

## Report on HKNHS Firefly Night Walk – Saturday 2nd June 2018

Have you ever seen a firefly? I don't mean the fairy lights flashing on and off in the darkness of a forested track, but the actual insect responsible? Those of us who joined Maureen's walk have – but more of that later.

Nine people, including that well-known visitor to Hong Kong Frank Bradley, met Maureen at Sha Tin Wai MTR station on a balmy (more or less) night to walk through Ma On Shan Country Park up to Sha Tin Pass in search of fireflies. Maureen did warn us at the beginning that, because of the lack of recent rains, we may be disappointed as fireflies like the dampness of water courses. Nothing daunted, we set off along the road that led up (of course) to the entrance of Ma On Shan Country Park. Two members hadn't made it to the meeting place on time, but thanks to the wonders of modern technology they were able to assure the leader that they would catch us up.

It had still been light when we left the station, but by the time we reached the country park, we needed to don the head lamps or pull out the torches. The climb up was, as advised on the outing flyer, not a difficult one. Wide, well-embedded rocks rose up and around through the trees. The sounds of night insects accompanied us for much of the walk, but there were no sounds of running water.

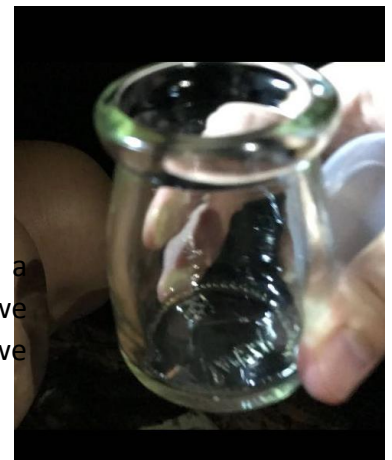
The first sighting of wildlife was a couple of unidentified frogs that had crossed the road just before the country park, and the second was of the object of our walk – some fireflies. Or so we thought. Maureen had placed her pack which had some reflective patches on it at the side of the track to trick those of us who were bringing up the rear. Not our first sighting, then, of fireflies.

Onwards and upwards, and despite being so well-camouflaged it looked like one of many dry leaves beside the track, an Asian common toad (*Duttaphrynus melanostictus*) was spotted by an eagle-eyed member.



Shortly afterwards, we had our first genuine sighting of some fireflies – not many, but enough to satisfy us that the walk had not been in vain. Rather like the March Plover Cover hike, where we saw lots of the flowering vine *Mucuna birdwoodiana* that had not been so evident on Chris Bailey's earlier walk specifically to see that plant, once we had seen our first lot of fireflies, we had several more sightings of many more fireflies.

The first prolific sighting was in a gully beside the track, and several adventurous members scrambled down to the stream to get a closer look at the insects that make those flashing lights. How lucky we are to have such members because those of us who didn't venture off the track were able to share the experience when Fox, who had come equipped with a small glass jar specifically for the purpose, captured a firefly and brought it up to the track to show us. First we looked with our lights turned off. Then, for a short while we turned them on again to see the insect responsible for the magic. Fox's



firefly was less than a centimetre in length, with a brownish-black body and a round orange head. After several attempts to take its photo, Fox released the insect a few metres down the track towards the stream from whence it had come, and to the oohs and aahs of NHS members, it flew off into the night sky, flickering and flashing its light.

From this point, the track took us across the stream several times and we had a number of other sightings of fireflies, the most magical of which was just below the road that led to Sha Tin Pass. We stood on a bridge in a night wonderland of tiny flashing lights on both sides of the track. Flashing fireflies near the water and in the trees – fireflies everywhere! We spent so long being enchanted by these insects that we didn't actually reach the pass until about an hour after the time we should have finished the walk.

It was time for a break and a decision. The break was accompanied by Anne's refreshing watermelon and cantaloupe slices (thanks very much Anne) and by photos of a large dog whose red wine-drinking master was happy to show off the dog's tricks. Fox decided to head down to visit his mother in Wong Tai Sin, and the rest of us decided to head back towards Tai Wai along the Wilson Trail.



This last part of the walk was down lots of steps – far more, it seemed, than when we climbed up - with views of the lights of the Sha Tin valley. Then there was a flat walk alongside a catchment watercourse, with views of Amah Rock silhouetted against the night sky by the lights of Kowloon. Down to a picnic area (where we were astounded at the amount of rubbish that had been left on the tables and on the ground despite the presence of both recycle and rubbish bins) at another entrance to the country park. Our 7.5 km night hike to see the fireflies had ended.



At this point, those who were Hong Kong island – bound headed to a bus stop to take them home, while those of us who live in the New Territories continued down towards Tai Wai. Our path took us towards some loudly barking dogs, and it was a close encounter of the boar kind that was actually the reason for their barking. Maureen and I had to pass within about a metre of a medium-sized wild boar that was foraging beside the path. We had no choice, so we didn't make eye contact and walked past very quickly.

This night hike to see fireflies was hot, sweaty and very rewarding. Thanks, Maureen, for organising and leading it.

*Report by Julie Moffat.*

*Photos by Judy Roe, Frank Bradley  
Picture of firefly from [www. ali-nsa.net](http://www.ali-nsa.net)*