

LCQ9: Gifts of precious species from the Mainland to the Ocean Park

Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mrs Rita Lau, to a question by the Hon Jeffrey Lam in the Legislative Council today (March 4):

Question:

It has been reported that the Chinese Sturgeon Aquarium of the Ocean Park (the Park) is being converted into a freshwater exhibit and Chinese sturgeon, a national treasure, are expected to be on display again upon its re-opening in summer. Chinese giant salamanders and red pandas, both of which are national treasures, will also be presented to the Park by the Central People's Government (CPG) this year for the appreciation by visitors. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) whether it knows the present condition of the Chinese sturgeon which were earlier sent from the Park to Xiamen for treatment and the expected time of their return to the Park; how the Park ensures that its staff have enough experience in keeping Chinese sturgeon to prevent the recurrence of series of deaths of the Chinese sturgeon;

(b) whether it knows CPG's plan to present to the Park Chinese giant salamanders and red pandas, including the numbers, ages, periods of stay and time of arrival in Hong Kong of these two types of national treasures; how the Park will take complementary measures and ensure that its staff have enough experience in keeping them; and

(c) what educational activities the Government will organise to enhance public and visitors' knowledge about these national treasures?

Reply:

President,

My response to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(a) According to the Ocean Park Corporation (OPC), the seven Chinese sturgeons which were sent to the Yangtze River Fisheries Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Fisheries Sciences in Xiamen in January 2009 are now in satisfactory condition. OPC plans to convert the existing "Chinese Sturgeon Aquarium" in the

park into a freshwater exhibit showcasing the aquatic wildlife species of the Yangtze River. The exhibit, tentatively scheduled to open this summer, will be named the "Chinese Sturgeon Aquarium - Yangtze Exploration". In support of the opening of the new exhibit, OPC has reached understanding with its conservation partners (including the National Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Association, the Yangtze River Fisheries Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Fisheries Sciences and the Beijing Aquarium) to strengthen joint efforts in enhancing the conservation techniques for Chinese sturgeons, leveraging on the facilities already established on the Mainland.

(b) OPC is in active discussion with the National Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Association on a conservation project for Chinese salamanders; and has in parallel initiated discussion with another Mainland conservation institution on a conservation project for red pandas. Discussion of the two projects is in progress. OPC will announce the details in due course.

(c) The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department supports the Ocean Park's work on ecological preservation, and enhances the public awareness of nature conservation through different promotion and educational activities, such as the Young Ambassador Programme for Endangered Species. The Education Bureau has collaborated with the Ocean Park in developing education materials, and encourages education institutions at all levels to make good use of the park's facilities, with a view to enhancing students' knowledge about nature conservation.

With the mission to promote nature conservation, the Ocean Park has been fostering interest in marine life and other animals through its "edu-tainment" and conservation facilities and activities. In addition to watching the animals in their habitats, visitors may join special programmes to gain a better appreciation of the unique features of these animals. Moreover, the Ocean Park Academy runs interactive courses on general science at different levels to enable students to experience the wonders of nature. OPC also supports the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation in commissioning research and public education work to promote sustainable development of wildlife ecology and biodiversity.

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