

LIFE

In old frontiersman's lost horse, we find encouragement

Long before I ever uttered my first word in Mandarin Chinese, I encountered a story that has helped me redefine how I approach the

good and the bad in life — the tale of the old frontiersman's lost horse, or *sai weng shi ma*.

According to the tale, an old man living near the border happened to lose his horse when it ran away. People came to comfort him, but he responded by saying, "Why couldn't this be some-

thing fortunate?" After a few months, the horse returned to the old man, bringing along with it a number of fine steeds from the frontier. People came to offer congratulations, but the old man said, "Why couldn't this be a calamity?" The old man now had many horses at his home, and his son loved to ride. But one day, while on horseback, the son fell off and broke his leg. People came to console the old man, who instead told them, "Why couldn't this be a good thing?" A year later, barbarians carried out a large-scale invasion on the frontier, and every able-bodied young man took up arms to go to war. The vast majority of the people

living at the frontier died. But the son was saved from going to battle because of his lame leg, allowing him and his father to survive in safety.

Ever since I've first read this story as a high school student, I've returned to it again and again whenever the world yields more sorrows than sweetness. The idea that, perhaps, things that seemed bad might actually prove to have a silver lining, one we might not discern at first, has provided a certain reassurance I depend on amid the vicissitudes of life. And indeed, sometimes what seems apparently unfortunate can still yield blessings after all. For example, years ago when I

returned to China from the United States, I came for a position at an organization in Hangzhou that soured after only four months. But, because of that position, which I ultimately quit, I discovered the charms of Hangzhou and found myself surrounded by a bevy of friends who encouraged me to stay. Then I soon fell into a wonderful new job at an internet company — the same firm that my future husband Jun would enter only months later, allowing the two of us to meet and fall in love.

From this perspective, those four bitter months at that organization proved fortuitous, because the experience still brought me to Hangzhou,

where I eventually got that pivotal new job that would connect me with my cherished husband.

Psychology professionals might point out that the story of the old frontiersman's lost horse could serve as a more ancient example of the idea of reframing — to look at a situation from a different angle.

Of course, not everything lends itself easily to a more uplifting rewrite, such as the untimely death of my mother when I was in high school. However, approaching the world with an eye toward the positive, and the hopeful possibilities in life, does mean we're more likely to find encouragement elsewhere,

even in the little things.

I like to play a game with my husband I call "However". Whenever one of us brings up some bad news or a negative situation, the other responds with the word "However" as a prompt to speak out the dialectical good side to what happened. I have a feeling the old frontiersman who lost a horse would approve.

Contact the writer at jocelyn@chinadaily.com.cn

Online
Scan the code to hear an audio version.



Candid camera: Healthy goal



Children play football in a residential community in Shanghai on Sunday. People who have been confined at home since the COVID-19 outbreak are gradually resuming their normal lives.

ZHOU XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Online
Scan the QR code for subscription or to get a copy of today's paper.

Swan route takes wing with protective measures

TAIYUAN — Spring is in the air. Tens of thousands of swans are leaving their winter homes in China and flying back to Siberia.

Local authorities in China's regions along the swans' migration route have pledged a harsh punishment for poaching and arranged special personnel to safeguard the birds on their return to Siberia.

Swans are listed as a national second-level protected animal in China and a globally vulnerable species. According to Zhang Longsheng, a senior engineer with the Shanxi provincial forestry and grassland bureau, there are three main migration routes for Siberian swans flying to China, with the middle route passing through Mongolia to northern and central China.

"Over 20,000 swans migrate from Siberia to China annually. The Yellow River Wetland is their largest migration site, attracting more than half the population every winter," Zhang says.

Located between Pinglu county of Shanxi province, and the city of Sanmenxia in Henan province, the Yellow River Wetland has an area of 2.8 million hectares, and plays an important role in protecting water quality in northern China.

"Swans started to hibernate here in the 1980s, and the number has grown from 2,000 to 12,000 over the years," says Yang Yunge, head of the wildlife conservation station of Pinglu.

In 2012, Pinglu was named "China's Swan County" by the China Wildlife Conservation Association. In order to protect the species, Pinglu has shut down all polluting enterprises around the wetland, invested tens of millions of US dollars to improve the environment and established a conservation team with some 100 people as well as installing a video surveillance system.

"It is our responsibility to protect these swans. They are both part of the natural ecology and our happy life," says He Jianxi, who has been a ranger for more than 10 years in the Pinglu Yellow River Wetland Reserve. For the past few months, he has been feeding them corn and cabbage weighing over 100 metric tons.

For the past six consecutive

years, Pinglu has compensated local farmers 400,000 yuan (\$57,100) annually to return farmland to wetland.

Pinglu strives to find a "balance point" between the ecological and economic benefits. The county is constructing a swan ecological economic demonstration zone with an investment of 3 billion yuan. After the completion of its first stage, it is expected to receive more than 500,000 tourists a year.

The rise of the "swan economy" has strengthened the awareness of authorities and people across China of the need to protect the species and the ecological environment.

In 2014, Sanmenxia has designated Nov 22 as "Swans Protection Day".

Last winter, an international academic exchange conference on swan conservation was held in the city of Rongcheng in East China's Shandong province, another important swan migration site.

Representatives and scholars from China, Russia and Japan, among other countries, jointly issued the Rongcheng Declaration on Swans Conservation, aimed at strengthening international cooperation in the protection of the birds.

Guo Lixin, deputy secretary-general of the China Wildlife Conservation Association, said at the meeting that Rongcheng's swan protection and management model based on community participation has formed an urban ecology in which people and nature harmoniously coexist.

In 2013, China set a "red line" of no less than 53 million hectares of wetlands by 2020. In 2019, 158 pilot national wetland parks in China passed appraisal, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

Thanks to the introduction of multiple protection policies and increasing financial investment, China's continuous improvement of the ecological environment has become the best "escort" for the migration of swans.

"As China continues to improve its ecological environment, there may be more swans flying from Siberia to spend the winter in China," Zhang says.

XINHUA



Top and above: Swans fly over the water at the Yellow River Wetland in Pinglu county, Shanxi province, on March 1. It is one of the biggest sites for swans migrating from Siberia for the winter. PHOTOS BY WANG FEIHANG / XINHUA

Tour a zoo and adopt an animal on screen

By WANG QIAN
wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn

The gates may be shut to the general public but one zoo has come up with a modern-day solution that gives "visitors" access and, through a unique adoption system, raises money for the upkeep of the animals.

More than 880,000 visitors explored the Qingdao Forest Wildlife World in Shandong province via Taobao Live on March 9. During the virtual field trip, animal lovers were able to "adopt" their favorites.

Two days before the tour, writer and rally driver Han Han announced his adoption of two hippos at the zoo on Chinese micro-blogging site, Sina Weibo. The post has been viewed more than 6 million times.

"Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, almost every sector is impacted. The chain reaction triggered is heartbreaking. Facing operational difficulties, some zoos launched animal adoptions. I have adopted two hippos at Qingdao Forest Wildlife World," Han posted.

The adoption program was launched late last month. Through symbolic adoption, the donation can help meet upkeep costs and purchase food for the animals, as well as support education and conservation projects.

"It can help create a special bond between human and animal, raising the public awareness about animal protection," Li Huanbin, director of the planning department at the Qingdao Forest Wildlife World, says. The private zoo, he adds, has been closed since Jan 24 and has encountered difficulties such as financial burdens and transportation obstacles.

With no notice of a potential reopening date, daily maintenance of the zoo costs about 160,000 yuan (\$22,843). Before the epidemic, there were thousands of visitors to



A zookeeper takes care of giraffes at the Qingdao Forest Wildlife World in Qingdao, Shandong province, which held a virtual tour via Taobao Live on March 9. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the zoo, but since its closure on Jan 24, its revenue has been reduced to zero.

To deal with the challenge, the zoo launched virtual tours, with discounts for presale tickets, lower adoption fees and extended membership.

The local government has released a slew of measures, including a relief fund, to help cultural and tourism companies weather the shutdown.

"Thanks to the government's preferential policy and support from the public, operation of the zoo is back to normal," Li says. During the closure, zookeepers disinfected the zoo twice daily compared with once every two weeks before the outbreak.

According to the zoo, the adoption fee for small animals like raccoons, turtles and squirrel monkeys is 360 yuan per year. For larger animals like hippos, giraffes and flamingos it is 1,000 yuan per year. There is a limit of 10 adopters for one animal. Adopters can enjoy free "entrance" and close "interaction" with their animals.

The program has been updated from an existing one that had been

running for about 10 years. Before the outbreak, it mainly targeted companies, schools and institutes, when the adoption price was much higher, about 10,000 yuan per year for big animals like giraffes.

"This year, we hope more people can get involved in the program. Together we can make life better for the animals," Li says.

When the program ended on Friday, more than 5,000 people had inquired and nearly 1,000 had made an adoption. These included more than 20 from the United States, Japan, Canada and Singapore, Li says. The zoo houses about 3,000 animals with 180 species.

To help the public get "close" to the animals during the shutdown, the zoo also launched virtual tours on livestreaming platforms such as Taobao Live, Douyin and Yizhibo in mid-February.

Usually lasting about an hour, viewers follow zookeepers' cameras, enjoying some often hilarious and touching moments with the animals including hippos, tigers and alpacas. It is also a tour packed with interesting information and facts about popular animals.

During a recent virtual tour early

this month, one of the hippos adopted by Han opened his mouth wide to let a zookeeper brush his teeth with a giant toothbrush, a ritual he clearly enjoys every day. Weighing about 3 metric tons, the 15-year-old hippo eats about 100 kilograms of grass and fruit daily.

Li explains when adopters like Han come to the zoo, they can help brush the teeth of their adopted hippos.

Besides interaction with the animals, Li adds adopters also enjoy privileges such as naming their animals, free admission and free parking at the zoo. Adopters can also contact the zoo for the latest information on their animals.

"An adoption ceremony will be held when the zoo reopens," Li says.

For Guo Jingchun, 24, in Tianjin, who adopted a raccoon at the zoo, the program is a step closer to her dream of being a zookeeper.

Guo says she doesn't care about adopters' privileges, she only wants to make sure the animals have adequate food.

Many other zoos, including Beijing Zoo, Shanghai Zoo and Chongqing Zoo, have moved online.

"People kept calling the zoo and expressing their eagerness to see the animals during the epidemic, so we adopted an online approach," says Yang Yi, deputy chief of Chongqing Zoo's science and education department.

Online zoos can help operators attract fans at low cost, which may promote future interaction, Beijing Business Today quoted Wu Liyun, a professor at the China Academy of Culture and Tourism under the Beijing International Studies University, as saying.

Six of Shanghai's major parks — Shanghai Botanical Garden, Shanghai Zoo, Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden, Gongqing Forest Park, Guyi Garden and Riverside Forest Park — reopened on Friday.