

University Sponsorship Programme 2005-06: Student's diary
Project : Chinese White Dolphin–
Population Monitoring
Date : 5 to 15 February 2006
Student: Vivian Lam



6th February, 2006 (Monday)

Dear Diary,

A long, tiring but fulfilling day! Walked along the beach towards the pier, saw birds (Grey capped greenfinch!), fat ducks as well as the catch of the day. Then we went out on a speedboat to search for our beloved dolphins. I was in charge of the GPS, Shadow to count dolphins, Qin lao shi and Xiao Long would be the photographers. Not much luck in the morning as we scoured the surrounding area for a glimpse of the animal.

Came back to the village for a rest and lunch as we came back frozen after being out on the boat for 2 hours with no sign of the dolphins. After that, we had our first try of photo ID! It is so difficult! The dolphins all looked the same to us at the beginning, especially the patchy ones. By the end of the file, our eyes were watering and we both got headaches.

Qin lao shi then decided we should not search for dolphins aimlessly and rather wait for others to have seen the dolphin before we set out. Proved a success since we saw 10+ dolphins at a very close range! Shadow and I were both so excited as we the weather was perfect – the sea was so calm



that it looked like satin. Haven't seen anything like this before, were wondering if we went to a pond instead of open sea. As the villagers told us, most of those we saw were juveniles and they don't seem to be scared of people at all! They swam close to the speedboat, as if trying to make out who we are. They even dived under our boats!

We had to rush back as officials from the Police Force were treating us to dinner. The restaurant is called "Seafood Palace" and definitely lives up to its name. One sure thing is the people at Sanniang Bay are all very friendly and good hosts. They also mentioned that their village is the safest around for miles (which we can tell by the opened doors of every single village house we pass by). All those we met seemed really supportive of the work Professor Pan's doing, but they also showed signs of wanting more profit at the expense of dolphins and ecotourism.

We busied ourselves with editing our photographs as Qin lao shi stayed behind to talk to the officials. Conservation work is so much related to socializing and communication with the right people. This is the hardest thing that I will have to learn, but I guess it comes with experience.

After Qin lao shi came back, we all sat around the table looking at the photos we have got for today. Mine were mostly out of focus, I found out it is so hard to catch dolphins unless you are using a SLR camera. Shadow's were mostly black little dots. We are happy to have the chance of improving our skills in the coming days. We also discussed more about the project, about the different methods we should try to make a most accurate population survey as possible (as we gave Qin lao shi some journals on CWD research in HK). Qin lao shi also told us about a factory that is going to be built soon which would most probably affect the waters around this area. The same company has set up another factory in Hainan. Qin lao shi also explained that our data will be useful in setting the boundaries for the future nature reserve and can be used to construct a distribution map for the species. I feel so happy to be finally helping out in conservation in real life.