

LCQ13: Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens

Following is a question by Dr Hon Lam Tai-fai and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (March 10):

Question:

It has been reported that some members of the tourism industry have urged the Government to consider increasing the number of animal species being shown in Hong Kong, so as to increase attractiveness to tourists. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) given that the Consultancy Study on the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens (HKZBG), which was commissioned by the Government and conducted by a university, was completed in 2003, whether the authorities have implemented all the recommendations proposed in the study report; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that, and whether they have planned to review again the positioning of HKZBG;

(b) of the reasons for the authorities not introducing larger-sized animals again after the death of the female jaguar "Siu Fa" in HKZBG in 2008; if the reason is that the spaces in HKZBG for keeping animals are limited at present, whether the authorities will consider looking for bigger alternative places to keep these animals; if they will, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(c) of the details of the animals of endangered species brought in from overseas zoos through the arrangement of the International Studbook Keeper by HKZBG in the past seven years; whether HKZBG has planned to introduce animals of other endangered species at present, and of the ways for introducing animals of non-endangered species;

(d) of the details of the animal species brought in by the Government for keeping in other parks under its management in the past seven years;

(e) given that there are approximately more than 4,000 species of mammals in the world at present, whether the authorities have assessed if it is sufficient for HKZBG to keep mammals of 17 species only at present; if they have, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; of the reasons for the animals kept in HKZBG are mostly primate; of the criteria considered by the authorities in deciding the animal species to be brought

in;

(f) whether the Government has planned to strengthen cooperation with overseas zoos, including exchanging animals for free show; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(g) of the respective person-times of students and, local and overseas tourists visiting HKZBG in each of the past seven years; of the measures adopted by the authorities for attracting more overseas tourists to visit HKZBG, so as to promote tourism and local economic development; and

(h) whether it will consider building a zoo of substantial scale in Hong Kong; if it will, what factors it will consider and its impact on the Hong Kong economy; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(a) The Leisure & Cultural Services Department (LCSD) commissioned the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University jointly to undertake a consultancy study in 2002 to determine the long-term development of the Hong Kong Zoological and Botanical Gardens (HKZBG) with a view to enhancing its facilities to meet public expectations.

The study was completed in 2003 and the consultants recommended that HKZBG should maintain its present status as a zoological and botanical garden. They considered that HKZBG has kept a good balance of animal and plant exhibits, and this format should be retained. The consultants also considered that HKZBG should serve important recreational, educational and conservation functions.

Since the completion of the study report, the accepted recommendations have already been put in place in HKZBG. They mainly include:

(i) Zoological Collection, Conservation and Breeding

- Successful breeding of endangered primate species (such as Orangutan and Buff-cheeked Gibbon) and endangered bird species (such as White-naped Crane and Palawan Peacock Pheasant); as well as the implementation of a conservation breeding

programme for endangered animal species; and

- Introduction of local fauna species including Romer's Tree Frog and Chinese Three-striped Box Turtle.

(ii) Botanical Collection and Conservation

- Introduction of more local flora including native orchids, Hong Kong Hawthorn and Common Melastoma to the garden for conservation and education purposes;

- Planting of more flowering trees including Hong Kong Orchid to improve the landscape of the garden; and

- Setting up a "Garden for all Seasons" by planting more flowering plants that blossom in different seasons to achieve the seasonal effect;

(iii) Improvement of Facilities

- Building of a new education centre which comprises an education room, audio visual display and ancillary facilities;

- Inclusion of more information on the labels for individual exhibit of plant and animal species.

LCSD has no plan to review the status of the HKZBG at present.

(b) After the death of jaguar "Siu Fa" in 2008, LCSD considered that big cats (such as tigers) require much larger activity areas and because of the limited space and other environmental restrictions in LCSD gardens, the Department has no plan to introduce this kind of animal.

(c) A total of 26 species of endangered creature have been introduced to HKZBG through the arrangement of studbook keepers in the past seven years. The details are as follows –

(i) Mammal

- three Emperor Tamarin, two Ring-tailed Lemur, one Golden Lion Tamarin, one Buff-cheeked Gibbon, two Pygmy Marmoset, one Red-handed Tamarin, one DeBrazza's Monkey and one Bornean Orangutan.

(ii) Bird

- Two Bali Mynah, four Edward Pheasant and two Maroon-breasted Crown Pigeon.

(iii) Reptile

- Two Chinese Alligator and four Radiated Tortoise.

LCSD will continue to introduce endangered creatures through the assistance from studbook keepers. At the same time, LCSD will also introduce rare creatures that are not endangered from overseas zoos through the daily official contacts with these zoological institutions when such opportunities arise.

(d) A total of 28 species of endangered or rare animal have been introduced to other parks under LCSD's management in the past seven years, of which 14 species (in brackets) are newly introduced. These include -

(i) Hong Kong Park

- Great Hornbill, Nicobar Pigeon, Crested Pigeon, Mindanao Bleeding-heart, (Red-vented Bulbul), (Golden Pheasant), (Golden Yellow Pheasant).

(ii) Kowloon Park

- (Coscoroba Swan), Palm Cockatoo, (Yellow-headed Amazon), (Yellow-naped Amazon), Mandarin Duck, Crested Pigeon, White-faced Whistling Duck, Ringed Teal, American Flamingo.

(iii) Tuen Mun Park Reptile House

- Ball Python, (Green Tree Python), (Jungle Carpet Python), Leopard Tortoise, (Burmese Starred Tortoise), Burmese Tortoise, Radiated Tortoise, Spurred Tortoise, (Madagascar Day Gecko), (Ocellated Spiny-tailed Lizard), (Fried Lizard), (Monitor Lizard), (Spectacled Caiman).

(e) LCSD considers it appropriate to keep a mammal collection of 17 species consisting of about 70 creatures taking into account the current space available in HKZBG. The Department will regularly review the situation. When selecting a new animal species, the Department will consider the geographic constraints of the garden, the feasibility of introducing particular animal species, adaptability of that species to the new environment as well as whether the mission of conservation and education could be achieved. Since most of the primate species are endangered and the staff of HKZBG has good experience in the husbandry of these animals, the primate

collection in the garden is relatively more comprehensive.

(f) LCSD has participated in many international endangered animal species conservation breeding programmes. From time to time, HKZBG exchanges some surplus endangered animals with overseas zoos to establish suitable breeding pairs of endangered animals for conservation breeding work. For examples, the garden has introduced an endangered Bornean Orangutan and a rare DeBrazza's Monkey last year from overseas zoos through the arrangement of a studbook keeper.

(g) Since HKZBG is admission free, it is popular among local and overseas visitors; and is a one of the most visited tourist attractions in Hong Kong. There are about 870,000 visitors to HKZBG every year. Among them, the local visitors comprise about 80 percent whereas overseas visitors comprise the remaining 20 percent (around 170,000). There are about 10,000 student visitors who join the school guided visit programmes each year.

In order to provide visitors with a comfortable and enjoyable environment, HKZBG has been making continual improvements to its facilities. The entire garden has recently been re-placed with non-slip floor tiling and fitted new railings. On the zoological side, new aviaries and viewing platforms to the animal cages have been provided. The animal collection has been enriched with newly introduced endangered animal species. On the botanical side, the garden has also provided new facilities to enhance its attraction and educational value. These include the herb garden, bamboo garden, camellia garden, palm garden, magnolia garden, rhododendron garden, bauhinia garden, "Garden for All Seasons" and aquatic plants exhibited in the glasshouse. These theme gardens are popular among photographers.

In addition, a new education and exhibition centre was built and commissioned for use at the end of 2008. It serves the purposes of training, seminar venue and exhibition centre. The preserved jaguar "Siu Fa" is also accommodated inside the centre for public viewing.

(h) At present, animal collections managed by LCSD include HKZBG, the aviary in Hong Kong Park, the bird lake in Kowloon Park, reptile house in Tuen Mun Park and bird pagoda in Yuen Long Park. Since all these facilities are admission free, they are popular among local and overseas visitors. At present, the Department has no plan to develop a new zoo. Nevertheless, the Department will continue to improve the existing zoological facilities to enhance the attraction of the gardens to the visitors,

through the introduction of new animal species, increases in guided visit programmes, the beautification of animal and bird cages, and the improvement of existing notices.

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