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Joint Press release by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, BirdLife International and Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong

Hong Kong and China conservation groups joined hands to protect the world's rarest bird: Chinese Crested Tern numbers broke records

Hong Kong Conservationist guarded on deserted island to protect the "Legendary Bird"

(14th August, 2014 – Hong Kong) The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, together with BirdLife International and Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong (OPCFHK) proudly announce that the artificial restoration project of Chinese Crested Terns by using decoys and sound playback system, at the Jiushan Islands had a second and even more successful breeding season than last year's: at least 43 Chinese Crested Terns arrived and stayed on one of the Jiushan Islands, Tiedun Dao, this breeding season (from mid-May to early-August 2014), and at least 20 breeding pairs have formed. This is about 90% of the world's Chinese Crested Tern population for the estimated population is less than 50. In early August, no less than 13 young Chinese Crested Terns have fledged. These records together added up to the highest count of Chinese Crested Tern at a single site ever. For such a rare species, this is a remarkable, almost miraculous, success.

Chinese Crested Terns, a "Critically Endangered" bird species listed in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, were presumed extinct in the late 20th century. This legendary bird was rediscovered at the Mazu Islands in 2000, and one new colony was discovered at the Jiushan Islands, Xiangshan County of Zhejiang Province, in 2004. Since 2011, BirdLife International and the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (BirdLife in Hong Kong) have been working with Dr. Chen Shui-hua from Zhejiang Museum of Natural History, the Zhejiang Wild Bird Society, the Ocean and Fishery Bureau of Xiangshan County and a team of tern experts lead by Dr. Daniel Roby from Oregon State University in the United States on a restoration project for Chinese Crested Terns in the Jiushan Islands, using the audio-visual social attraction methods of decoys and tern call playbacks.

The restoration work started during the breeding season in 2013 on Tiedun Dao, a 2-hectare island within the Xiangshan Jiushan National Nature Reserve. During the first season, one Chinese Crested Tern chick successfully fledged. However, very little else was known as there



were no observations done at the breeding colony in 2013. This year, a conservationist from Hong Kong, Mr. Simba Chan, Senior Conservation Officer of BirdLife International Asia Division, stayed on Tiedun Dao to ensure that no adverse factors affected the nesting terns and to monitor the breeding colony. This is the first on-site monitoring programme of this poorly known species. With very basic facilities built on the restoration site, Mr. Chan stayed on the island for three months with the terns, even when typhoons passed through the island during the 2014 breeding season, guarding and monitoring the tern colony day and night. This year, up to 90% of all the Chinese Crested Terns in the world have been attracted to this one-colony site, and have safely produced their offspring.

By the end of the breeding season, a large quantity of useful data regarding the breeding biology of Chinese Crested Terns has been collected and these data will prove very useful for the future management and design of additional restoration projects for this critically endangered species. Building on the excellent results from the first two years of this restoration project, the team is considering expanding the project to Wuzhishan Island, Zhejiang and Mazu Island next year and further collaborating with Taiwan researchers. The team will improve the nesting habitat as well as apply the audio-visual social attraction method on all three selected sites, hoping to establish a network of breeding sites for the species. To identify the Chinese Crested Tern's migration and over-wintering areas, a banding project (to attach a small, individually numbered tag to the leg of the bird) for the crested terns in the area has also been proposed.

“Gradually, more will be learned about the biology and migration of the crested terns in Eastern China. This will assist them as well as other seabird populations to be restored with the help of well-designed outreach and education programmes. More importantly, it is hoped that more interest on international cooperation and restoration of tern and seabird colonies can be generated from this project, particularly for Asia,” said Mr. Simba Chan.

Ms. Suzanne Gendron, OPCFHK's Foundation Director, said, “The Foundation has been supporting the conservation works on Chinese Crested Tern since 2008, by providing funding to start up the project and later to 2014 to monitor the breeding population in Zhejiang and to educate local communities about the importance of conservation. We are excited to know that after years of efforts, we see hopes of the survival of this critically endangered species. This is also a good tool to inspire a new generation of conservationists to keep our conservation efforts going. This year, two students from The University of Hong Kong, who joined the Foundation's University Student Sponsorship Programme, joined Mr. Simba Chan in the field for 18 days. It was a once-in-a-life-time experience for them to witness this significant milestone of seabird



conservation in China.”

This project was only made possible with the generous support of the Xiangshan Ocean and Fishery Bureau, the Zhejiang Museum of Natural History, the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation, Hong Kong, the Japan Fund for Global Environment, Endangered Species Fund from the State Forestry Administration of China, Pacific Seabird Group and BirdLife International Preventing Extinctions Programme supporter - Mark Constantine. The two organisations in Zhejiang also provided significant logistical support which helped make the project such a resounding success. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (Wildlife Without Borders) supported the project by providing decoys and playback equipment needed for social attraction.