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## **Butterfly Survey of Tai Lam Country Park Reveals High Butterfly Biodiversity at the Periphery of Country Park**

Green Power annually recruits and trains citizens to become Butterfly Surveyors, to collect local butterfly data and monitor environmental changes in butterfly hotspots. Currently, 10 butterfly hotspots are being monitored. In response to the government's initiative of inviting Hong Kong Housing Society to study the development potential at the periphery of two country parks including Tai Lam Country Park, Green Power has included its periphery as a butterfly monitoring site this year. This brings the number of butterfly hotspots being monitored to 11. Data of the preliminary butterfly survey there is released today.

### **Concern the Government Underestimates Ecological Value**

The preliminary butterfly survey at the periphery of Tai Lam Country Park was conducted in April and May this year. 71 butterfly species were found, accounting for about 30% of all Hong Kong butterfly species. The findings include 2 very rare and 5 rare species. The preliminary data suggests that Tai Lam Country Park has a high butterfly diversity.

The 10km long butterfly survey route in Tai Lam Country Park starts at Ma On Kong Warden Post, passes by the Tsing Tam Reservoirs, and finishes at Ho Pui. Matthew Sin, Senior Environmental Affairs Manager of Green Power, remarks that the route planning involved consideration of butterfly ecology and the level of developmental threats. Since country parks are protected under the Country Park Ordinance, our previous survey routes rarely touched upon country parks. However, the government has already indicated an intention to develop Tai Lam Country Park. Therefore, the newly added survey route has a 90% overlap with Tai Lam Country Park, with an aim of proving the actual ecological value of the periphery of Tai Lam Country Park.

According to the government's announcement, the development potential study will be conducted to the west of Tai Lam Tunnel Toll Plaza, covering an area of more than 20 hectares. This is likely to be within the country park area at Ma On Kong, Kam Tin. Matthew predicts that Housing Society's study area will largely overlap with the butterfly survey route. He believes Housing Authority will soon appoint environmental consultants to assess the ecology of the area. Matthew remarks, "We are concerned that the ecological value and significance of the area will be underestimated, and purposely downplayed. The environmental impact assessments of Lung Mei artificial beach and Lok Ma Chau Spur Line are typical examples. This

is why we have to take a step ahead to record the butterfly species in Tai Lam Country Park with our Butterfly Surveyor programme, so that the data from us and the government can be compared.”

Matthew points out that the species diversity and numbers will generally be lower in the initial stage, based on the experience of monitoring different butterfly hotspots in the past 10 years. More notable records are expected to be made with increasing time and effort. In fact, the preliminary study has recorded a total of 71 butterfly species, which is comparable to some other butterfly hotspots. A rare butterfly species, Magpie Flat (*Abrahamia davidii*), was found during the survey. This species has been recorded at other butterfly hotspots, yet only occasionally recorded, and a relatively high number was recorded at Ma On Kong. In addition, a number of unrated species were spotted, including Common Banded Demon (*Notocrypta paralyos*), Angled Red Forester (*Lethe chandica*), and Green Skirt Baron (*Euthalia niepelti*). They have only been discovered in Hong Kong in recent years. Matthew believes there will be more notable records at the site in the future. A total of 34 butterfly surveyors have commenced a year-long butterfly survey in Tai Lam Country Park.

Matthew reaffirms the opposition to development in country parks. Even though the ecological value of country park peripheries may be lower than that of the core area, the peripheries serve an important function as a buffer zone to protect the core area. According to data collected during the initial survey, the ecological value is in fact much higher than most people would have thought. He is unhappy that the government has created a confrontational situation between conservation and housing development, in which finding land for housing development necessitates sacrificing our country parks. Yet, the government has never announced the distribution and amount of brownfields in Hong Kong, which would allow a more comprehensive discussion in society. Matthew asks: “Take Kam Tin area as an example – why did the government propose housing development in country park, while there are lots of brownfields in areas near Tai Lam Country Park, such as Ma On Kong and Tai Kek in Kam Tin? These brownfields cover even larger areas than the 20-hectare area in Tai Lam Country Park.”