

## Baby horseshoe crabs released off Kinmen

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KINMEN, Taiwan -- Some 350,000 baby Asian horseshoe crabs bred in captivity were released into the wild off Taiwan's outlying island of Kinmen yesterday in an effort to conserve the "living fossil" species.

Kinmen County Deputy Magistrate Yang Chung-chuan led over 200 Kinmen residents and students in the activity held on the shore of the Chienkung islet and the mouth of the Wuchiang creek under the guidance of officials from the Kinmen Aquaculture Research Institute (KARI), which bred the crabs.

According to KARI researchers, the horseshoe crab is nearly extinct in waters surrounding Taiwan proper but is occasionally seen near the Penghu Island group and on the west coast of Taiwan proper.

The seas around Kinmen are among the horseshoe crab's major natural habitats, but even there, its numbers have declined in recent years as a result of industrial and urban development, the researchers said. The sharp dwindling of the crab population prompted KARI to zone an 800-hectare coastal area near Kuningtou as Kinmen's horseshoe crab conservation district in 1999 in the hope that its population could be preserved.

In addition, since 2006 KARI has staged annual releases of baby horseshoe crabs to help accelerate the natural replenishment of the species, known as a "living fossil" because it has evolved little in its 400 million years of existence.

With a distinctive domed carapace shaped like a horseshoe and a stiff pointed tail, the Asian horseshoe crab, or "tachypleus tridentatus," is known as one of Taiwan's few "living fossil" species.