

University Sponsorship Programme 2005-06: Student's diary

**Project : Chinese White Dolphin–
Population Monitoring**

Date : 5 to 15 February 2006

Student: Vivian Lam



10th February, 2006 (Friday)

Dear Diary,

Instead of white-dolphins or monkey research, we ended up translating a book on Pandas for Professor Pan with another volunteer who is from the US. He has been working on the book with another volunteer for a few days already, but the book is so hard and long to translate that we had to keep on taking breaks. These breaks helped improve our ball skills quite a bit, which prepared us for the competitions later on with Prof. Pan. The work has been slow, but steady.

The 3 of us ended up talking a lot about our conservation goals and aims and what we have done to gain experience. Shadow and I learnt that there are also some opportunities to gain experience in many of the institutes as well as organizations in the US and they all sound very exotic and fun e.g. wildlife rehabilitation centres

During a break today, we gathered a few volunteers and hiked for a bit to do bird watching. One of the professors here can tell the species of birds just by their sounds. I hope to learn to do that sometime, but maybe I should start with the HK species! We didn't many birds as it is quite hard, the area around are mostly covered in brown vegetation and the birds hide in there. We saw many Crested Bulbuls, a few plain prinia as well as an asian brown flycatcher. These are all found in HK as well.

A very relaxing and fun day.

11th February, 2006 (Saturday)

Dear Diary,

We experienced the life of proper cooking today. It is definitely once in a lifetime, though not exactly happy experience for us city kids. You have to kill everything yourself! It is a big deal killing a pig in the rural areas, and there are pictures showing how cruel the whole process is. After that, I couldn't make myself eat pork anymore, couldn't pick up a piece of meat without thinking about the tears in the pigs eyes when it was just about to be killed and with the squealing and struggling accompanying it. Shadow and I also helped in plucking the feathers from the chickens that were killed. I became a strict vegetarian after that for the rest of the days I was in the headquarters...



We were also lucky enough to participate in the white-headed langur survey that only happens rarely (once in 2, 3 years). I can imagine it would be quite boring if you had to do it every single day, we had to wait for the langurs to return to their caves and confirm that they are staying at that certain cave at night, which basically means we have to sit in front of the caves the whole afternoon to evening waiting and watching. It was indeed interesting for us as we get to see the whole family progress down to each cave though the whole wait was quite long. We could not go back for dinner until very late at night and everyone was starving after the long walk. Since everyone was so tired, we did a bit of translation at night and then went to bed.

12th February, 2006 (Sunday)

Dear Diary,

Another day filled with fun and excitement and cultural activities. First thing after breakfast, we went to worship the hill god. Professor Pan



thinks that we should respect the local cultural activities and therefore he is performing this ceremony out of respect of the local tradition. We offered chicken, wine and fruits to the God. After that, we did work in the morning and early afternoon, on translation of the Panda book and also photo id of the dolphins. Then we got to experience more cooking at the campsite. We learnt special techniques for making perfect dumplings as well as 春餅, everyone spent the whole afternoon making it on a big table and it was so much fun! After that, Liang lao shi and da chu helped us cook everything and we had a taste of our own cooking. Some dumplings looked weird, some looked smashed, some fillings spilled out, but we didn't mind a bit as we had so much fun making it.

After dinner was the highlight of the night, we had a serious table tennis tournament. 2 people paired up to form a team and there were at least 16 people competing. In the end, Qin lao shi's group won and it was such a fun night! Professor Pan is so good at skills and tactics, it is amazing how he can be better than most of the people there despite his age! We all had a great time and went to bed exhausted.

13th February, 2006 (Monday)

Dear Diary,

Besides the normal workload of translation and photo ID, we experienced two new things today. We went to watch how people make a raft out of bamboo shoots in the morning as the raft they normally use to catch fish in the pond is broken. First of all, they look for strong and thick bamboo shoots and cut them down. After that, they used special tools to shave the skin off the bamboo shoots so that the green parts are all gone. It's very tough work, Shadow and I both tried for a bit and then gave up as we worked so slowly compared to them.



After that, we went to the cave to do some excavation work. Never imagined such hard work, we had to squat in the ground among piles and piles of earth dug up from the cave and use sieves of different mesh sizes to pick out the

pieces of bones. Some of the pieces were so small it is very difficult to separate from the earth. I was quite happy when it was time for lunch and we had to go out into the light, I think I'm more of a person who's interested in living things =)

Whenever we were tired of doing photo ID or translation, when our eyes water from looking at the computer screen too much, we would go out for a walk and appreciate the scenery around us or go play some ball. Never enjoyed this kind of life style so much, the pace and atmosphere is so different from that in Hong Kong, we wonder if we'll be able to keep this kind of attitude when we get back.

14th February, 2006 (Tuesday)

Dear Diary,

Today is mostly spent on enjoying our last day in the headquarters and also preparing for the presentation we are going to give at night. We also did a bit of translation, hoping to finish at least one chapter of the Panda Book.

After dinner, Professor Pan gathered all the teachers as well as the students in the conference room to hear about presentations from the students that worked here over the holidays. First, QQ boy presented his paper on the caves of the white-headed langurs. Then Xiao Long tong xue talked about his population studies on the Chinese White Dolphins. Last of all, it was shadow and my turn to talk about our trip in Guangxi and we were glad that it was received the best. Most of them laughed when they heard about our new experiences and also felt out passion in conservation throughout the presentation. After tonight, I believe that maybe someday some of us would be able to meet again to work on conservation projects together hand in hand.

At night, it was spent mostly in exchanging information, chatting with other students, each talking about aims and goals in the future. One of the most valuable things from this trip is how we got to meet so many people our age, from different backgrounds and places, yet having the same goal of conservation. I'll do try my best to keep in touch.

15th February, 2006 (Wednesday)

Dear Diary,

We had to rush in the morning as our flight is pretty early at noon. We got up, had breakfast and quickly said our goodbyes. We exchanged contacts with all of the students we met there. Professor Pan and Liang lao shi took us to the airport as they had some matters to deal with in town as well. Took us 2 hours to get to the airport and we were so sad about leaving.



We spent the whole time on flight talking about how much we will miss this place and also about the things we learnt. After this trip, both of us feel that our passion towards conservation has greatly increased since we know that many people in this world are also working hard towards conservation. It is indeed a very tough road if we choose to work in this field, but then we both think that the satisfaction and fulfillment we would get can be found in no other fields. This is truly an unforgettable trip.