

15 December 2008

Green Power Finds Luk Keng Woodlands Ravaged Threatening Butterfly Hotspot

Luk Keng, near Sha Tau Kok Closed Area, is one of the most important butterfly hotspots in the Northeast New Territories. During an ongoing butterfly survey there, Environmental group Green Power has discovered that large tracts of wooded areas – including some within a country park – have been damaged by human activities. Green Power has written to government departments, urging action to halt the damage.

In August 2008, Green Power launched one-year butterfly surveys at three butterfly hotspots, conducted by 67 trained butterfly surveyors. The surveyors are assessing butterfly populations and diversity at Luk Keng, Fanling district; San Tau, Tung Chung and Wu Kau Tan, Tai Po. The data collected will help to protect these butterfly hotspots. In October, butterfly surveyors at Luk Keng found that many trees along the coastal path had been sprayed with herbicide and killed, and fires had damaged some wooded areas.

The affected sites, grassland, shrubland and woodland, were near Fung Hang and Kuk Po in the Luk Keng area. “Fung Hang and Kuk Po are mainly within Plover Cove Country Park”. According to the Country Parks Ordinance, ‘the taking of, destruction of or interference with vegetation within a country park’ is prohibited. Hence, it was an offence to use herbicide and burn vegetation at these sites. Additionally, in 2004, the Environment, Transport and Works Bureau announced the “New Nature Conservation Policy”, which listed Luk Keng among the 12 priority sites for conservation – showing that Luk Keng has high ecological value that needs to be protected.

Several of the plants that were destroyed, such as Lantana (*Lantana camara*) and Wild Vitex (*Vitex quinata*), are nectar sources for adult butterflies as well as food plants for caterpillars. With the loss of caterpillar food plants, adult butterflies will not be able to reproduce, and butterfly populations will be seriously impacted. Apart from butterflies, other insects, reptiles and birds will also be affected. In addition, the damaged areas are beside tidal flats, and the herbicide may enter and pollute the inshore waters.

Green Power has written to the Environment Bureau, the Environmental Protection Department, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department and the Lands Department in order to bring this issue to their attention. Green Power also urged them to strengthen patrols and law enforcement, to safeguard the ecological treasury at Luk Keng from future damage.

Luk Keng Butterfly Survey

From August to October 2008, Green Power Butterfly Surveyors recorded 79 butterfly species at Luk Keng, including 8 rare and 3 very rare species.