

**Advisory Council on the Environment  
Nature Conservation Subcommittee**

**Control of House Crow Population**

**Purpose**

This paper presents the results of the measures taken by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) to control the population of House Crow in Hong Kong.

**Background**

2. The native range of the House Crow (*Corvus splendens* 家鴉) includes the Indian subcontinent, western China, Burma and Thailand. The species might have come from oceangoing ships and arrived in Hong Kong unintentionally. House Crow was not common in Hong Kong in the past, with only 12 sightings reported in the 1990s. In 2002, some 100 – 150 individuals were reported. A survey done in 2003 found 200 – 250 House Crows in Hong Kong, which were gathered mainly in Sham Shui Po and Kowloon City.

3. Since late 2003, the public has started expressing concerns about the presence of House Crow in the urban areas in Kowloon. Various government departments also received reports from the public on the nuisance caused by House Crows, including noise and hygiene problems.

**Population and distribution in Hong Kong**

4. In 2004, a study on House Crows commissioned by AFCD found about 250 House Crows in Hong Kong, mainly in Sham Shui Po Park, the nearby Lai On and Lai Kok Estates, Tai Hang Tung, Stonecutters Island and Kowloon Tsai Park. The study also identified 29 House Crow nests, mainly in Sham Shui Po and Kowloon Tsai Parks. It estimated that House Crows foraged within an area of about 2 km radius from their night roosts. The Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market seemed to be a foraging ground of House Crows in Sham Shui Po.

5. The study suggested that House Crows had limited impact on local biodiversity, at least for the time being and in the near future. However, if the population was to increase significantly or individuals spread to the countryside, they could affect the local ecology and biodiversity.

### **Measures Undertaken by AFCD**

6. Since 2004, AFCD has prepared an action plan to monitor and control population of House Crow in Hong Kong by implementing the following measures:

- (a) improving environmental hygiene,
- (b) proper handling and disposal of garbage,
- (c) prohibiting feeding,
- (d) egg and chick removal,
- (e) cage trapping, and
- (f) baiting.

The results of these measures are summarized in the following paragraphs.

#### ***Improving environmental hygiene, proper handling and disposal of garbage, and prohibiting feeding***

7. Since 2004, AFCD have been advising and recommending the concerned parties, including estate managers of Lai On/Lai Kok Estates and Stonecutters Island, staff of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department on measures (a) to (c) mentioned in para. 6. Posters and notices have been posted by relevant authorities in the housing estates and parks to advise the public not to feed wild birds. Cleansing activities have also been stepped up. Household garbage if left outdoor are being kept under covered container and closely monitored. Upon AFCD's recommendation, selected trees in the housing estates were trimmed by the estate managers. As a result, the environmental hygiene conditions of the housing estates have improved and the source of food for the House Crows greatly reduced in these areas.

8. In February 2004, managers of the Lai On/Lai Kok estates used

prerecorded distress calls of House Crows prepared by AFCD to disperse the roosting birds. Preliminary results were promising as about 100 birds originally roosting in a big Banyan Tree in the Lai Kok Estate were dispersed away to trees in nearby parks and thus nuisance to estate residents were reduced.

### ***Egg and chick removal***

9. In May 2004, six House Crow nests were successfully approached with the aid of a platform-vehicle. 14 chicks were collected, but no eggs were found. Immediately after collection, all the chicks were transferred to an Animal Management Centre of AFCD for disposal by euthanasia.

10. In 2005, egg and chick removal exercises were conducted at Sham Shui Po Park, Tai Hang Tung Recreation Ground, Kowloon Tsai Park, Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market and Stonecutters Island. A total of 81 nests were inspected with 77 eggs and 68 chicks treated or collected. The eggs were either collected or treated by injection of alcohol before returning to the nests, while the chicks were disposed by euthanasia. Subsequent monitoring revealed that all treated nests were inactive and all treated eggs had disappeared.

### ***Cage trapping***

11. Trials on cage trapping with bait have also been conducted since June 2004 in Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market, Kowloon Tsai and Sham Shui Po Parks. So far, no bird has been trapped. This method was considered ineffective.

### ***Baiting***

12. Since February 2005, AFCD has been conducting trials using baits (e.g. fish, pork, beef and canned meat) treated with alpha-chloralose (an anaesthetic commonly used overseas for the population control of wild animals) in Cheung Sha Wan Wholesale Food Market, Kowloon Tsai Park, Sham Shui Po Park and Stonecutters Island. The treated baits are closely monitored by AFCD staff to avoid any potential contact by the public or non-target species. Up till now, 84 House Crows have been collected and no non-target animals have been attracted. Anaesthetized House Crows were collected by AFCD staff and disposed by euthanasia. Safety guidelines were observed in the handling and disposal of

treated baits and anaesthetized birds.

13. AFCD has consulted interested parties, including the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, World Wide Fund for Nature Hong Kong, Tai Po Environmental Association and local bird experts. The concerned parties did not have any objection to the use of baits.

### **Zoonotic disease surveillance**

14. All House Crow samples collected that were suitable for testing have been tested for highly pathogenic avian influenza viruses including H5. Up till now, all the samples have tested negative for H5.

### **Way forward**

15. It is estimated that the population size of the House Crow is now stable at around 200 – 300. Generally, the measures taken by AFCD were found to be effective for population control of House Crows. AFCD will continue to monitor the population of House Crow in Hong Kong.

### **Advice Sought**

16. Members are invited to comment on the measures to control House Crow population.

**Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department**  
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