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Release of butterfly survey data

Established in 2008, "Butterfly Surveyor" is the first Butterfly Surveyor group comprising members of the public. The group specialises in collecting data on butterfly species and ecological data. "Butterfly Surveyor" currently has 132 qualified members, who have been conducting regular butterfly surveys at eight butterfly hotspots: San Tau - Lantau Island; Luk Keng - Fanling; Wu Kau Tang - Tai Po; Lam Tsuen - Tai Po (She Shan and Ng Tung Chai); Yuen Tun Ha - Tai Po; Sham Chung and Yung Shue O - Sai Kung; and Sha Tau Kok, Pak Sha O and Lai Chi Chong - Sai Kung .

This year's butterfly surveys commenced in June, and recorded 162 species of butterflies at the butterfly hotspots, accounting for more than 60% of the Hong Kong's total. A total of 108 species of butterflies were found at Sha Tau Kok, which is the highest among all sites. Pak Sha O and Lai Chi Chong, Sai Kung, ranked second, with 101 species of butterflies; they were newly added as survey sites this year. Sham Chung and Yung Shue O, Sai Kung, ranked third with 99 butterfly species.

Among these sites, the most noteworthy site is Sha Tau Kok. As it was a Frontier Closed Area, the public formerly had limited information about this site. It was opened last year, and immediately designated as one of the survey sites. Substantial butterfly populations were discovered. In early July, Green Power's Butterfly Surveyors discovered Hooked Oak Blue (*Arhopala paramuta*), which had not been found in Hong Kong for 32 years. To date, with data from four months, more butterflies have been recorded than in the same period last year. It is believed that there will be more fascinating results to come.

This year's Butterfly Survey has been conducted for four months; in general, the diversity and numbers of butterfly species are similar to last year. This shows the butterfly hotspots were not adversely affected by human activities and urban development during the year. However, butterfly hotspots are still severely threatened by urban expansion.

With years of observations of Butterfly Surveyors, it is found that many butterfly hotspots are changing gradually. For example, there was formerly freshwater wetland at Pak Sha O, but the wetland has been filled in as a prelude to development. Other examples are Yuen Tun Ha and She Shan, Tai Po. The vegetation butterflies need might be swiftly destroyed and changed to construction sites within a few months. Despite the mobility and adaptability of butterflies, it will be too late once we realise that butterflies have disappeared entirely due to the



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wholesale environmental destruction. We must act before this happens. Therefore, the government should better plan and monitor development of suburbs and rural areas, to avoid uncontrollable development.