

New incubation ground for horseshoe crabs in Penghu launched

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The Cabinet-level Council of Agriculture (COA) announced Friday that a new "incubation ground" for horseshoe crabs has been established in Cingwan, Penghu and predicted that the facility will greatly help to preserve the rare species that inhabits the outlying islet.

To mark the opening of the incubation facility, its operator -- the Penghu Marine Biology Research Center which is an affiliate of the COA's Fisheries Research Institute (FRI) -- invited about 200 students from local elementary schools to participate in the release of some 150 young horseshoe crabs that were artificially bred and raised in the center.

FRI Director Su Wei-cheng said that the horseshoe crab population in Taiwan has been decreasing significantly in recent decades, and the participation of students is a vital step in raising public awareness of the issue.

The horseshoe crab is sometimes nicknamed the "living fossil" because the species has existed on Earth for some 400 million years and has remained in its present form for 200 million years.

According to a recent survey on horseshoe crabs, the species no longer has any habitats in Taiwan proper, and its remaining habitats in Kinmen and Penghu are currently under threat because of human activity and over-exploitation, despite the designation of reservation zones.

Kinmen is a group of islets that lies closer to China's southeast coast than to Taiwan proper, and the Penghu archipelago lies roughly in the middle of the Taiwan Strait.

Tsai Wann-sheng, director of the Penghu Marine Biology Research Center, noted that in addition to the existing reservation zones, the establishment of a new incubation ground for baby and young horseshoe crabs indicates both the need for better protection and the government's will to preserve the species.

Tsai also indicated that all the horseshoe crabs released from the incubation ground will carry a unique identification chip -- a device that he said will not only facilitate remote tracking of the crabs, but also prevent poaching.



Two king crabs in the photo are protected and set free to the nature in Penghu on Nov. 14, 2008.

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