Ocean Park

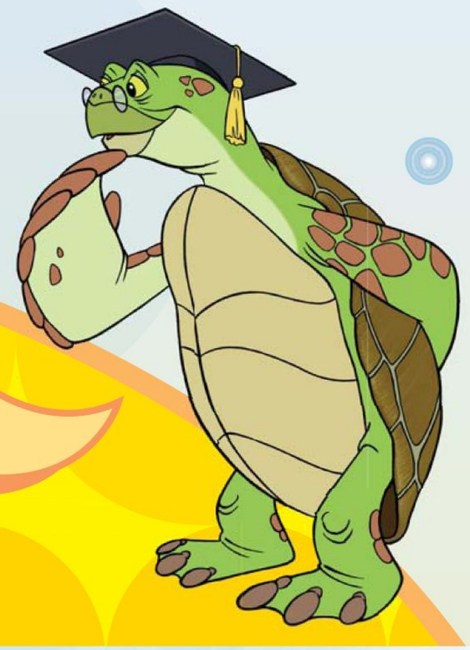
Conservation Highlight Series-1

Hong Kong People's Park - Connecting People With Nature For 32 Years!

Throughout these years, we have been inspiring generations of Hong Kong people and overseas visitors to the wonders of our world by blending conservation, education and entertainment, the founding principles of Ocean Park. So far, we have touched the lives of 90 million people, connecting them with nature.

Our conservation and charity arm, Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong (OPCFHK), is dedicated to nature conservation. It funds research on, and calls for action by, all of us to help save our wildlife.

Since 2006, each Ocean Park guest is helping with conservation as every dollar from an Ocean Park admission ticket is donated to fund OPCFHK's efforts. Last year, Ocean Park donated over $9 million to OPCFHK.



Now, come with us on a discovery journey about the Chinese sturgeons!

CHINESE STURGEONS LIVED IN THE DINOSAUR ERA

Ancient sturgeons have been around in the freshwater rivers where dinosaurs drank over 200 million years ago. Our Chinese sturgeon, Acipenser sinensis, appeared on earth 60 million years later and has, therefore, been around for over 140 million years. This special fish lays eggs (spawns) in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River and other similar rivers in China. For the next year, the fry (newly hatched fish) swim down to the sea where it will live for the next 15 to 18 years growing big (about 3.4 to 5 meters) and strong to make the journey back to its birth place to lay eggs. Chinese sturgeons will make this journey to the sea and back many times in their lives.

THE 3,000 KM SWIM FROM RIVER TO SEA

It is a challenging journey of over 3,000 km from river to the sea. Natural predators lurk, human activities block some of the familiar paths, and pollution affects these fish. Not every fish will be fit enough to make it to the ocean, and live in the ocean for 15 years, but scientists in China are working to improve their survival rate.

ONLY ONE IN 10,000 CAN MAKE IT BACK TO LAY EGGS

Through the research conducted by the Yangtze River Fisheries Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Fisheries Sciences and others, Chinese sturgeons can now live long lives in freshwater under human care, and they too will eventually, and successfully, lay eggs. However, during the initial phase, of the newly hatched fish (fry) that were released to the river, very few survived.

Now, hundreds of thousands of newly hatched fish are released into the river each year. Studies have shown that about one in 10,000 will successfully make the journey to the sea, and back to the spawning grounds. What we don't know is what happens in between the release, and their return! How much time is spent in the mouth of the rivers where the water is not as salty as the open ocean? How old must they be to make that difficult transition from freshwater, to salt water, and then, back to freshwater? How do their bodies react to cope with the different water environments?

CONSERVATION AND SCIENTIFIC ALLIANCE TO KEEP CHINESE STURGEONS SUSTAINABLE

To help answer these questions, the country's National Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Association included Ocean Park, whose expertise in the care of salt water fish is well-recognised, as a partner in this important conservation research project, which also has the Yangtze River Fisheries Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Fisheries Sciences and the Beijing Aquarium as key members of this scientific alliance. The ultimate goal for all the research conducted on the Chinese sturgeons under human care is to release them to the rivers and seas.

GROUNDBREAKING LEARNING ABOUT CHINESE STURGEONS

With the natural advantage of a rich supply of sea water in the South China Sea, Ocean Park embarked on this groundbreaking study with the partners to provide a scientific platform to find out more about how Chinese sturgeons make the transition from fresh to salt water, and back to freshwater again for spawning. This is the first time such research has been conducted in the world on the Chinese sturgeons. It is also the first time that the focus on the Chinese sturgeon conservation research can be showcased to the world through the international profile of the millions of guests that visit Ocean Park each year.

The earlier research at Ocean Park had found the Chinese sturgeons comfortable moving into low salinity waters. As the salinity increased closer to that of the ocean, it was discovered that some of the fish responded better, whilst some did not appear to adjust to the new environment. We have also found that the younger and smaller fish responded better to this process.

There is still so much to learn about the Chinese sturgeons and how they thrive in salt water! And Ocean Park is committed to this meaningful conservation project so all of us will know more about this enigmatic species. This learning is important as it will help scientists better design conservation projects to ensure the sustainability of this species, overall biodiversity, and to increase people's awareness about the importance of aquatic conservation to give our future generations a better tomorrow.

Stay tuned as we return soon to tell you more exciting conservation stories in our series!

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OPCF Hong Kong 香港海洋公園保育基金 Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong