



## Press Release

# **31 Local University Students Embarked On One of the Most Challenging and Unique Conservation Journeys in Their Lives in Poor Remote Areas**

## **OPCFHK's University Student Sponsorship Programme 2008-09 Students Came into Close Encounters with Endangered Wildlife Including Giant Pandas, Red Pandas, Komodo Dragons, Whales and Dolphins, and Seahorses**

**(25 June 2009, Hong Kong)** 31 local university students were arranged by Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong's (OPCFHK) "University Student Sponsorship Programme 2008-09" to personally journey to various Asian remote reserves that are not easily accessible to take part in 13 different conservation research projects on endangered species. In their challenging adventure, participants not only had to adapt to living in barren areas without basic facilities, but also endure walking long distances to conduct field research along the mountains or sea. Despite this, the students appreciated the rare opportunity to be in close encounters with endangered wildlife, which is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. At today's media briefing, some student representatives used this chance to share with the media their personal experiences and their sentiments when seeing these rare animals. It was evident that their passion for conservation far exceeded the difficulties they endured.

Of all the projects, the one at Komodo National Park in Indonesia was undeniably the most exciting and thrilling. The students who journeyed to Indonesia to study the Komodo Dragons spent 12 days on a remote island, and carried around cages that were 8 to 10kg in weight, to help experienced local researchers catch the largest lizard in the world – the Komodo Dragon, which has over 50 kinds of bacteria in its saliva – for measurement and record. Not only did they overcome living without basic day-to-day luxuries, such as showers or washrooms in an environment that had limited electricity and tap water supply, they even witnessed local researchers being chased by the Komodo Dragons. What really impacted the students was the attention and care the local conservationists had for the Komodo Dragons – despite living in a harsh environment far away from home, they are still content with their conservation work there.

Another group of students carried out wildlife rescue in the Shaanxi Province, and not only got to feed different animals daily but also clean their faeces too. The animals they cared for included giant pandas, red pandas, takins, Sika deers and golden monkeys.

As for the students travelled to Bangladesh to study whales and dolphins, they went for seven days without showering while living on a boat, and reflected upon how economically-developed cities lack conservation knowledge, when even a developing country like Bangladesh is willing to invest resources for conservation efforts.

Sponsored participating students came from The University of Hong Kong, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong and The City University of Hong Kong. And this was the first year to have groups of four students from four different universities, which helped promote a more varied exchange and experience. These four students travelled to the Sichuan Wanglang Nature Reserve to patrol the area with researchers to monitor poaching and illegal collection activities, and investigate the damages of the Sichuan earthquake done to the Reserve.

**Ms. Suzanne Gendron, Director of OPCFHK** said, “Established in 2004, the OPCFHK organised “University Student Sponsorship Programme 2008-09” just entered its fifth year. During this period, the programme scale has continued to expand – from the six students participating in three research projects in the inaugural year, to 31 students participating in 13 research projects this year – totaling to 84 students altogether. In order to nurture a new generation of conservationists, OPCFHK has been offering many opportunities to students through the sponsorship programme to journey to Asian remote reserves and carry out actual conservation work, which will encourage them to devote themselves to the conservation field. With the programme’s continuous expansion and its achievement of its first milestone, we are grateful to our major donor, Ocean Park and are especially thankful to Dr. Allan Zeman, Chairman of Ocean Park for his wholehearted donation – his unwavering support towards wildlife conservation efforts is undeniable.”

The projects of this year’s “University Student Sponsorship Programme” achieved various research goals, discoveries and unique experiences. For example, the incredible discovery made by students who travelled to the Philippines and found, together with local researchers, a nest of a Philippine crocodile and its eggs in the Narra Lake region where no crocodiles were ever discovered before. Another example is the rare sighting of 15 “Birds of legend” or Chinese crested-terns that were once thought to be extinct but was rediscovered, and is now a critically endangered species with less than 50 individuals on earth.

For more details on the “Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong University Student Sponsorship Programme 2008-09”, please refer to the factsheet.

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#### **About Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong**

Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong (OPCFHK) was established as an independent charity trust, aiming to advocate and participate in the conservation of Asian wildlife and its habitats. Through research and education, we hope to ensure the sustainability of wildlife and biodiversity in Asia.

As Ocean Park’s conservation arm, OPCFHK has funded over 180 research projects since establishment, expanding its conservation efforts from whales, dolphins and giant pandas to other species like seahorse, red panda and coral. We also endeavour to inspire young people by organizing school programme for secondary and primary students, as well as giving them the opportunities for field work under the “University Student Sponsorship Programme in Wildlife Conservation”.

After the earthquake in Sichuan, OPCFHK set up the “Giant Panda Base Rebuilding Fund” and donated modular houses, camping equipment, water purifying tablets and generators to the affected nature reserve. We need your support to sustain our efforts. Please show your support and log on to our website [www.opcf.org.hk](http://www.opcf.org.hk) for online donation.