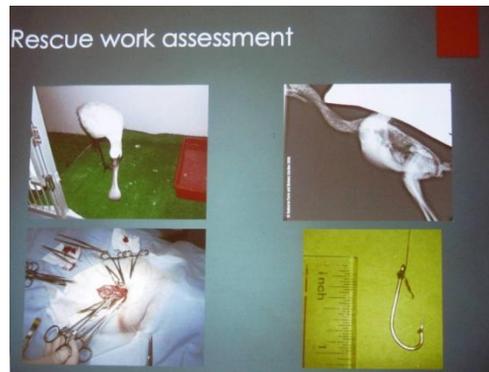


The Hong Kong Natural History Society

Report on Dinner Talk entitled “Caring for Wildlife and Exotic Animals”, presented at Café 8 on 6 December 2018 by Dr Alex Grioni, Manager of the Wildlife Rescue Veterinary Programme at Kadoorie Farm in Hong Kong



Members and guests assembled in Café 8 at 6:30pm and, after informal introductions and conversation, Dr Grioni commenced his presentation at 7pm.

Dr Grioni gave an overview of the growth of Hong Kong and the establishment of Kadoorie Farm by Lord Lawrence and his brother Sir Horace Kadoorie in the years after the Second World War, in the midst of the rapid influx of Chinese immigrants into Hong Kong at that time. As many of these immigrants were farmers it was felt that an agricultural aid project would be a valuable way of helping people to help themselves and thus to promote their independence. To this end the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association (KAAA) was set up in 1951 and this provided training and some interest-free loans to the farming community.

From these beginnings, the Kadoorie Farm was established on its present site at Paak Ngau Shek on the slopes of Tai Mo Shan in 1956. Here training and demonstration of crop production and animal husbandry techniques were offered to further promote effective and profitable farming methodologies. Aid projects were set up on many aspects of animal, crop and farm management and, over the following years, Kadoorie Farm became a respected centre of excellence in these areas. In 1995, The Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden (KFBG) was established with a Mission “To harmonise our relationship with the environment”, and its work covers a very wide range of activities from Fauna and Flora Conservation to Sustainable Living, Education and Conservation in China. As Manager of the Wildlife Rescue Veterinary Programme, Dr Grioni’s work falls largely into the Fauna Conservation Department of KFBG and the remainder of his talk centred on this work.



A very wide range of animals are covered by in the rescue programme. Broadly, the animals passing through the programme fall into five categories. These are: Birds, Mammals, Reptiles, Stray Snakes, and Amphibians. Of these, the largest categories are Reptiles (58%), Stray Snakes (23%) and Birds (15%).

Rescue work may be broken down into three main phases. Firstly, animals are received from various sources, notably from Hong Kong Government and also from further afield in Asia as KFBG becomes increasingly involved in collaborative rescue and research activities across the region. All animals entering the programme are given a medical examination immediately upon arrival to determine appropriate remedial treatments.

Secondly, animals are treated and nurtured back to health using the excellent facilities available to KFBG staff. And thirdly, animals are either released back into their natural habitats in Hong Kong or, when necessary, re-homed in locations conducive to their survival and growth. Individuals that are not deemed fit to survive in the wild are humanely euthanised.

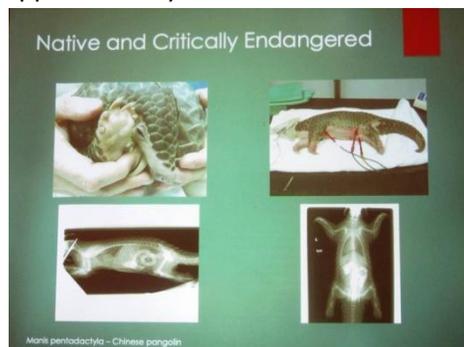
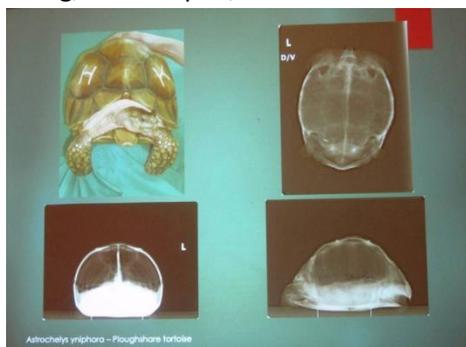
Rescue work in numbers

Total number of animals received, released and rehomed through the rescue centre programme for the **Period 1994 to 30 November 2018**

	Received	Released	Rehomed
Birds	6,943	2,907 (42%)	69 (1%)
Mammals	1,279	346 (27%)	83 (6%)
Reptiles	27,543	1,294 (5%)	10,005 (36%)
Stray Snakes	10,942	10,139 (93%)	243 (2%)
Amphibians	561	19 (3%)	9 (2%)
Grand Total	46,627	13,996 (30%)	10,393 (22%)

Since the inception of the rescue programme over 20 years ago, more than 46,000 animals have passed through the system. Whilst it can never be possible to rescue all of these animals, it is impressive to note that about 30% of animals have been successfully released back to their natural habitat whilst about 22% have been successfully re-homed. It is interesting to note that these success rates have remained largely the same throughout the existence of the programme.

Dr Grioni then went on to describe in more detail some of the more interesting rescue cases with which KFBG have been involved. The animals involved in these cases included Ploughshare Tortoises, Pangolin, Stray Pythons, Crocodiles, Turtles and Pig-nosed Turtles and the locations concerned included Hong Kong, West Papua, Indonesia and the Philippines. Many of these animals are currently regarded as endangered.

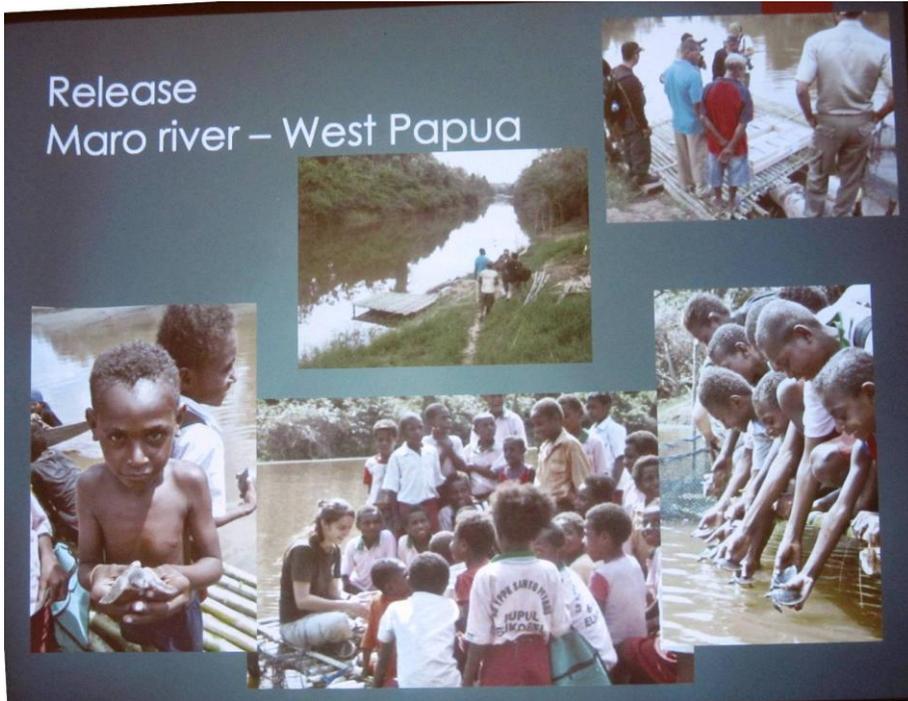


endangered.

The rescue work includes indigenous wild mammals. In the past twenty years in Hong Kong nine out of twelve pangolins were successfully

returned to the wild by KFBG. Some veterinary collaborative work includes helping other NGOs or Government departments in dealing with their animal medical problems. Among others, few cases included surgeries of crocodiles belonging to the Wetland Park in Tin Shui Wai. Stray Pythons have been rescued and provided with electronic tagging devices prior to their successful return to the wild. Such

tagging provides valuable information concerning the typical movements of snake populations thus enabling improved monitoring and protection of these creatures.



In the wider Asian region, collaborative rescue operations of endangered species in the Philippines and West Papua were of particular interest. About 3000 turtles were discovered on the island of Palawan in the Philippines. The turtles were in grave danger and urgent action was required to save them. A team from KFBG was sent to Palawan where, in collaboration with colleagues from the Philippines and several

other countries, strenuous efforts were made to treat the turtles and to improve their habitat. These efforts were a great success. In 2011 in West Papua, a population of pig-nosed turtles was found to be in serious decline. These animals were moved to KFBG where they underwent lengthy treatments to stabilize and improve their condition and were eventually taken back to the Maro River in West Papua where they were reintroduced to the wild. The turtles were welcomed home by local residents and Government officials and undertakings were made to ensure that all such vulnerable animal populations would be properly cared for in the future.

These operations illustrate the vital importance of teamwork, both locally and internationally, if threatened animal populations are to be sustained. In addition, the importance of governmental support for such work cannot be overstressed.

After questions from Members, Dr Gioni was thanked for his excellent presentation and a buffet dinner was enjoyed by all present.

Stewart Traynor

Photos courtesy of Dr Alex Gioni