

**Hong Kong Natural History Society**  
**Report on February 2018 Visit to Kadoorie Farm & Botanical Gardens**

It was a seriously cold day in Hong Kong on Saturday 4 February when our party visited KFBG; with all the extra padding of our warm clothing it was perhaps just as well there was a bit of spare room on the bus, with 13 members and 1 guest participating.

Our guide for the day was once again Dr Chiu Sein Tuck, the gentleman who had looked after us on our last visit in April 2016. Kadoorie had again kindly granted our request to visit the Animal Rescue Centre, so we headed there quickly - pausing only to photograph some stunning pink dombeya (*right*) - it being warm and snug inside the "ARC."! There, Senior Conservation Officer Kit introduced himself and proceeded to enthral us with information for the remainder of the morning. He began by explaining that the hospital had a "no residents" target, the aim being to provide only short-term care for the animals in need. Various staff who worked in shifts recorded the care regime of feeding, cleaning, and medically treating the patients on a simple whiteboard on the wall.



There were fewer "exhibits" for us to see than on previous visits since, being winter, several species were hibernating, but there was a small masked palm civet cat (*paguma larvata*). This should have been a treat for us, the small mammal being our NHS logo, and indeed it was the first time some members had seen one, but the young civet was a sad case. Curled up and inactive, the poor thing was blind and prone to fits, which is presumably why it had been found abandoned by its mother. The prognosis was bleak and Kit told us the civet would likely become a case for euthanasia: Nature is cruel, and only the fittest survive. The other, far livelier, inpatient was a barn owl which had been intercepted by the authorities from an internet sale and was being held as a prosecution exhibit. Apparently the Harry Potter movies had unwittingly done owls no favours at all! as the amount of illegal trading in them has soared.

Outside, there were more barn owls and Kit explained how KFBG works with the SPCA, the "first responder" in legal cases. It is illegal to *import* these birds but *possession* is a grey area of the law! so there is still a market for them in HK. This rather ambiguous situation, coupled with a lack of training on legal matters for AFCD officers, is naturally a frustrating environment within which to work.

We also saw in these outside cages – if we looked carefully! - some wood owls, a basra,

and a brown fish owl. Snakes, mongoose, and golden coin turtles we had to believe Kit were asleep under the straw! These turtles are critically endangered and can sell for USD20,000 each on the black market! Amazingly, Kadoorie currently housed about 100 of them! Again, an anomalous situation exists whereby it is not illegal to *own* one in HK.

Having got quite cold standing outside those pens, we were marched up a steep slope, which at least warmed us up, to the Raptor and Owl sanctuary. Here we sat by a small



enclosure where Kit's assistant Tracy introduced us to another barn owl, called Ron (Harry Potter, remember..?). Ron weighs 330g and eats 2 mice (about 60g) a day. Kit's ensuing talk on barn owls taught us that they are popular on farms as they eat the rodents that eat the farmer's seeds; they have four equally spaced toes; the parabola of their face shape catches sounds waves and thus contributes to their super hearing, as does the fact that the right and

left ear holes are at different heights, a feature unique among birds to this owl; their fuzzy-edged feathers cut down sound in flight, as does their flap-and-glide flying method; they can turn their necks 275 degrees, and need this flexibility because their eyes are fixed in their skull; this fixing of the eyes means the head is quite still while the body flies, since visual stabilisation (ie no blur) is essential to their hunting – they can in fact see the sun move! Since Ron's legal case is now over, he has become a permanent resident at Kadoorie, and he will no doubt delight many other visitors as he did us.

There was time for a quick look at the kites and crested goshawks in the raptor section, and Diana the salmon crested cockatoo (a surrendered pet), Oscar the sulphur crested cockatoo, green Amazon parrots, macaws and others in the parrot section on the way down to the picnic tables and café where we had our lunch.

After lunch we boarded the minibus Kadoorie had generously supplied for the exclusive use of our group and took the easy way up to the top of the hill. A short walk near the T S Woo Memorial gave us the Taiwanese cherry blossom we had been promised, and very beautiful it was too. Most of the party spent the afternoon walking back downhill, revelling in the multitude of plant species to be viewed and enjoyed en route, including the seasonal flowering apricot mume. Pictures of these two and many more can be seen on Peter's photo collage included separately in the newsletter. The day was rounded off perfectly (for this writer) by a visit to the Piers Jacobs Wildlife Sanctuary to see the wild boat and barking (muntjac) deer.

*Report: Jan Campbell*