

7 February 2013

### **Illegal Excavation in Ta Tit Yan Unveiled**

Green Power Butterfly Surveyors discovered astonishing, large-scale destruction of woodland at Ta Tit Yan, Tai Po, when conducting a butterfly survey on 26 January 2013. The affected area is along a regular butterfly survey route that is known to be a butterfly hotspot.

The destroyed woodland is near to the entrance of Ta Tit Yan Village, to the south of Tai Po Market. The land was abandoned farmland, with many trees and bushes, and the destruction has affected up to 9,000 square metres, which is approximately the turfed area of Hong Kong Stadium. Butterfly Surveyors even discovered that the Ta Tit Yan road sign had been removed to facilitate access by construction vehicles. All vegetation in the area had been completely removed by heavy machinery. Felled trees covered the ground, and a stream passing through was damaged.

The excavated woodland is near the main stream of Tai Po River. After the destruction, the soil has become very loose. As rain season is coming, without emergency restoration, surface soil will be flushed to the stream, leading to an ecological disaster. Soil and stones will block the river, aggravating the chances of flooding along middle and lower sections of Tai Po River. Moreover, the affected area is in a Water Supplies Department catchwater, helping supply Hong Kong drinking water. Destroying waterways and contaminating catchwaters are both offences under the Waterworks Ordinance.

Green Power is concerned that the destruction is paving the way for future development, and has become another example of "destroy first and develop later". In 2010 and 2011, the nearby area Yuen Tun Ha had suffered several incidence of eco-sabotage. Green Power discovered plants that had been sprayed with herbicides, some trees were deliberately snapped or "girdled" (strangling them as they grew), and part of the fields was burnt.

Ta Tit Yan and Yuen Tun Ha are known butterfly hotspots, where over 100 species of butterflies have been recorded. In 2010, Green Power included both places as monitoring sites of the Butterfly Surveyors programme, to conduct regular butterfly surveys. It is believed that this illegal vegetation destruction has removed many plants that are food for butterfly caterpillars and adults, thus affecting butterfly ecology.



## Press Release

In early February, Green Power contacted numerous governmental departments to request follow-up of this incident. Those responsible should stop the destruction immediately, and restore the land as soon as possible. Moreover, as Ta Tit Yan and nearby Yuen Tun Ha have very high ecological value, Green Power hopes the government can further restrict the land use of both places, to guard against over-development and preserve this "Butterfly Paradise".