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Porcupine!

Newsletter of the Department of Ecology & Biodiversity, The University of Hong Kong

Episode IV—A New Hope

The 3rd of December 2003 marked the fourth milestone in the history of the Swire Institute of Marine Science (SWIMS). The facility was the brain-child of Prof Brian Morton, who dictated its development for 12 years. The "stone" laying ceremony took place in 1989, with the formal opening of the Swire Marine Laboratory in November 1990. The facility was expanded in November 1994 when it was re-named the Swire Institute of Marine Science in recognition of its increased profile and importance within the SE Asian region.

Over the past 12 years SWIMS has had a great impact on marine science, both regionally and internationally. During this period it supported many different types of projects and "evolved" to meet the needs of modern marine science. With time, however, the facility struggled to meet these demands; seawater quality was poor, bench space inadequate and facilities for specialized analytical and molecular work limited. Once more the Swire family and group of companies recognized this need and, together with HKU, funded a complete refurbishment of the aquarium and laboratory. This went hand in hand with a general renovation of the external façade and residence blocks and an upgrading of the rest of the institute.

On December 3rd representatives of HKU staff, other institutions and government met to celebrate the most recent milestone. The ceremony was a relaxed affair, based around the chopping of a roast pig by James Hughes-Hallet, the Chairman of the Swire Group, and HKU's Vice Chancellor Prof Tsui. Also in attendance were Mr Andy Herdman, Mr Michael Bell and Mr Davy Ho to represent the Swire Group. As Honorary Director, I gave a short speech welcoming the guests and explaining the focus of SWIMS, to promote research into the Hong Kong's marine environment by young researchers and staff. This was followed by an informal tour of the new facilities where postgraduate students and staff explained their research work to the guests. This was really the highlight of the celebration and the guests all enjoyed chatting with the students and seeing, first-hand, how marine research is conducted. A very popular venue was the aquarium, where baby octopuses are being hand-reared and Dr Cynthia Yau demonstrated how cuttlefishes feed.

After a brief champagne toast in the Seminar Room, official guests left and staff and students got together to reflect on entering this fourth phase of the history of SWIMS. I think we all feel very confident, given the personnel at SWIMS and the new facilities, and look forward to the next few years' challenges. Many thanks to all those who were involved in the Celebration, including HKU's External Relations Office and DEB staff, but most of all a big thanks to the postgrads who were the real stars of the show!

To complete this celebration, we were delighted to welcome Sir Adrian Swire and his family for a tour of SWIMS in late December, all in all rounding off a great launch for this new era for SWIMS.

Gray A. Williams

