

Endangered Species Advisory Committee

Review on Placement Scheme for Pet Animals of Endangered Species

Purpose

This paper is to report on a review of the placement scheme of endangered pet species through the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and Hong Kong Society of Herpetology Foundation (HKHERP).

Background

2. Live animals scheduled under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, Cap. 586, may come under the custody of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) from various sources including seizure from enforcement actions and collection of abandoned or stray animals. AFCD strictly follows the guideline of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in the disposal of live scheduled animals. The underlying principles are to maximise the conservation value of the species, discourage further illegal or irregular trade and provide a humane solution with respect to live animals. Euthanasia is only considered as a last resort when all other options, such as donation to non-commercial parties for conservation, scientific or education purposes, repatriation and releasing to the wild, have been exhausted.

3. With the support of the Endangered Species Advisory Committee, the placement scheme for live endangered animals with the SPCA and HKHERP has commenced in June 2011 and April 2014 respectively. The scheme is of non-commercial nature and it conforms fully with the CITES disposal guidelines. A review has been conducted to assess the operation and overall effectiveness of the placement scheme.

Review

Operation

4. SPCA and HKHERP are registered charitable animal welfare organisations committed to protecting animals. From time to time, the two organisations receive live animals surrendered by members of the public voluntarily or found abandoned / rescued in public places. Since the commencement of the placement scheme, they have also received seized animals handed over by AFCD for rehoming purposes. Rehoming is arranged through their own adoption programs. The organisations are responsible for assessing the suitability of the animals under their custody for adoption and adopters with their existing screening mechanism (including knowledge and resources to take care of the animals). Necessary veterinary care is provided to the animals and monthly reports are submitted to AFCD for progress monitoring. No additional resources is required from AFCD to implement these placement schemes.

Incident during the reporting period

5. An incident was reported to AFCD on 22 January 2018 and it involved the loss of 12 *Terrapene carolina* (Common box turtle) and 9 *Clemmys guttata* (Spotted turtle). The lost turtles were suspected to be swapped or stolen by a volunteer and it was reported immediately to the police by HKHERP for follow up investigation.

6. Inspections to HKHERP were conducted by AFCD after the incident for stock inspection and on-site discussion on upgrading the security measures. The security of the premises was enhanced shortly after the incident. The measures taken included changing passwords and key lock of the entrance and installation of CCTVs which allows real-time monitoring outside the entrance and within the premises. In terms of operations, photo records of the concerned animals with clear markings and patterns upon collection from AFCD have been maintained and prohibition of removing animals from HKHERP premise without prior approval has been strictly implemented.

7. As the security measures and operations of HKHERP have been immediately enhanced and no other similar incident or irregularity was received or detected since then, it was considered as an isolated incident involving the integrity of an individual volunteer.

Premises inspections

8. Inspections to the animal keeping premises of SPCA and HKHERP and stock check were conducted in April 2021. The concerned animals were generally in good condition pending for rehoming. One individual was under intensive veterinary care because it has been in poor health condition since it was found abandoned and rescued. Appropriate keeping facilities and sufficient security measures were found in place.

No irregularity was observed during the inspections.

Results and effectiveness

9. During the reporting period from January 2011 to March 2021, a total of 2,938 live animals seized in enforcement actions or collected from stray cases have been donated to different parties locally or outside Hong Kong for conservation, education and scientific research. Among those, 272 and 326 animals of endangered species were rehomed through SPCA and HKHERP respectively since the commencement of the placement scheme. These contributed to about 9.4% and 13.1% respectively of all animals donated to different organisations during the reporting period.

10. The endangered animals rehomed by the two organisations include birds, turtles, snakes and lizards. Except for pet adoption, disposal options for these animals are considered very limited as they are very common pet species listed in Appendix II or III to CITES and of very limited conservation value.

11. All the rehomed bird species were of species in the family Psittaciformes (parrots), except *Lonchura oryzivora* (Java sparrow). The most common bird species among those were *Agapornis fischeri* (Fischer's lovebird), *Pyrrhura molinae* (Green Cheeked Conure) and *Aratinga solstitialis* (Sun Conure). Most of rehomed tortoises were *Geochelone elegans* (Indian star tortoise) as there were several significant seizures of this species during the reporting period. The number and species of rehomed animals since the commencement of the scheme are summarised in Table 1 and 2 in the Annex.

Assessment

12. The placement scheme was generally in smooth operation since its commencement. The overall rehome rate was above 90% in the past five years. Rehoming of the confiscated animals has been a significant local disposal option. About 70% of the confiscated animals rehomed locally was conducted through the placement scheme while other local receiving parties are mainly schools and non-governmental organisations. Due to their limited conservation value, opportunities for disposal of common pet species other than pet adoption are very limited. It is anticipated that many of these common pet species confiscated would have to be euthanised without the support of the placement scheme. The scheme also alleviated the operational and financial burden of AFCD in accommodating the confiscated animals in limited keeping facilities. It is thus considered as an effective means to

dispose of live endangered animals, in particular those common pet species of limited conservation value.

Way Forward

13. AFCD will continue to cooperate with the two organisations for the arrangement of rehoming the seized endangered pet species according to CITES guidelines.

Advice sought

14. Members are invited to express their views and comments on the placement scheme for pet animals of endangered species.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department
June 2021

Table 1: The quantity of rehomed animals since the commencement of the individual placement scheme (as of 31 March 2021):

No. of animals rehomed	SPCA (Since June 2011)	HKHERP (Since April 2014)
Bird	70	N/A
Tortoise & Turtle	187	319
Lizard	7	3
Snake	8	4
TOTAL	272	326

Table 2: Animal species rehomed by SPCA and HKHERP (as of 31 March 2021):

Species	Common name
BIRD	
<i>Agapornis fischeri</i>	Fischer's lovebird
<i>Amazona aestiva</i>	Blue-fronted amazon
<i>Ara ararauna</i>	Blue-and-gold macaw
<i>Aratinga solstitialis</i>	Sun conure
<i>Aratinga wagleri</i>	Red-fronted conure
<i>Cacatua galerita</i>	Greater sulphur-crested cockatoo
<i>Cacatua sanguinea</i>	Bare-eyed cockatoo
<i>Eclectus roratus</i>	Eclectus parrot
<i>Eolophus roseicapilla</i>	Roseate Cockatoo
<i>Deroptryus accipitrinus</i>	Hawk-headed parrot
<i>Lonchura oryzivora</i>	Java sparrow
<i>Lorius garrulus</i>	Chattering lory
<i>Myiopsitta monachus</i>	Monk parakeet
<i>Orthopsittaca manilata</i>	Red-bellied macaw
<i>Pionites leucogaster</i>	White-bellied caique
<i>Pionites melanocephalus</i>	Black-headed caique
<i>Poicephalus gulielmi</i>	Jardine's parrot
<i>Poicephalus senegalus</i>	Senegal parrot
<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	Alexandrine parakeet
<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>	Grey parrot
<i>Pyrrhura molinae</i>	Green-cheeked conure

Species	Common name
TORTOISE / TURTLE	
<i>Chelonoidis carbonaria</i>	Red-footed tortoise
<i>Chelonoidis denticulata</i>	Yellow-footed tortoise
<i>Geochelone elegans</i>	Indian star tortoise
<i>Geochelone sulcata</i>	African spurred tortoise
<i>Stigmochelys pardalis</i>	Leopard tortoise
<i>Carettochelys insculpta</i>	Fly river turtle
<i>Clemmys guttata</i>	Spotted turtle
<i>Cuora amboinensis</i>	Malaysian box turtle
<i>Malaclemys terrapin</i>	Diamondback terrapin
<i>Mauremys reevesii</i>	Chinese three-keeled pond turtle
<i>Mauremys sinensis</i>	Chinese stripe-necked turtle
<i>Podocnemis unifilis</i>	Yellow-spotted sideneck turtle
<i>Terrapene carolina</i>	Common box turtle
<i>Terrapene</i> species	Box turtle
LIZARD	
<i>Uromastyx</i> species	Spiny-tailed lizard
<i>Varanus acanthurus</i>	Ridge-tailed monitor
SNAKE	
<i>Boa constrictor</i>	Boa constrictor
<i>Morelia spilota</i>	Carpet python
<i>Morelia viridis</i>	Green tree python
<i>Python regius</i>	Ball python