



ANNUAL REPORT

2019 – 2020

BLOOM ASSOCIATION HONG KONG



VISION AND MISSION

To resist the fate of an overfished, barren ocean in the future, by proving that dedicated action can reverse the course of environmental and human tragedy. Giving a voice to the voiceless; ensuring that humanity has a future where children have food and fishermen have jobs, by restoring ocean ecosystems to their full biological capacity.



WHAT WE DO AT BLOOM HK

ONE. SHARING WHAT WE KNOW

Bringing knowledge of the many problems and solutions to ocean conservation issues, both local and global, to people, both local and global.

TWO. RESEARCH

Creating new information and filling knowledge gaps about ocean conservation and the marine world by carrying out scientifically rigorous research.

THREE. ADVOCACY

Assisting Hong Kong's progression towards a future of better oceans and fisheries by working with governments in establishing and enforcing marine policies.

FOUR. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Engaging the public through creative media to spread the word about our work, and restoring a sense of personal responsibility to marine conservation in all levels of the general public.



Marco Chan@14°E Hong Kong Reef Fish Survey

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International Wildlife Trade

The 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP18) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) took place on 17-28 August 2019, in Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting saw the listing of the shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*), longfin mako shark (*Isurus paucus*), giant guitarfishes (6 species from *Glaucostegidae*) and wedgefishes (10 species from *Rhinidae*) onto CITES Appendix II.

In addition to sharks, CITES CoP18 also saw an unexpected win for sea cucumbers, listing teatfishes, including *Holothuria nobilis*, *Holothuria whitmaei*, and *Holothuria fuscogilva* onto CITES Appendix II.



The successful listing of sharks and rays onto CITES Appendix II in CoP18 brings more species under trade regulations. The implications for Hong Kong, being a trade hub for related dried seafood products, is far-reaching, as inspections at customs ports will need to identify fins belonging to these newly-listed species, to ensure that trades are complying with CITES implementations.

Notably, with the listings of teatfishes, a section of the workshop was dedicated to the visual identification of the three listed species in commonly traded forms. This was the first time that a teatfish identification workshop was held, and success hopefully means its continuation for the Hong Kong government in future workshops, and for other key trading governments in other countries/territories.

SEA CUCUMBER TRADE

Like shark fins, sea cucumbers are also a product found ubiquitous in the local dried seafood trade. Moving forward and with the listing of teatfishes onto CITES, BLOOM HK will also conduct research surrounding the teatfish trade.



Like shark fin, dried sea cucumbers are also a product ubiquitous in the local dried seafood market.

BLOOM HK continues to discover opportunities for collaboration with countries/territories related to the shark fin trade.

Notable visits this year include a workshop with customs officers of the government of Peru, sharing on shark fin visual and DNA identification methods to aid their implementation of CITES regulations.

In addition, by invitation of JWCS, BLOOM HK has also delivered a seminar on the shark fin trade and shark conservation to Japan's general public.

ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADES AS ORGANIZED AND SERIOUS CRIMES

Every year since local regulations were implemented in 2014, Hong Kong has made seizures of illegally traded shark fin and other wildlife products. However, prosecution rates remain relatively low, and criminal syndicates behind these organised illegal trades remain uninvestigated.

Globally, the illegal wildlife trade is one of the most lucrative crimes, often compared with human, drugs and firearms trafficking. As one of the world's key trade hubs for wildlife products and handling a large proportion of the world's shark fin trade, Hong Kong is in a position to effectively combat illegal wildlife trades by taking local action.

BLOOM HK is a member of a working group of NGOs and experts, taking steps to encourage Hong Kong's government to take wildlife crimes in the form of illicit trades of wildlife products more seriously, by recognising such crimes as organised and serious crimes under the local law. Should this be implemented, local authorities would have clear obligations to conduct investigations behind seized products, facilitating increasing deterrence for illegal trades and increasing capacity for the arrest and prosecution of criminal groups.

LOCAL CITES IMPLEMENTATION TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

As before, BLOOM HK has been supporting the relevant departments of the Hong Kong government by providing training workshops for implementation. In January 2020, officers from the Customs and Excise Department (CED) and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) were trained on the visual identification of shark fins for these newly listed species, along with fins of species listed in previous CITES CoPs. The workshop was also joined by representatives of the Indonesia government.

Following these workshops, Hong Kong made record-breaking seizures of CITES-listed shark fins and related products.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and the associated travel restrictions in many regions, the Singapore government were not able to join this training workshop as planned. BLOOM HK continues to work with the Singapore government and other local NGOs on the ground to seek opportunities to bring the workshop to Singapore in the coming months.

LOCAL SHARK FIN CONSUMPTION SURVEY

As an update to research initiated in 2009/10 and repeated in 2014/15, in 2019/20, BLOOM HK has started the third round of sociological surveys looking into the shark fin-related consumption habits and attitudes among Hongkongers. Once completed, the results, compared with surveys in the previous years, will offer insight into how local shark fin consumption has changed in the last decade. Such long-term comparison for Hong Kong's shark fin consumption is unprecedented.



Training workshop for AFCD and CED.



Seafood Trade

Seafood is an integral part of Hong Kong's culinary culture, and in particular, live seafood are a part of daily meals for many families. With this demand, local fisheries have long been depleted, and most of Hong Kong's seafood today is imported from around the world.

This high demand and consumption in Hong Kong makes the city an opportune place for promoting sustainable seafood consumption, moving the city's seafood consumption towards more sustainability-conscious practices.

For this reason, BLOOM HK has plans to increase work related to the local seafood trade - in particular live reef food fish - in the coming years.

HONG KONG SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD

The term "sustainable seafood" has been present in Hong Kong for several years and occasionally found in menus of high-end restaurants, such as in hotels. However, despite promotion of the concept and products by local NGOs, it is suspected that the average person will not have heard of sustainable seafood, or would not understand what this term means.

In the coming year, BLOOM HK will be partnering with ADM Capital Foundation (ADMCF) on a new sustainable seafood initiative, involving research into the availability of sustainable seafood in local catering outlets, supermarkets and online



Live reef fish and seafood tanks are not uncommon in Hong Kong seafood restaurants, where a variety of species can be found.



Freshness is regarded as highly important in local seafood consumption, and customers often choose their seafood from live tanks.



shops, and where these can be found by consumers. It is hoped that through this initiative, sustainable seafood products can be made more accessible to local consumers, hence making the concept more easy to grasp.

REGIONAL WORKSHOP AND IUCN ASSESSMENTS FOR ASIAN GROUPERS

Groupers are some of the most commonly consumed and sought after live reef food fish for Hong Kong and neighbouring regions. Their popularity for consumption make many grouper species particularly susceptible to overharvesting.

The IUCN Red List assessments provide the conservation statuses of species to indicate the health of wild populations. The conservation statuses can be used to inform conservation action and policy change. These statuses can be updated with assessments, and at the regional or national level, regional assessments can be conducted to more accurately inform local conservation policies.

This year, with the support of the Ocean Park Conservation Fund Hong Kong (OPCFHK) and the IUCN Groupers and Wrasses Specialist Group (IUCN GWSG), BLOOM HK organised regional workshops for IUCN regional assessments of select grouper species. The initiative consisted of two key elements - workshops and assessments. Fisheries experts from around the region were invited to attend, and individuals who had not conducted such assessments before were prioritised. After learning the assessment method through the workshops, participants are invited contribute the relevant fisheries data from their respective regions, and form teams to conduct the assessments.

Despite local social unrest and the global coronavirus pandemic, the workshops were finally successfully completed in May 2020. In the upcoming months, participants will be completing the regional assessment work, which will afterwards be submitted to the IUCN Red List to provide an updated regional assessment results.





Catrin Wong@114°E Hong Kong Reef Fish Survey



Marco Chan@114°E Hong Kong Reef Fish Survey



Local Biodiversity

114ehkreeffish.org

The 114°E Hong Kong Reef Fish Survey was established in 2014 to provide baseline data for Hong Kong's reef fish species.

To date, the project's database has recorded more than 380 species of reef fishes, including more than 20 that are new to Hong Kong's official records, through more than 2000 hours underwater at 80 different dive sites.

Apart from highlighting the vast diversity of Hong Kong's reef fishes, the project's findings have also shed light on some of the less discussed issues, such as the presence of artificially introduced species likely as a result of local fish release activities, and the appearance of tropical species in local waters - a sub-tropical climate, which has been described as a potential impact of climate change.

It is hoped that at least 10 years of data can be collected on Hong Kong's reef fishes, in order for long-term analyses to be conducted on an extensive dataset, on issues such as climate change impacts.

BLOOM HK has continued to hold the 114°E Surveys this year, and on 26th June 2019, officially launched the 114°E Hong Kong Reef Fish Web-Portal. The website is the first of its kind for Hong Kong, introducing reef fish species found in the 114°E Surveys, targeting the general public and using only live fish photographs taken underwater in Hong Kong. It also provides a gallery of photographs for reef fish species - a resource often found wanting in the Asia-Pacific region, and offers a platform for recreational divers to upload their own underwater photographs from dives conducted in Hong Kong.

GETTING TO KNOW OUR WATERS

Throughout the years, data and photographs of live reef fish collected through the 114°E Surveys have been used in further research, publications with universities and local government departments, IUCN regional species assessments, exhibitions, and the creation of resources to locate Hong Kong's marine biodiversity hotspots.

Moving forward, BLOOM HK hopes to explore new ways in which the data can be used and more importantly, how the knowledge gained from the 114°E Surveys can be shared. In doing so, it is hoped that the project can contribute nurturing a deeper understanding, while rebuilding of a sense of appreciation and respect for the local marine life.

SANCTUARIES FOR MARINE LIFE

Under the initiative of The Swire Group Charitable Trust, BLOOM HK has joined other local NGOs and experts to form the Hong Kong Marine Policy Alliance (HKMPA). The Alliance provides a platform for efforts to improve marine conservation in Hong Kong to be aggregated and strategised, and for goals to be aligned.

One of the more often discussed goals is the expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Hong Kong. Currently, less than 10% of Hong Kong's waters are protected as MPAs, and a smaller percentage still is free from fishing activities. It is hoped that through coordinated partnership, more ambitious goals, such as expanding local MPAs, can be achieved for marine conservation in Hong Kong.

A TRIP TO TAIWAN

Under the funding of the National Geographic Society, the 114°E Survey was introduced to communities in Taiwan for the first time.

The project introduced the 114°E Survey methodology to local dive groups, and shared experiences in conducting citizen science underwater surveys for documenting reef fish. A group of volunteers from Hong Kong joined this mission, to conduct experimental survey dives with Taiwan's local dive groups.

It was hoped that through this exchange, both Hong Kong and Taiwan's teams can be

inspired to tap into the potential of recreational divers and diving activities to create more citizen science initiatives that help us to understand our waters. While the 114°E Survey looks only at reef fishes, divers were encouraged to consider establishing similar surveys for other marine life, such as nudibranchs, shrimps, jellyfish and others.

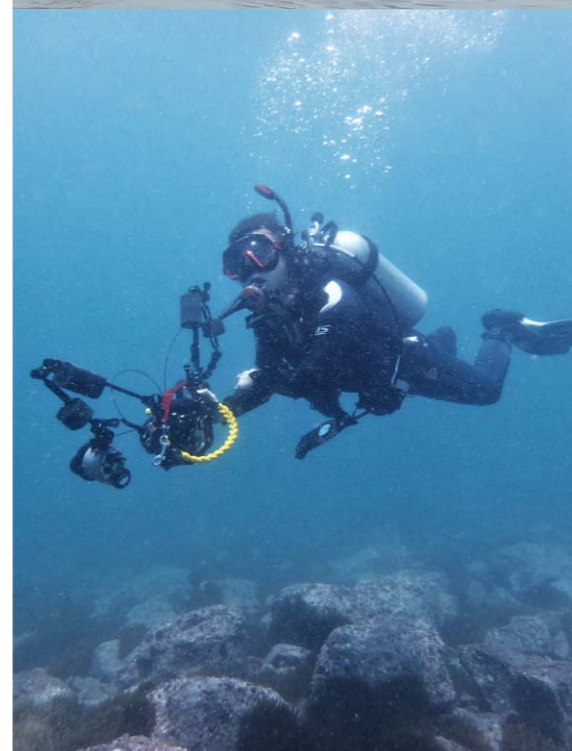
SPECIAL OUTREACH:

"UNDERWATER WORLD OF HONG KONG" PHILATELIC PRODUCTS

Worth noting this year, the 114°E Survey collaborated with the AFCD and Hongkong Post to issue the "Underwater World of Hong Kong" - marine life-themed special stamps. Reef fish species appearing on the stamps are linked to the corresponding species pages on the 114°E Web-Portal.



Display of the "Underwater World of Hong Kong" philatelic collection.

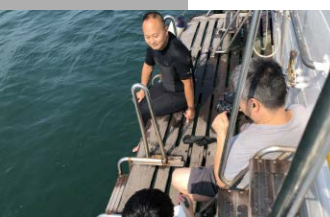


NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER: STAN SHEA

Leading the 114°E Survey project, BLOOM HK's Marine Programme Director Stan Shea joined the National Geographic Explorer community, becoming one of the first National Geographic Explorers in Hong Kong to have a locally based project. It is hoped that with this new title, more work can be done for the conservation of Hong Kong's marine environment and resources.



Education & Media



As is the case in every year, BLOOM HK carried out a wide range of education, media and outreach activities for all ongoing marine projects. As always, BLOOM HK welcomes invitations from all groups, from school children to corporate events, for conducting interviews, seminars or other events. Popular topics include Hong Kong's shark fin story, local marine biodiversity, the 114°E Survey, and sustainable seafood, and special requests for tailored topics are also welcome. Please contact us for more information!



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THE HONG KONG TEAM



Stan Shea
Marine Programme Director, Hong Kong

Stan is the most long-standing member of BLOOM Association Hong Kong. Joined in 2009, he is the face and steer of all of BLOOM's projects in Hong Kong, whether in research, advocacy or outreach. He believes strongly in spreading the message of conservation as a key step in protecting the oceans. To date his seminars have reached over 10,000 individuals worldwide.

Stan holds a BSc in Environmental Sciences from Oxford Brookes University and a Master's degree in Ecology and Biodiversity from The University of Hong Kong.

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Kathleen Ho
Marine Programme Manager, Hong Kong

Kathleen joined the BLOOM Hong Kong office in January 2015, after obtaining a BSocSc degree in Geography and an M.Phil. in environmental ethics, both from The University of Hong Kong.

At BLOOM, Kathleen is chiefly responsible for managing ongoing projects of the marine programme, assisting with field research, engaging the younger audiences for information sharing seminars and communications.

Funds & Donations

This year, BLOOM HK was received funding from, in alphabetical order, ADM Capital Foundation, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Hong Kong Shark Foundation, International Fund for Animal Welfare, Japan Wildlife Conservation Society, Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Shark Conservation Fund of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, Swire Group Charitable Trust, The Pew Charitable Trust, TRAFFIC International, Wildlife Conservation Society, and other one-off donations.

