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**Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site
Waterbird Monitoring Programme
2004 - 05**

**Egretty Counts in Hong Kong,
with particular reference to the Mai Po
Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site**

Summer 2004 Report



Submitted by
The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Ltd.
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Waterbird Monitoring at the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site

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Summer 2004 Report: Egretty Counts in Hong Kong with particular reference to the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site

Report



The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Limited



Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department

EGRETRY COUNTS IN HONG KONG, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE MAI PO AND INNER DEEP BAY RAMSAR SITE

SUMMER 2004 REPORT

Summary

In the 2004 breeding season, a total of 242 nests of four ardeid species in seven egretries (thereafter colonies) were recorded in the Deep Bay area. Chinese Pond Herons (*Ardeola bacchus* 133 nests) and Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta* 100 nests) were the dominant species in the Deep Bay area, which comprised 43% and 40% of their local populations respectively. The nest abundance in Deep Bay accounted for 27% of the total number of nests in Hong Kong in 2004. The total nest abundance in Hong Kong in 2004 was 888 nests of five species in 20 colonies. One new colony at Little Green Island was first reported, while the Stonecutters was abandoned. Compared with 732 nests in 2003, there is an increase of 16% and 19% in number of nests in the Deep Bay area and Hong Kong, respectively. Inappropriate use of adjacent footpath as a minibus stop could be one of disturbances that contribute to the long-term decline of nest abundance at the Mai Po Village colony. Relocating the minibus stop and planting suitable vegetation to provide screening to the colony are recommended.

1 INTRODUCTION

Breeding activity is an important aspect of population dynamics. Nesting populations of colonial waterbirds are counted as part of long-term monitoring studies in Mediterranean Europe (Tourenq *et al.* 2000), Australia (McKilligan 2001) and the United States (Gawlik *et al.* 1998). In East and Southeast Asia long-term records of breeding populations of colonial nesting ardeids only exist in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) and Vietnam (Lansdown *et al.* 2000). Reporting of the number of nesting pairs in Hong Kong, organized by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, started as early as 1958. This kind of record submission was suspended between 1975 and 1989 (Young and Cha 1995). Recording was far from complete, and on many occasions only breeding species were recorded with no count of nesting pairs made. In addition, not all colonies were counted each year. The recording of nest abundance in the Deep Bay area, as part of the long-term monitoring of waterbird abundance in the Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site, started in 1998. Both breeding species and the number of nesting pairs, in the Deep Bay area are recorded.

2 METHODS

Active and abandoned egrettries (thereafter colonies) in 2002 and 2003 were surveyed between March and July 2004 (Table 1 and 2, Figure 1). In addition, potential new nesting sites were also visited. New colonies were located by personal observations. Active nests determined by the presence of incubating adults or chicks, were counted directly from vantage points or by the walk-and-count method at all colonies. On Little Green Island, each landing location of returned adults is considered as one possible nest as all nests were hidden in vegetation. Repeated landings around the same location were considered as one nest. A sketch map of Little Green Island was made for recording the landing locations. Apart from the nest abundance, the nesting substratum was also identified. The number of nests in each colony was taken to be the sum of the highest count of the number of nests of each species (for colonies surveyed more than once).

Table 1. Dates of surveys by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society in the 2004 breeding season (*: Deep Bay colonies). Breeding of Black-crowned Night Heron at Ocean Park is strongly suspected although no such activity was seen during the visit.

Colony	Date
Mai Po Village*	17 April, 23 May
Tam Kon Chau*	17 April, 23 May
Pak Nai*	13 May
Ngau Hom Shek*	16 May
Ho Sheung Heung	17 April
Tai Po Market	16 May,
Centre Island	16 May
Penfold Park	9 May
A Chau	30 March, 3 April, 16 May
Stonecutters	15 May
Lam Tsuen	8 May, 1 and 4 June
Tai O	15 May
Ho Pui	8 May, 6 June
Ma On Kong	8 May, 6 June
Mai Po Lung Village*	17 April, 23 May
Tung Shing Lane* [^]	17 April, 23 May
Ha Che	8 May
Tai Tong	17 April, 23 May
Ha Mei San Tsuen*	17 April, 23 May
Tuen Mun	17 April, 23 May
Shing Uk Tsuen*	23 April
Little Green Island	22 May, 21 June
Ocean Park	15 May
To Kau Wan	30 April

[^]: Previously named as Small Trader New Village

Table 2. Dates of surveys by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department in the 2004 breeding season (*: Deep Bay colonies).

Colony	Date
Tai Po Market (Wan Tau Kok Lane)	20 July
Pat Heung Tsing Long Highway	20 July
Ping Shan Ha Mei Tsuen	20 July
Mai Po Lo Wa	20 July
Shuen Wan	10 May
Sam Mun Tsai	20 July
Shui Tau Tsuen	20 July
Ha Che	20 July
Shing Uk Tsuen	4 June
Tsim Bei Tsui	4 June
Yim Tso Ha	4 June

3 RESULTS and DISCUSSION

3.1 Breeding population in the 2004 breeding season

A total of 888 nests were recorded at 20 colonies between March and July 2004 in Hong Kong (Figure 1, Appendix 1 - 19). Another six abandoned colonies (Sam Mun Tsai, Shui Tau Tsuen, Shing Uk Tsuen, Tsim Bei Tsui, To Kau Wan and Yim Tso Ha) were visited but no breeding was found. Underestimation of active nests at A Chau, Centre Island and Little Green Island colonies may occur as some nests may hide in dense vegetation. There was a 19% increase in total nests between 2003 and 2004. A colony at Little Green Island near Kennedy Town, Hong Kong Island was first noted but the Stonecutters were abandoned. As in previous years between 1998 and 2003, the small colony of Chinese Pond Herons is located about 200 m northeast to the Mai Po Village colony was included in that one. Apart from these 20 colonies, the Tai Shue Wan part of Ocean Park was also visited but no confirmed breeding was noted (Table 1). However, breeding of Black-crowned Night Heron at Ocean Park is believed as on-site staff reported that newly-fledged juveniles were seen in previous years.

The highest number of nests was recorded at the A Chau colony (26% of total nests in Hong Kong) while the lowest was at the Ngau Hom Shek colony (0.2% of total nests in Hong Kong) (Table 3). A Chau contained the highest number of nests of Great Egrets (*Egretta alba*) (75% of the total number of nests), Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) (69% of the total number of nests), and Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) (38% the total number of nests) in Hong Kong. With regard to Little Egrets, the Tuen Mun colony (14% of total Little Egret nests in Hong Kong) is the

most important site, while the Ho Sheung Heung colony is the main nesting site of Chinese Pond Herons (*Ardeola bacchus*) (31% of the total Chinese Pond Heron nests in Hong Kong).

Numerically, Chinese Pond Heron (35% of the total number of nests) was the most while Cattle Egret was the least numerous (8% of the total number of nests numerous (Table 3). Little Egrets and Chinese Pond Herons are the most widespread species. Little Egrets bred at 16 colonies, while Chinese Pond Herons bred at 13 colonies.

In general, the population increase cannot be explained due to the absence of qualitative or quantitative data of preys, nor productivity of wetland habitats in Hong Kong, population trend could not be explained.

Table 3. The number of nests at surveyed colonies in the Hong Kong in 2004 (*: Deep Bay colonies).

	Great Egret	Little Egret	Black-crowned Night Heron	Chinese Pond Heron	Cattle Egret	Total	%
1. Mai Po Village*		28		18	6	52	5.8
2. Tam Kon Chau*				47		47	5.4
3. Pak Nai*		30		5		35	4.0
4. Ngau Hom Shek*		1		1		2	0.2
5. Ho Sheung Heung		23		99	8	130	14.9
6. Centre Island	20	13	9		1	43	4.9
7. Penfold Park		15	3	3	1	22	2.5
8. A Chau	64	14	119		27	224	25.7
9. Little Green Island	1	23	14			38	4.4
10. Lam Tsuen		1		19		20	2.3
11. Tai O		19	15			34	3.6
12. Ho Pui					10	10	1.1
13. Ma On Kong				10		10	1.1
14. Mai Po Lung Village*		10		35		45	5.2
15. Tung Shing Lane*^		24		8	3	35	4.0
16. Ha Che		3		32		35	4.0
17. Tai Tong				16	15	31	3.9
18. Ha Mei San Tsuen*		7		19		26	3.0
19. Tuen Mun		35				35	4.0
20. Tai Po Market		2	12				
Total	85	248	172	312	71	888	100
%	9.6	27.9	19.4	35.1	8.0	100.0	
No. of colonies that the particular ardeid was found	3	16	6	13	8		

^: Previously named as Small Trader New Village

3.2 Colonies in Deep Bay

A total of 242 nests of three species in seven colonies in the Deep Bay area were recorded during the 2004 breeding season (Table 3 and 4). Tam Kon Chau is the only colony inside the Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site. **No Great Egret and Black-crowned Night Heron was recorded breeding in the Deep Bay area.** These two ardeids bred in the Deep Bay area previously. The total number of nests in colonies in the Deep Bay area comprised 27% of the total number of nests in Hong Kong (Table 4). Chinese Pond Herons and Little Egrets were the two most abundant species in the Deep Bay area, and comprised 43% and 40% of their local nesting populations, respectively.

Table 4. The relative importance of Deep Bay colonies to the others in Hong Kong in 2004
Deep Bay colonies are Mai Po Village, Tam Kon Chau, Pak Nai, Ngau Hom Shek, Mai Po Lung Village, Tung Shing Lane, and Ha Mei San Tsuen.

Species	No. of nests in Deep Bay	Total no. of nests in Hong Kong	Deep Bay nests as % of all nests in Hong Kong
Great Egret		85	
Little Egret	100	248	40
Black-crowned Night Heron		172	
Chinese Pond Heron	133	312	43
Cattle Egret	9	71	13
Total	242	888	27

3.3 Nesting habitats

Bamboo was the main nesting habitat of ardeids nesting in North and Northwest New Territories including colonies at Ho Sheung Heung, Mai Po Lung Village, and Ho Pui (Table 5). All nests at the Tam Kon Chau colonies were built on Banyan trees (*Ficus microcarpa*). Exotic trees including *Melaleuca leucadendron* and *Lagerstroemia speciosa* were made use by ardeids nesting in the Mai Po Village and Tuen Mun colonies, respectively. The majority of nests on the A Chau colony were built on Cuban Bast (*Hibiscus tiliaceus*), while unidentified coastal plants were used by birds nesting in Centre Island and Little Green Island.

Table 5. Plants used by ardeids as nesting habitats in 2004.

	Bamboo	<i>Ficus microcarpa</i>	Exotic trees	Other plants	Remarks
1. Mai Po Village	+	+	+		
2. Tam Kon Chau		+			
3. Pak Nai	+				
4. Ngau Hom Shek	+				
5. Ho Sheung Heung	+				
6. Centre Island					No detailed plant survey was conducted
7. Penfold Park		+			
8. A Chau				Mainly on <i>Hibiscus titiaces</i> , <i>Mallotus mamiculatus</i>	
9. Little Green Island					No detailed plant survey was conducted
10. Lam Tsuen	+				
11. Tai O	+				
12. Ho Pui	+				
13. Ma On Kong				Lychee and Longgan trees	
14. Mai Po Lung Village*	+				
15. Tung Shing Lane*^	+				
16. Ha Che		+			
17. Tai Tong	+				
18. Ha Mei San Tsuen*	+				
19. Tuen Mun			+		<i>Lagerstroemia speciosa</i>
20. Tai Po Market					No observation was conducted

^: Previously named as Small Trader New Village

3.4 Long term decline in nest abundance at the Mai Po Village colony

A decline in nest abundance at the Mai Po Village colony has been noted in recent years. The total number of nests of this colony declined from 109 nests in 2001 to 52 in 2004. The decline in nest abundance is probably related to the following observations:

(i) Human disturbance

During the surveys, it is noted that the footpath of Castle Peak Road adjacent to the colony was used by nearby residents as a minibus station (Figure 2). Passengers were seen to wait minibus just in front of the colony. In fact, no nest was seen in that part of colony, suggesting that this activity could be one of the disturbances to the breeding birds. Previous observations in 2000 indicate that this part of the colony was made use by ardeids as nesting sites (L. C. Wong, pers. obs.). Photo records in 2000 revealed that the existing footpath was grassy area and that area was not seen as a minibus drop off / pick up area.

In order to minimize the disturbance to this important colony without causing inconvenience to nearby residents, it is recommended that that section of Castle Peak Road adjacent to the colony should be designated as a restricted zone in accordance with the Road Traffic (Traffic Control) Regulations. A minibus stop can be designated near the rubbish collection station. In addition, planting of bamboo along that section of Castle Peak Road could provide a screening effect to reduce the adverse impact of human activities on the nesting birds.

(ii) Disturbing monitoring at the Mai Po Village colony

An undetermined nest monitoring inside the Mai Po Village colony was seen during this breeding season. Coloured markings of 10 cm long on the base of 20 nests were seen (Figure 3). The highest height of this marked nest is around 10 – 12 m. The markings should be tagged through climbing trees or by climbing up a ladder. As the human being is identified as predators by the birds, any high degree of movement of human beings inside the colony would lead to falling down of chicks from their nests. It is anticipated that the marking process caused disturbance to the breeding birds not only around nearby nests, but also those in the colony.

3.5 Counting difficulty at the A Chau colony

Counting the nests of this colony from two vantage points outside A Chau has become more difficult in recent years as the vegetation is overgrown, causing heavy shading of the nests by the vegetation. Difficulty in counting the white egret nests could be overcome by the presence of adults or juveniles, which are contrast enough with the surrounding to indicate the presence of a nest. However, this technique could not apply for Black-crowned Night Herons as their body colour is dull and blend with the background. Thus, an underestimation of this species may be resulted. It is recommended that a survey of nests could be made in the colony by qualified researchers for more accurate estimation of nest abundance.

3.6 Protection of colonies against minor construction and maintenance works

In considering the disturbances at colonies, it is recommended that a list of colony locations should be circulated within relevant government departments to increase the awareness of their existence. Therefore, the present of colonies can be taken into account when maintenance works and planning applications are planned and considered, respectively. The recommended list should be circulated in the Planning Department, in particular Central Enforcement and Prosecution Section, Lands

Department, Environmental Protection Department, Drainage Department, Territorial Development Department and Highways Department.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Figures



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Figure 1. Locations of colonies in Hong Kong in 2004. Nesting colonies in the Deep Bay area are enclosed. (1: Mai Po Village, 2: Tam Kon Chau, 3: Pak Nai, 4: Ngau Hom Shek, 5: Ho Sheung Heung, 6: Centre Island, 7: Penfold Park, 8: A Chau, 9: Little Green Island, 10: Lam Tsuen, 11: Tai O, 12: Ho Pui, 13: Ma On Kong, 14: Mai Po Lung Tsuen, 15: Tung Shing Lane, 16: Ha Che, 17: Tai Tong, 18: Ha Mei San Tsuen, 19: Tuen Mun and 20: Tai Po Market).

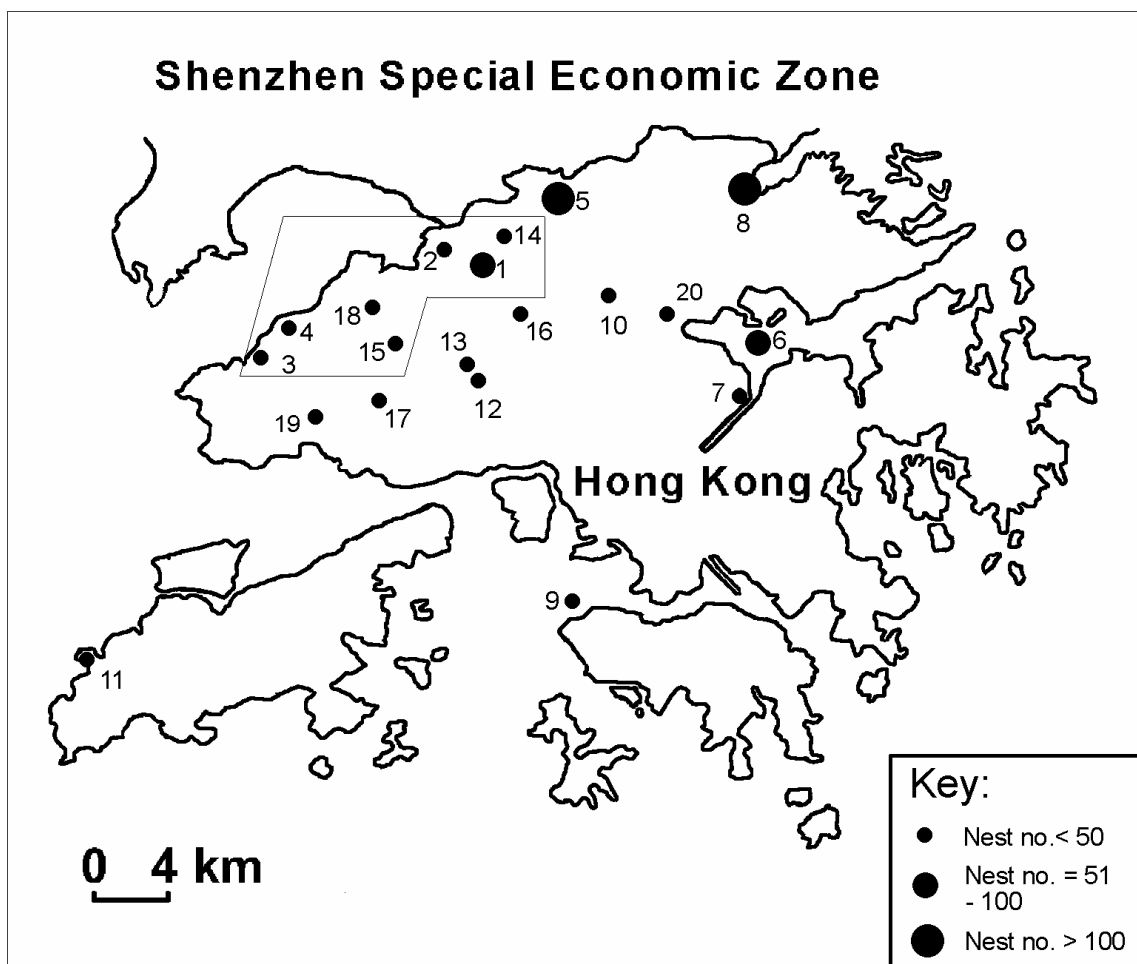


Figure 2. The footpath adjacent to the colony was used as a minibus stop. No breeding was noted in this part of colony. It is recommended that no passenger should be allowed to pick up in this section of Castle Peak Road



Figure 3. Markings of another undetermined monitoring in the Mai Po Village colony. The marking process is expected to cause disturbance to the breeding birds not only around nearby nests, but also those in the colony.



Summer 2004 Report: Egretty Counts in Hong Kong with particular reference to the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site

Appendice



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APPENDICES. The number of nest recorded in each survey in the colonies in 2004.

Appendix 1. Number of nests at Mai Po Village

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Little Egret	27	28	28
Cattle Egret	6	3	6
Chinese Pond Heron*	9	18	18
Total	42	49	51

*: Chinese Pond Heron nests were found at a nearby colony

Appendix 2. Number of nests at Tam Kon Chau

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Chinese Pond Heron	22	47	47
Total	22	47	47

Appendix 3. Number of nests at Pak Nai

	13 May
Little Egret	30
Chinese Pond Heron	5
Total	35

Appendix 4. Number of nests at Ngau Hom Shek

	13 May
Little Egret	1
Chinese Pond Heron	1
Total	2

Appendix 5. Number of nests at Ho Sheung Heung

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Little Egret	7	23	23
Cattle Egret	3	8	8
Chinese Pond Heron	60	99	99
Total	70	130	130

Appendix 6. Number of nests at Centre Island

	16 May
Great Egret	20
Little Egret	13
Cattle Egret	1
Black-crowned Night Heron	9
Total	43

Appendix 7. Number of nests at Penfold Park

	9 May
Little Egret	15
Cattle Egret	1
Chinese Pond Heron	3
Black-crowned Night Heron	3
Total	22

Appendix 8. Number of nests at A Chau

	20 Mar	3 Apr	16 May	Max
Great Egret	59	64	25	64
Little Egret	14	10	4	14
Cattle Egret		8	27	27
Black-crowned Night Heron	45	119	91	119
Total	118	201	147	224

Appendix 9. Number of nests at Little Green Island

	22 May	21 Jun	Max
Great Egret		1	1
Little Egret	10	23	23
Black-crowned Night Heron	12	14	14
Total	22	38	38

Appendix 10. Number of nests at Lam Tsuen

	8 May	1 Jun	4 Jun*	Max
Little Egret		1		1
Chinese Pond Heron	13	13	6	19
Total	13	14	6	20

*: a new small colony found 150 m away from the main one

Appendix 11. Number of nests at Tai O

	15 May
Little Egret	19
Black-crowned Night Heron	15
Total	34

Appendix 12. Number of nests at Ho Pui

	8 May	6 Jun	Max
Cattle Egret	10	10	10
Total	10	10	10

Appendix 13. Number of nests at Ma On Kong

	8 May	6 Jun	Max
Chinese Pond Heron	6	10	10
Total	6	10	10

Appendix 14. Number of nests at Mai Po Lung Tsuen

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Little Egret	1	10	10
Chinese Pond Heron	5	35	35
Total	6	45	45

Appendix 15. Number of nests at Tung Shing Lane (previously named as Small Traders New Village).
(+ = presence but no breeding activities were noted)

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Great Egret*	+		
Little Egret	24	14	24
Cattle Egret	3	+	3
Chinese Pond Heron	5	8	8
Total	32	22	35

*: in non-breeding plumage

Appendix 16. Number of nests at Ha Che

	8 May
Little Egret	3
Chinese Pond Heron	32
Total	35

Appendix 17. Number of nests at Tai Tong (+ = presence but no breeding activities were noted)

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Cattle Egret	8	15	15
Chinese Pond Heron	11	16	16
Black-crowned Night Heron	+		
Total	19	31	31

Appendix 18. Number of nests at Ha Mei San Tsuen

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Little Egret	7	4	7
Chinese Pond Heron	12	19	19
Total	19	23	26

Appendix 19. Number of nests at Tuen Mun

	17 Apr	23 May	Max
Little Egret	30	35	35
Total	30	35	35

Appendix 20. Number of nests at Tai Po Market (Wan Tau Kok Lane)

	20 Jul
Little Egret	2
Black-crowned Night Heron	12
Total	14