



Visit to SWIMS (The Swire Institute of Marine Science)

22 October 2011

The University of Hong Kong Law Alumni Association organized a visit on 22nd October, 2011 to The Swire Institute of Marine Science (SWIMS), a research institute of The University of Hong Kong's School of Biological Sciences. SWIMS is located at the southernmost tip of the Cape d'Aguilar peninsula (south of Shek O) and right on the shores of Hong Kong's only Marine Reserve, access to which is strictly controlled.

Upon arrival, the visitors were warmly greeted by Professor Gray Williams, Honorary Director of SWIMS. Prof Williams introduced us to SWIMS and its research focus and objectives. The presentation was informative, interesting and inspiring. Prof Williams also shared with us his personal experience in witnessing the growth in students' environmental consciousness – when they change their focus from “how are we going to cook this mud crab” to “what can we do to conserve this species”. A lively Q&A session ensued, after which everyone was persuaded Hong Kong is endowed with a rich diversity of marine species and we should do more towards their conservation.

We were then shown round SWIMS' outdoor laboratories, where various species of algae, sea urchin and coral reefs were kept. Visitors were allowed “close encounter” with these marine species whilst Prof Williams explained how, by observing the growth and development of these marine species, they can monitor changes in the condition of the Marine Reserve and assess their impact on the species found in its waters.

Prof Williams then led us on a “mini field trip” to the rocky shores of the Marine Reserve. Climbing up and down the rocky shores was an experience which “took our breath away” (in more than one respect!) The scenery was amazing, and so were the coastal rock formations. We could see a distinct dark basalt dyke intrusion into the volcanic rocks. If the area had not been designated a Marine Reserve, it would probably have qualified for alternative protection due to its geological significance. We all became enthusiastic students again, asking numerous questions about the crabs, snails, sea urchins, rock barnacles and other species we saw in the wild.

Everyone had a great time, especially the children who could not bear to pull themselves away from the star fishes when it was long past our scheduled departure time. May be we have seen some marine biologists in the making?

Some members expressed interest in visiting SWIMS again and spending a weekend at their Residence. Those who are interested can email swims@hku.hk.

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