

Second coming of creature from ancient times

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Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, announcing the release yesterday, said the populations of the two species still found here have fallen victim to overfishing, pollution, reclamation and coastal development.

There is a lack of information about the populations in Hong Kong, but the crabs are protected in the mainland.

Since 2006 the foundation and City University of Hong Kong have allocated more than HK\$350,000 to improve breeding and rearing of horseshoe crabs to repopulate Hong Kong waters and make it a protected species.

The first batch of 15 artificially bred crabs, released on September 12, were implanted with small chips to follow their lives in the wild.

Scientists will track the crabs on mudflats, where there will be releases every two weeks over the next six months. But even in ideal conditions only one or two of 10,000 will make it to adulthood and reproduce, said Paul KS Shin, associate professor of biology and chemistry at the university.

There is little information on how many crabs are left around Hong Kong, he added. Still, "there are several mudflats in Deep Bay and Lantau Island, located on the border of seawater and freshwater, which are rich in nutrients that juvenile horseshoe crabs need and are highly suitable habitats."

Horseshoe crabs are often known as "living fossils" due to the few evolutionary changes they have undergone in the past 400 million years. In fact, they are not true crabs but arthropods, which makes them relatives of the spider and scorpion.

The foundation and the university are also urging people to reject the idea of eating horseshoe crabs.
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