

Lantau Conservation Fund

Research Project

Project Number	RE-2025-12
Recipient Organisation	Lingnan University
Project Title	Establishing a Foundation for Freshwater Turtle Conservation on Lantau
Project Description*	Freshwater turtles are among the most threatened vertebrate groups globally, with over 80% of Asian species listed as Endangered or Critically Endangered due to overexploitation for food and the pet trade and ongoing habitat degradation. Local turtle conservation is disproportionately important at the global scale because Hong Kong supports the last wild populations of some endangered species. Despite substantial research, enforcement, and conservation breeding efforts elsewhere in the territory, Lantau Island remains a major gap in freshwater turtle conservation, with no systematic surveys conducted to date. Recent anecdotal observations by researchers and local naturalists suggest that Lantau still supports populations of the Critically Endangered Big-headed Turtle (<i>Platysternon megacephalum</i>) and Golden Coin Turtle (<i>Cuora trifasciata</i>). However, their distribution, population status, and conservation threats on Lantau are currently unknown. Freshwater turtles therefore represent one of the most understudied yet highly threatened faunal groups on the island. In addition to their conservation status, freshwater turtles play important ecological roles in stream ecosystems, including seed dispersal and regulation of prey communities, such that their

	loss may have cascading effects on ecosystem structure and function. This project contributes to turtle conservation by conducting systematic stream surveys of Lantau to clarify the presence, distribution, and population status of native turtle species. At sites where turtles are detected, population monitoring and individual marking will be implemented to support long-term monitoring and strengthen law enforcement against poaching. Genetic analyses will be used to assess population structure, thereby informing conservation breeding and future reintroduction planning. Camera-trap surveillance at key sites will further support in situ protection by detecting human access and facilitating enforcement responses. By integrating field surveys, genetic analyses, population monitoring, and targeted surveillance, this project will provide the scientific foundation needed to integrate Lantau into territory-wide freshwater turtle conservation strategies.
Project Period	36 months
Approved Grant	\$1,540,000

*The project description is provided by the project proponent