

【 Press for Immediate Release 】

25 Mar 2018



Black-faced Spoonbills tend to rely on artificial wetlands due to habitat loss
Conservation of Deep Bay natural mudflats brook no delay

(Hong Kong, 25 Mar 2018) The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) coordinated *The International Black-faced Spoonbill Census 2018* and it was carried from 19 to 21 of January. During the 2018 census, a total of 3,941 Black-faced Spoonbills were recorded, the figure is the same as it in 2017. Although the overall figure does not indicate that Black-faced Spoonbill (BFS) is further threatened, the numbers recorded in Deep Bay between Hong Kong and Shenzhen continuously decline. This reflects suitable wetland habitats for BFS are shrinking. Coupled with continuous development in the Northwest New Territories, the habitat of BFS in Hong Kong is being seriously threatened. HKBWS appeals to the relevant government departments to develop conservation strategies for BFS habitat as early as possible, which promote measures to protect the wetland and waterbirds in order to maintain the ecological balance.

香港觀鳥會
THE
HONG
KONG
BIRD
WATCHING
SOCIETY

Since 1957 成立

Records in Deep Bay dropped 7% compared with 2017

The census results showed that 350 BFSs were recorded in Deep Bay in 2018, 25 less than the last census. Mr Yu Yat-tung, the Research Manager of HKBWS, believed that the deteriorating quality of wetlands in Deep Bay area may lead to insufficient food supplies for BFS during their migratory journey.

Habitat degradation and destruction of mudflats in Deep Bay

BFS feeds on fish and shrimps. When the birds stay in the Deep Bay area in winter, it relies on mudflats and fishponds for roosting and feeding. With continuous development in Deep Bay in Shenzhen and the northwest New Territories, the habitat of BFSs around Deep Bay has been damaged to various extent. The impact caused by reclamation is the most serious. The reclamation work in Shenzhen in the previous decades reduced the size of mudflats in Deep Bay. Besides, heavy sedimentation at the estuary raised the mudflat elevation, which fosters the encroachment of mangroves. With the rapid growth of mangroves, especially exotic *Sonneratia*, the area of mudflats and the feeding grounds of BFSs keeps on shrinking.

Decrease in habitat quality in fishpond areas due to urban development

Deep Bay is located on the mid-point of the "East Asian-Australasian Flyway", many migratory waterbirds including BFSs coming to Hong Kong every year in winter. In addition, use of some fishponds and wetlands in the northwest New Territories was changed without making any formal applications. This directly affects the foraging range of BFS and the wintering time in Deep Bay. Yu, Yat-tung worried that the continuous development and the decline of freshwater fish farming industry, leading to reduced suitable habitats for BFS, will finally make BFS not visiting and staying in Hong Kong in winter in future.

Illegal animal traps found

In the past two years, HKBWS received 6 cases of 15 illegal traps in the fishponds in Deep Bay during winter time. Some traps caused this endangered bird to get injured or even killed. We understand that the waterbirds might affect harvest of fish, however, illegal use of traps threatening animal lives is forbidden. In this regards, HKBWS appeals fish farmers to use safe and legal methods to drive away birds.





香港觀鳥會
THE
HONG
KONG
BIRD
WATCHING
SOCIETY

Since 1957 成立



Insufficient law enforcement and difficult investigation of illegal case

In the past 6 months, HKBWS found two BFSs were being injured by illegal animal traps. HKBWS reported the incidents to the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD). However, due to the insufficient evidence, the authorities could not make further follow-up actions. We recommend that the AFCD allocate more resources in patrolling and conducting public education in order to enhance awareness of bird conservation and to promote animal-friendly policies.

No more delay on Conservation of Natural mudflats

In the results of the present Census, more than 55% of BFSs were recorded in Taiwan, followed by Mainland China and Japan. Among the BFSs found in Taiwan, nearly 1,800 birds stayed in fishponds and salt pans in Chiayi and Tainan. In Mainland China, 744 were recorded, in which 270 of them were found in the fishponds in Fujian, and the number has nearly doubled to the figure of 2017. BFSs tend to recharge in artificial wetlands, it reflected that natural mudflats might not be able to feed them all.

Since the late 1990s, conservation of the endangered BFS has started in many sites along its flyway. However, with the development around the Yellow Sea region and mudflats along the coast of China, mudflats in this area are declining and deeply affect Deep Bay. The recent figures showed that BFSs tends to rely on artificial wetlands such as fishponds. The sustainability of such artificial wetlands is not as high as mudflats. Yu, Yat-tung worried that "The situation will change the foraging patterns of BFSs and affect the stability of their numbers. So, conservation of natural mudflats is urgent." HKBWS calls all the stakeholders to protect natural mudflats, this is the long-term, effective and sustainable way of conservation for birds and enhancing biodiversity.

Media inquiry, please contact:

Mr Yu Yat-tung

Research Manager

Contact Number: 2377 4387

Email: yyaytung@hkbws.org.hk

Ms Vicky Tang

Senior Development Officer

Contact Number: 2377 4387

Email: tvicky@hkbws.org.hk

