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Protection Needed for Butterfly Hotspots

Information from Hong Kong Lepidopterists' Society shows that in the past five years, more than 40 butterfly hotspots were recorded across Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, the mainland New Territories and Outlying Islands. Yet 29 of these were outside country parks and lacked proper protection, while 28 hotspots were home to one or more very rare butterfly species. Take Lung Kwu Tan of Tuen Mun and Shen Tau of Lantau Island as examples: there were at least 116 species at Lung Kwu Tan, including the rare Red Lacewing; and over 87 species were nurtured at Shen Tau, including the rare White Dragontail. Neither site was under legal protection.

Dr. Cheng Luk-ki, Division Head of Scientific Research and Conservation of Green Power, said that at present, most butterfly hotspots are outside country park area or are unprotected in any way, so are easily damaged by developments. He said butterfly conservation should cover the protection of both habitats and butterfly species. He also suggested the government should expand the protection net for butterflies, including through a review of the existing legislation.

Currently, there are over 60 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in Hong Kong, but only Fung Yuen of Tai Po was established to protect butterflies. Efforts to protect butterflies must be upgraded. With the coming "Review of the Nature Conservation Policy", sites nurturing rare butterflies should be reviewed. For instance, Shen Tau of Lantau Island and Lung Kwu Tan of Tuen Mun are currently threatened, the former by the planned construction of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macau Bridge and a container terminal, while the latter may be jeopardized by a container terminal, waste treatment facilities (an incinerator) and roadworks.

Furthermore, with regard to the protection of butterfly diversity, only Common Birdwing (*Troides helena*) and Golden Birdwing (*Troides aeacus*) are under legal protection in Hong Kong (Cap. 187 Animals and Plants (Protection of Endangered Species) Ordinance). Other local butterflies, however, are targeted by collectors – for example, Red Lacewing (*Cethosia biblis*) and White Dragontail (*Lamproptera curius*). Therefore, the appendix of animals under protection of the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Cap. 170) requires review. Other highly endangered butterfly species should also be included in the legislation.