



英文中國郵報

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## 'Living fossil' crabs sighted in Chiayi

2007/6/2  
TAIPEI, CNA

Asian horseshoe crabs, known as one of the few "living fossil" species in the Taiwan area, have been sighted on the coast of the southern county of Chiayi recently, opening another wildlife conservation door, Chiayi County officials said Friday.

Five adult and 32 young Asian horseshoe crab *tachypleus tridentatus*, whose appearance on Earth can be dated back to 200 million years ago, have been sighted on the coast of Putai, Chiayi, making Chiayi County the third place in Taiwan to witness the appearance of the crabs after sightings were reported on the outlying island of Kinmen and in the Penghu archipelago, the officials said.

The Chiayi county authorities are collaborating with researchers from the Research Center for Biodiversity, Academia Sinica (RCBAS) to protect the rare species and its habitat near the Putai coast, the officials said.

Other members of several wildlife conservationist groups will also join the RCBAS researchers and Chiayi officials on a field trip to a saltmarsh in Putai Saturday to witness the erection of a netted area to allow the adult crabs to spawn and the babies to be nurtured, making the area an exclusive breeding zone for the crabs.

Meanwhile, the officials went on, the protection of Asian horseshoe crabs will also be arranged as one of the activities to attract tourists to Chiayi County.

In 2006, some 70,000 baby Asian horseshoe crabs bred in captivity were released into the wild off the coast of Kinmen as part of efforts to conserve the "living fossil" species.

With its distinctive domed carapace shaped like a horseshoe and a stiff pointed tail, the Asian horseshoe crab was nearly extinct in waters surrounding Taiwan proper as a result of development and environmental change until it occasionally began to be seen near Penghu a couple of years ago.

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