



# THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

G P O BOX 12460, HONG KONG

BULLETIN NO. 136                      JUNE 1990

## SOCIETY NEWS

- i) Annual General Meeting. The 33rd AGM took place on 27 March 1990. The minutes of the meeting, including the Chairman's Report, are enclosed with this bulletin.
- ii) 'What's about' contact number. The number given in the last bulletin was unfortunately incorrect. Mike Turnbull's telephone number is 525 6564.
- iii) Systematic list. The committee has recently decided to return to the inclusion of a full systematic list (as opposed to the present rarities report) in the annual Report. Those members who stated that they have not been sending in records because these were not certain to appear in print, are now invited to submit cards. Initials will be included with records of particular interest, thus giving the finders their apparently much-sought-after due recognition! The systematic list will appear for the first time in the 1990 Report although it is intended to print initials in the 1989 Report.
- iv) Typhoons. If Signal 3 is up or appears likely to be hoisted on a day when a Society outing has been arranged, please contact the leader for advice. If Signal 8 is up, the outing will automatically be cancelled.

## BIG BIRD RACE 1990 (John Edge)

This year's Race, the seventh in the series, differed from those of previous years in two main respects: firstly, it took place over two days (from 1800h on 6 April to 1800h on 7 April) and secondly, the funds raised are to be put towards education and management rather than land acquisition. There were 15 teams this year, the latest addition being

-----

The next committee meeting will be held in late July 1990; if any Society member wishes a matter raised please contact one of the committee members on the telephone numbers given below.

Hong Kong Bird Watching Society officers and committee members:

|                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Gavin Cooper    | Richard Stott   |
| Janet Stott     | Mike Chalmers   |
| Simba Chan      | John Edge       |
| Peter Kennerley | C Y Lam         |
| David Melville  | Verity Picken   |
| Mike Turnbull   | Michael Webster |

NATIONAL SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BIRD PRESERVATION

four ladies from Kobe, representing the Wild Bird Society of Japan, so there were at least 60 people all trying to get their share of roosting winter-plumaged waders. There was also another difference - it didn't rain! This was fortunate in the context of April's weather in general.

The idea of spreading the Race over two days was prompted by an awkward tide. It was decided to hold the Race on the weekend of 7 April partly because it was considered to be the optimum time for numbers of birds (aggregate totals for the 1988 and 1989 Races were 237 and 232 species respectively), and partly so as not to clash with either the previous weekend (the Rugby Sevens - we cannot compete with that!) or the following one, which was Easter. In order to maximize the number of birds seen, and thus increase funds raised, teams should watch the managed area at Mai Po (particularly the 'scrape') when the tide is at its highest in Deep Bay, as the shorebirds are forced off the bay onto the marsh; about 40 species of wader are usually recorded on Race day, not to mention duck and other waterbirds.

High tides were relatively low over the Race weekend - 1.9 metres on the Friday evening, only 1.6 metres on the Saturday morning - which made it even more critical to catch the waders on the managed area while the tide was up. New rules devised to meet the unusual hours of the Race were subject to some very interesting interpretations - teams that were able to take the Friday afternoon off stationed themselves in the hides, counted off the waders and on the stroke of six asked 'Anything moved?'. 'No'. Forty ticks by 1805h! Commendable initiative. In fact, this meant that those teams who were unable to get to Mai Po on the Friday had the place to themselves on Saturday morning and a potentially explosive pile-up was avoided.

The Race was won by the Professionals, led by Ken Searle, with a total of 156 species. They are the only team to have won the Race outright twice, and Ken is still dining out on it! No-one should be surprised at this result as the team consisted of a formidable combination of local knowledge and field expertise from its overseas members. As the tables below show, it was a close race, with only seven species separating the first seven teams, but as far as sponsorship goes, the Professionals easily won that 'race' as well - as they make a habit of doing. Ken is to be congratulated on both counts. Results are as follows:

#### THE RACE

| <u>Place</u> | <u>Team</u>                | <u>Number of species</u> |
|--------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1            | Professionals              | 156                      |
| 2            | Wandering Tattlers         | 155                      |
| 3            | = Police                   | 154                      |
| 3            | = Stonechats               | 154                      |
| 5            | WWF HK                     | 152                      |
| 6            | ICI (China)                | 151                      |
| 7            | Ladies Plus                | 150                      |
| 8            | Philip Morris All Stars    | 146                      |
| 9            | = Birdbrains               | 145                      |
| 9            | = China Resources          | 145                      |
| 11           | Locals                     | 142                      |
| 12           | Mai Po                     | 127                      |
| 13           | = Army                     | 123                      |
| 13           | = HKBWS                    | 123                      |
| 15           | Wild Bird Society of Japan | 78                       |

SPONSORSHIP:

|   | <u>Team</u>   | <u>Corporate</u>                              | <u>Individual</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|---|---------------|---|-------------------|--------------|
| 1 | Professionals | \$100,000 (Sino Land Co Ltd)                  | \$269,739*        | \$369,739    |
| 2 | WWF HK        | \$ 30,000 (Polly Peck International (HK) Ltd) | \$117,781         | \$147,781    |
| 3 | Ladies Plus   | \$ 30,000 (Hutchison Whampoa Ltd)             | \$ 64,965         | \$ 94,965    |

\* This figure includes a donation by the Lee Hysan Foundation of \$30,000, to be made to the team seeing the most species - the winner, therefore.

Mention should also be made of Stewart Smith, a member of the WWF HK team, who, in spite of work commitments, single-handedly raised over \$80,000 of WWF HK's total. A remarkable effort, which was rewarded with the presentation of a special trophy (a Pied Kingfisher by Ma Hai-feng) by Mary Ketterer, WWF HK's Honorary Executive Director, at the post-race dinner.

The aggregate number of species seen was 218, lower than in the previous two years but still impressive, bearing in mind the scarcity of late winter visitors and migrant passerines - perhaps this is why the Race was so close. The Nepal holiday prize, awarded for correctly guessing the winning team and the aggregate number of species, was won by Stewart Smith (the same) who most generously put the prize back in the hat, as he won it two years ago. On a redraw, the winner was Dr. David Cheng.

The Cooper's Crippler trophy, also awarded at the dinner, was won by the Army team for a Hoopoe found on the small remaining part of Sek Kong airstrip, though this must have been run very close by ICI China's Blyth's Pipit Anthus godlewskii seen at Tsim Bei Tsui - a 'first' for Hong Kong. The six o'clock finish this year meant that the dinner and pre-dinner drinks were more leisurely than heretofore - a very welcome change for tired racers! We nevertheless enjoyed ourselves enormously and we were particularly pleased to welcome Bill Oddie, a veteran racer with a refreshing sense of humour and attitude, to the ICI China Team.

Lastly, a few words about the whole point of the Race. It is to raise money, and this year we did better than ever, raising a total of \$1.325 million, comfortably exceeding the target, initially considered optimistic, of \$1.2 million. A huge thank-you is due to all sponsors, corporate and individual, whatever the amount of the contribution. I find it greatly encouraging that year after year sponsors continue to contribute, without any arm-twisting, to what appears to be a popular cause - the development of Mai Po as a protected area. There is now an exciting rumour that the Government is including in its budget for 1991/92 the funds necessary to purchase the remaining two-thirds of the Mai Po reserve for WWF HK - but do not think this will be the end of the Big Bird Race! Funds will continue to be needed for the management of existing and future facilities, for habitat improvement and for further educational expansion. All those who have been there will see how well Mai Po is coming on, and its value as a facility increases in proportion to the development of Hong Kong as a whole.

## MAI PO UPDATE (Michael Lau)

### Deep Bay Fish Nets

This year, despite several operations by the Agriculture and Fisheries Department and also a recent air-borne assault with the valuable assistance of the Army to remove fish nets, the Chinese fishermen are still operating in the area and causing a lot of disturbance to the birdlife. The long-term solution to this problem is to list inner Deep Bay under the Sixth Schedule of Cap. 170. It will then be given the same status as Mai Po Marshes and access will be restricted to those with written permission from the Agriculture and Fisheries Department. After careful examination and background research, the Government has approved this proposal in principle and it is now in the law-drafting stage. We hope this will come into effect as soon as possible but in the meantime, we have to keep an eye on the situation and take action whenever fish nets are found.

### Visitors use Peter Scott Field Studies Centre

A training course on wetland management was offered to a delegation from Vietnam in mid-April and they were among the first visitors to stay in our newly completed Peter Scott Field Studies Centres. The three participants are involved in the establishment of Xuan Thuy Reserve in the Red River Delta. Xuan Thuy is the first Ramsar site in Vietnam and its flora and fauna are very similar to those at Mai Po. They also have tidal shrimp ponds but their operation is quite different from that of our gei-wais - there the water level is kept high most of the time and the mangroves inside are quickly drowned. Hence their value to wildlife is greatly reduced and after several years of harvesting, the nutrients become exhausted and new ponds have to be dug out in the mangrove belt. We hope they will try our operation method and adopt it if it is proved to be more successful.

In addition to the Vietnamese, the Peter Scott Field Studies Centre has also housed a group of British birdwatchers, a group of Dutch birdwatchers, bird-ringers from China, Taiwan and the United States, and also a group of local nature-lovers. Participants of training courses offered by WWF Hong Kong will have first priority, but other people who may be interested can also book rooms (through the WWF HK office) when there is a vacancy. Entry permits from AFD need to be applied for beforehand and WWF HK membership is required in order to use the facilities in the reserve outside normal guided tours.

### RAMSAR LISTING FOR DEEP BAY (David Melville)

Following my note in the last Bulletin asking members to write to Government to have the Mai Po/Deep Bay area placed on the Ramsar Convention list of Wetlands of International Importance it is sad to report that I have received no copies of correspondence to Government from members. Perhaps people really do not care about the future so long as they can watch birds today?

### SPRING 1990 SHOREBIRDS

Details of unusual shorebird sightings and any accurate counts of a particular species made during the spring migration would be gratefully

received by Peter Kennerley. He will collate and pass on the information to the Asian Wetland Bureau for further analysis and comparison with previous years. Peter's address is: 2C Crane Court, 45 Sassoon Road, Pokfulam, Hong Kong.

#### PROGRESS AT BEIDAIHE (Martin Williams)

A reserve has been established at Beidaihe, east of Beijing. Though only fields and marshy land at present, the area is slated to be transformed into a lagoon overlooked by a visitor centre. If this is successful, the reserve will be expanded to include much of the land around, and including, a small reservoir. Plans were announced at a press conference in May, resulting in articles in China Daily, the local city paper and probably other papers.

Over 200 species were seen at the town in two weeks during May. Brown Thrush and White-breasted Waterhen were new for Beidaihe, bring the species list to around 400.

The foreign/overseas section of the Beidaihe Birdwatching Society is now 'open' to members. A twice-yearly bulletin is planned, with news from Beidaihe and elsewhere on birds using the east China flyways. A year's subscription costs HK\$80. Please contact me if you are interested (cheques payable to 'Friends of the Earth') at 1/F 15 Siu Kwai Wan, Cheung Chau Island, Hong Kong. Tel. 981 3523.

#### LIBRARY ADDITIONS

The following books have kindly been donated to the Society's library:

'Cranes of Izumi' donated by Simba Chan

'A Birdwatcher's Guide to Japan' donated by Hiroko Morinaga

#### CHRISTMAS COUNT RESULT

After scrutiny of the rarer records by the Recorder, the total number of species seen is confirmed as 170. Simba Chan's estimate was spot-on so he will be rewarded with a copy of the 'Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Hong Kong'.

#### LETTER TO THE EDITOR - 1 April 1990

Dear Madam,

Although, as yet, you do not have a 'Letters to the Editor' section, I suggest that the article 'Calling all listers and twitchers' provokes and certainly warrants a response.

'Listing', if it must be done, is like a certain unmentionable pastime. Practising either induces blindness and a form of self-satisfaction that can only be of marginal interest to anybody else.

Our Society is in serious danger of losing its credibility when its senior members (and I don't use that word lightly) spend most of their free time

chasing ticks and arguing whether a particular species is A, D or E. Rivalry is now so intense that the Records Committee spends most of its meetings debating whether a species counts or not under the 'listing rules'. Whether a Red-tailed Minla is D or E or whether a potential first-year Glaucous-winged Gull is a hybrid or not depends not so much on the bird's credentials but more on who 'needs' it.

All right, if the majority want to make a game of it, let's be honest like the 'American Birding Association' and just concentrate on lists and rules for lists.

Having accepted that, let's look at Mike Chalmer's 'rules'.

Where did Ijima Leaf Warbler come from? The last I heard, the pundits overseas told us that they were Pale-legged Leaf Warblers and, in any event, we are not a Society known for its 'splits'. And why is a Pied Wheatear seen in urban Hong Kong Category A when other temperate cohorts are D or even E? It took the Brambling years to reach the esteemed A status.

Highest Day List - 164. Well, yes that's right if you count 'heards' and accept that races for funds are totally honest.

Highest Year List. No quibbles here. Well done Richard and it's only a shame that your 300th A bird was nicked!

Highest Hong Kong List. This is undoubtedly the most sordid part of the revelation. All those Cs and Ds, and what's this 'birds in the hand' nonsense? How about freshly dead? Or even just dying? Will Mike be at an advantage because he lives closer to David's ringing sites or will Peter buy a faster car to get there before release? Or will David just hang them up in those little bags of his until the listers have twitched? I can barely wait for the next instalment!

Highest Ringing List. I always believed this to be a scientific exercise.

Highest Number of Firsts. I see we're back to those ridiculous hand jobs.

Well, Madam Editor, the Society is at the crossroads. Either we unashamedly list or we try and maintain our dignity into the next century. Egg collecting and plume gathering was outlawed. Why not listing?

Anyone for the 'Hong Kong Ornithological Society'?

Yours faithfully

357

(name and address withheld)

#### OUTING REPORTS

MAI PO - 18 March 1990 (Peter Stevens and Richard Stott)

I had anticipated that on a warm sunny afternoon we would get a good turnout, and in this I was not disappointed. Peter Stevens had kindly agreed to help out and so the gathering split into two to circle the marsh.

The afternoon turned out to be very interesting particularly for those people who had not visited Mai Po before. White-breasted, Black-capped and Common Kingfishers afforded good views although the Pied Kingfishers eluded us. Overhead, both Spotted and Imperial Eagles were to be seen soaring from time to time. As so often with large raptors, they seem to be circling aimlessly but suddenly they have all gone. Peter's group saw a Crested Honey Buzzard which was the bird of the day for those lucky enough to have seen it.

A few waders were passing through including Black-tailed Godwit and Curlew Sandpiper, the former bird being picked out with some difficulty from amongst a large mixed flock of Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank. Intermediate Egret and Purple Heron were also in evidence.

The passerines offered some interest as a flock of obliging Penduline Tits were hopping up and down in the reeds near the casuarina path while Little Buntings were seen on the path itself.

The day was enhanced by beautiful weather and the total of 65 species seen satisfied all.

#### LUK KENG - 24 March 1990 (Mike Bishop)

Unfamiliar with this venue (except from the dry solidity of the roadside) I was relieved to note the presence of Peter Kennerley. Considering what was to follow, there was also a sort of satisfying poetic justice in the fact that, finding himself in one of his rare spells in the territory, and having nothing better to do, he decided to turn up. It was, you see, Mr Kennerley's idea to hit the swamp at this particular time, on the off-chance that we might catch a glimpse of an interesting L.Y.J. (Little Yellow Job) from over the border. We did not.

What the floating mass of vegetation did produce was more Fantail Warblers than I have ever seen assembled in one place, Fantail, Pintail and Swinhoe's Snipe (although we were unable to agree just exactly how many of each of the latter two species), Red-throated and Richard's Pipits and the other unremarkable stuff you would expect to encounter. On the plus side, the Anderson's (Brown-breasted) Bulbuls appeared to order, and the heavens yielded a White-bellied Sea Eagle and a flock of needletails; here Mr Kennerley let me down badly by failing to identify the species - some feeble excuse about their being too high.

On the whole, an unremarkable morning, but it could have been worse. I mean, if Mr Kennerley had not been there, the outcome would no doubt have been ascribed to my inability at swamp bashing (not to mention identification skills!).

#### TAI LONG WAN - 21 April 1990 (John Edge)

A record-breaking day, shared by only three other people. Hot and humid it was, but there was a fair breeze which kept things comfortable.

The total for the day was 83 species (not including Feral Pigeon) plus three sps. (thrush, flowerpecker and accipiter). The previous record was 79, and this was broken by the presence of a variety of shorebirds, which are worth listing on the basis that they should be recorded more regularly on spring passage:

|                       |     |           |
|-----------------------|-----|-----------|
| Greater Sand Plover   | c50 | Tai Long  |
| Sanderling            | 20+ | Tai Long  |
| Red-necked Stint      | 11+ | Tai Long  |
| Curlew-Sandpiper*     | 2   | Tai Long  |
| Swinhoe's Snipe       | 2   | Tai Long  |
| Common Sandpiper      | 2   |           |
| Grey-rumped Sandpiper | 1   | Tai Long  |
| Pintail Snipe         | 1   | Tai Long  |
| Turnstone*            | 1   | Tai Long  |
| Temminck's Stint*     | 1   | Tai Long  |
| Oriental Pratincole   | 1   | Tai Long  |
| Whimbrel              | 1   | Chek Keng |
| Terek Sandpiper*      | 1   | Chek Keng |

\* Not previously recorded from the area.

Mike Chalmers, sunning himself on Tai Wan beach, saw two flocks of 60 and 35 waders in flight, plus two Little Terns. Laid-back birding by the Adjudicator!

Other interesting species were Chestnut Bittern (up to three), Chinese Goshawk (3), Moorhen (also new to the area list, surprisingly), Black-naped (c 25) and Common (c 10) Terns in Tolo Channel, Red-winged Crested Cuckoo, Broad-billed Roller (3), Great Reed Warbler, Brown Shrike (4), Chinese Starling (c 12) and a mint-condition male Yellow-breasted Bunting.

The waders (sand plovers, stints and Sanderling) were behaving beautifully on Tai Wan beach; the combination of these, the white sand and turquoise water was an unusual sight for Hong Kong and was strongly reminiscent of the Indian Ocean. I suppose (if such behaviour is permitted!) that we should now be aiming for a daily total of 100 species for this outing; attainable, I believe, if the waders and migrant passerines are there in sufficient numbers. And people to spot them! A stunning sunset over Plover Cove and the Pat Sin range completed a perfect unwinding day, as Nick Townsend described it.

#### MAI PO - 28 April 1990 (Janet Scott and Anthony Tse)

Once again a Stott outing was blessed with good weather and a goodly number of members turned out on this afternoon outing. C.Y. Lam had arranged a bus leaving from Kowloon Tong and over half the party found this to be a convenient way to get there. Unfortunately he was unable to lead the party but found a more than adequate substitute in Anthony Tse.

As the group assembled, three or four Oriental Pratincoles were circling overhead with a party of Large White-rumped Swifts. White-breasted Kingfishers were shy to the point of not being seen but we saw the three others including a Pied Kingfisher. Most of the wild duck had departed so we were left looking at the captive wildfowl collection to think of what might have been. The good weather had persuaded many of the waders to move on north but what there lacked in numbers was made up for in variety. A total of twelve species was seen including one of Hong Kong's specialities - the Great Knot. There were also some Asiatic Golden Plovers looking rather splendid as they were coming into their black and gold summer plumage. Among the smaller passage waders two Long-toed Stints and a Broad-billed Sandpiper were to be seen.



The reed beds were a riot of sound, wren-warblers singing fit to burst from the reed heads and both Von Schrenck's and Great Reed Warblers chattering as they slunk through the base of the reed stems. The path from the warden's hut held Masked, Little and Yellow-breasted Buntings although no males of the last species were seen.

The day ended with a modest total of 52 species but several of these were 'quality' birds.

MAI PO - 6 May 1990 (Verity Picken)

The peripatetic Peter Kennerley led for the first half of this outing but on his mid-morning departure for Indonesia I took over. About ten people made the early start and were rewarded with lovely weather if not stunning birds. The boardwalk yielded little (four Black-faced Spoonbills accompanying one European, and a couple of Sand Martins were the highlights) and the scrape produced only a limited array of waders. The most interesting and instructive sighting here was of all four marsh egret species (Great, Intermediate, Little and Swinhoe's) standing close together. Later, from the tower hide, we watched a young male Watercock walking out in the open before swimming across a water channel. The tally for the morning was about 55+ species though this didn't include a possible Japanese Yellow Bunting which was glimpsed too briefly to positively identify.

TAI PO KAU - 12 May 1990 (Wendy Young)

It was a day of bird calls rather than actual birds. The morning started off looking rather murky so only a small but manageable number of members turned up for this field trip. The Large Hawk Cuckoo was calling as we left the bottom car park and shortly afterwards we had our first views of a gorgeous male Scarlet Minivet that had also been heard. As we walked up the road, Koel and Great Barbet were heard together with Chestnut Bulbul, Hwamei, sunbird, several flowerpeckers, Blue Magpie, Barred Owlet and an odd single 'poom' of what we thought was an Emerald Dove but at closer range it turned out (much to our amazement) to be a distant cow! Then from down below in the forest somewhere, but a fair distance from us, we heard a very odd but vaguely familiar sound, a two-note very harsh call becoming faster and rising higher. For the life of me I could not remember what it was. On arriving home in the evening however and replaying some of my tapes I discovered that it is the 'other' call of the Barred Owlet.

After that little bit of excitement a coffee and snack were called for and as we were standing by the warden's hut consuming these, a pair of Yellow-cheeked Tits chasing a Silver-eared Mesia were glimpsed just above us. We stood at the dam for half an hour or so in the hope of a view of the Black Bazas that had been seen displaying the previous week, but the mist gradually enveloped us and so we moved on into the forest. The Hainan Blue Flycatcher was singing from its usual spot but although we waited very patiently it never did appear. Another coffee and sandwich halt this time at the picnic ground produced a probable but very difficult to see Arctic Warbler making an unusual call, some very close but still not seen Chestnut Bulebuls and a fabulous Grey-streaked Flycatcher which fluttered up onto the top of a dead branch and gave all of us (but one - sorry Sam) excellent views through the telescope. The rest of the Red Walk turned out to be extremely quiet and humid especially once the sun came out, so we walked almost directly through. Close by the farm we had another Arctic Warbler - this time an excellent view and it was making its usual 'chink' call. The last two birds of the day were Serpent Eagle on

the way down and an Indian Cuckoo calling whilst we were sipping our well-earned Carlsbergs at the noodle shop. Thirty-nine species for the day of which 14 were 'heards'.

#### TAI PO KAU BREEDING BIRDS SURVEY - 26 May 1990 (Clive Viney)

The best turnout yet was thwarted by rain and mist.

Eleven of us gathered in the pouring rain at dawn with the promise that four more would join in later and work independently. The prearranged rendezvous was the dam at midday. The rain was ignored and the energetic assigned the Yellow and Brown Walks (Bob Ferguson and Mike Chalmers) and the road, whilst the more painstaking agreed to cover the lower paths. The trouble was the rain didn't ease - it just came down harder. Umbrellas and Hong Kong waterproofs were useless and by 0900h my road gang had had enough and I aborted the survey (Mark Nunns politely pointing out that he couldn't blame me for the weather!) I passed on the retreat to those that I could locate but Bobs's and Mike's parties had a few choice of words to say about the leader at the rendezvous!

A few birds were identified but the survey coverage was so poor as to be meaningless. Bob and Mike were rewarded with the day's only raptor which might have been a Mountain Hawk Eagle. Grey-throated Minivets were confirmed as breeding and Yellow-cheeked Tits were interesting but that was about it. As a footnote, it's worth mentioning that MLC had some iffy babblers in the misty heights of the reserve which would be worth following up as Rufous-capped Babbler seems a likely candidate.

We should try again next year but a spare set of clothes in the car must be mandatory!

#### REPORT ON THE BIRDS (Mike Turnbull)

1 March to 31 May 1990

##### March

Amongst birds trapped at Mai Po on 3rd were a Styan's Grasshopper Warbler and a Japanese Sparrowhawk (PL et al.), while at the Boardwalk an adult Black-tailed Gull was perhaps a lingerer from the influx noted the previous weekend. The casuarinas held a Brambling, and a Brown Thrush was located in the Police Post trees, where the Chiffchaff was again seen. On the same date a free-flying Baer's Pochard joined the captive stock in the wildfowl collection. A Reed Bunting and a Wryneck were trapped at Mai Po on 4th (ACG et al.) and a Grey Bushchat was briefly seen at Nam Chung on 5th (NJGC). During the days which followed, the grim weather of the preceding three weeks or so finally abated and increased raptor activity was noted, the highlight being frequent sightings at Lok Ma Chau of the two Black Vultures - up to at least 20th (RWL).

On 8th a Rustic Bunting was seen and photographed in the casuarinas at Mai Po (MH) with a further report of one at Lok Ma Chau on 17th, this bird still being present on the 22nd (SPS, PRS, et al.). The 8th also produced a particularly intriguing observation, with a pair of what appeared to be Red-wattled Plovers (Vanellus indicus) being seen flying over the main road near the bridge over the Shing Mun River at Shatin (RDES). Unfortunately they were not seen again. A Crested Bunting, found on 10th at Mai Po (LY) remained until at least 18th with a Ruddy Shelduck there on 15th and a pair of Baikal Teal near the Rocky Outcrop on 16th and 17th

(RWL et al.). In addition to the Rustic Bunting already mentioned, the 17th produced several other exciting discoveries. The Mai Po nets captured no less than three Styan's Grasshopper Warblers, while at Tai Po Kau there was an immature male Gould's Sunbird. This bird remained until at least 21st though its condition left doubts as to its origins in the minds of some observers (SPS, WY, GJC). Most unexpectedly of all a male Grey-necked Bunting (Emberiza buchanani) was found at Mai Po - a first for Hong Kong and not out of keeping with an emerging trend of vagrancy from Central Asia (MT). A Hoopoe and at least six Chinese Greenfinches were at the Jubilee Sports Centre, Shatin on the same date (SES). The Purple Gallinule made itself visible once more at Mai Po on 24th, and again on 31st (ML). Also on 24th seven unidentified needletails were seen high over Luk Keng, and around this time about five Black Bulbuls were reported from near the dam at Tai Po Kau.

The numbers of waders at Mai Po began to grow rapidly around this period, a pleasant feature being the reappearance on the marsh of the Black-winged Stilt flock. There was also a Von Schrenck's Little Bittern there on 25th (GJC), when a Red-headed Tit was an even more surprising find at the same location (MT, GJC). A Hobby was seen in Happy Valley on the same date (JSRE). Reports from Yim Tso Ha of a Swinhoe's Egret on 26th and from Tai Po Kau of a Ferruginous Flycatcher on 30th were further indications of the beginnings of spring passage, though the appearance of a second House Crow at Kowloon Tong (JH) on 27th was presumably unrelated. More intriguing, perhaps, was a Grey-headed Parrotbill at Tai Tam on 25th (KL). On 27th a Yellow-browed Bunting was found at Mai Po (SC). It was trapped and released the next day and was to remain almost throughout April. On the same date the Fence held a male Baikal Teal (WY). By the 30th around 3,000 waders were already present at Mai Po and the first Nordmann's Greenshanks were found on that date with two at the Rocky Outcrop (RWL). Three were on the scrape on 31st, together with the first Little Stint of the year (PRK, MT). A European Goldfinch trapped at Mai Po on the same date exhibited an abnormal moult pattern for the time of year, indicating that it was in post-breeding moult. There was a further report of a Rustic Bunting, this time from the Fence, on the same date (AY, GCHC) and a Blue-and-White Flycatcher was reported from Tai Po Kau (RWL).

## April

The month began in interesting fashion with a Pine Bunting, unfortunately not in possession of a full tail, and an intriguing pipit (Hong Kong's first Blyth's?), both at the Fence, on 1st (PRK, GJC, PJJ, MT). A Lesser Yellowlegs at Mai Po on the same date (MLC) left no such doubts as to its identity, but was to go unseen for a further 11 days, before returning to the scrape until 16th. A Chestnut Bittern was seen in the Lam Tsuen Valley on 3rd (GJC). However, the first ten days in April and the period around the Bird Race did not 'buzz' as they have in the last two years, a male Fukien Niltava in Tai Po Kau on 6th being the highlight of an extremely quiet period of flycatcher migration. A Narcissus Flycatcher was also there that day (DSM et al.). The greatest surprise of this period must however, have been the appearance of four swiftlets (Collocalia sp.). Two at Mui Wo on 11th were not seen at very close quarters but their description tallied with that of the first bird at Shuen Wan on 5th (RPT, JJMF) and the second at Mount Davis on 8th (PRK). Both these birds were seen well and appear to have been Himalayan Swiftlets (Collocalia brevirostris) a species which breeds in central China and which could be expected to wander to Hong Kong occasionally.

A Narcissus Flycatcher was also noted at Mount Davis on 7th and 8th.

Another Yellow-browed Bunting was reported from Chek Keng on 5th, but no reports of Japanese Yellow Buntings were received until one was seen at Lok Ma Chau on 10th. Another two were at Hau Tin on 19th. The appearance of three Meadow Buntings (Emberiza cioides) - two good-condition males and a female in poor condition - at Sandy Bay on 14th (SPS) represents the first sighting of this mainly sedentary species in Hong Kong. Two days later there was a poor-condition male and good-condition female. However, with a Black-headed Bunting at the same location around the same time and with Rock Buntings also turning up at Wah Fu on 18th and at Telegraph Bay on 22nd - this bird being in such poor condition that it was picked up by a local resident (per CAV) - the occurrence of those birds may have been connected with a release of birds in the district. This release was reported in the press earlier in the month. On the other hand Chestnut Buntings, peaking at seven birds at Mai Po on 14th, were certainly genuine migrants (GJC).

A trip to Lantau by a group of visitors on 11th produced a Radde's Warbler at Tai O in addition to the swiftlets already mentioned. A burst of bright weather on 12th following heavy rain the previous day predictably resulted in an impressive list of migrants from Tai Po Kau, including Ferruginous, Blue-and-White, Japanese Paradise, Asian Paradise and Narcissus Flycatchers, as well as the already well-established Hainan Blue Flycatchers. A male Siberian Thrush was also present, and there was another sighting of this species on 17th. On 12th this bird was in a flock of Eye-browed Thrushes, and Grey and Grey-backed Thrushes were also present. On the same date a Red-headed Tit was reported from Pokfulam and a Pale-legged Leaf Warbler (RWL) from Aberdeen Country Park. A Red-winged Crested Cuckoo was also seen in Tai Po Kau on 12th, though Tai Mei Tuk catchment proved a much more reliable hunting-ground for visitors seeking this species, with three there on 20th (RWL). Several Black Bazas around this time were a frequent bonus on the catchment and two were seen at Chek Keng on 28th, when six Red-winged Crested Cuckoos were also noted (CAV, JSRE).

A large owl (Bubo/Ketupa sp.) at Chau Tau on 13th was mobbed by two Savannah Nightjars and a Common Cuckoo was heard at Tsim Bei Tsui on 15th (PJL). The Mai Po collection attracted a Pochard on the same date (SC) and a Verditer Flycatcher was singing in Tai Po Kau (JH). There was also a Narcissus Flycatcher at Wah Shan near Fanling (NJGC). Reports of Horsfield's Goshawks began on 16th with five in the Pokfulam area (SPS). They continued to be reported in small numbers to the end of the month. Grey-faced Buzzard-eagles were reported from Mai Po on 6th (RWL), Mount Davis on 22nd (PRK) and 24th (30+ - VBP), and from Tai Long on 28th (five - CAV). There were about ten reports of Hobbies during the month, mainly from Deep Bay. A Forest Wagtail turned up at Mai Po on 16th and remained until 19th with up to nine White-throated Needletails and similar numbers of White-vented amongst over 10,000 swifts and hirundines there around this time (GJC et al.). Several Sand Martins and Red-rumped Swallows were also present.

A Japanese Paradise Flycatcher was at Tai Po Kau on 18th, when a male Pied Harrier was first seen at Mai Po by a lone observer. It delighted many more the next day when it flew past the excellent new tower hide, which also provided splendid views of a Chestnut Bittern and a rare opportunity to study all three regular species of snipe at close quarters (GJC et al.). Up to three Japanese Quail were also present at Mai Po that day, and a Japanese Paradise Flycatcher was at Chek Keng. An outing to Tai Long Wan on 21st returned with a surprisingly long list of wader species, including over 50 Greater Sand Plovers and over 20 Sanderlings, as well as

first records for that area of Curlew Sandpiper, Turnstone, Temminck's Stint and Terek Sandpiper (JSRE, MLC). It also produced the first report of the spring of Black-naped Terns (c25), as well as ten Common Terns. The paddies held three Chestnut Bitterns. Another Styan's Grasshopper Warbler was trapped at Mai Po along with four Penduline Tits, bringing the 1990 total to 67 with no retraps (PJL). There followed a rather quiet period though a female Great Spotted Woodpecker and two Black Bazas were at Mount Davis on 24th (RWL). A Little Whimbred was found at Mai Po, again at the tower hide on 25th (ML), around which time it was noticed that a pair of wild Baikal Teal had joined the collection.

A Black-shouldered Kite made a typically brief appearance there on 26th (WY, GJC) when a Swinhoe's Egret was first seen. It was to remain into May. The first reports of Grey-streaked Flycatchers were received around this time and increased towards the end of the month. Another trip to Tai Long Wan on 28th produced several exciting finds including a Baillon's Crake and a Black Bittern (PRK, CAV et al.) as well as the raptors and Red-winged Crested Cuckoos already mentioned. A Hoopoe was at Shouson Hill on the same date (AT) with another at Mai Po the next day (PRK, GJC, MT). Brown Shrike passage was heavy around this time and there were several reports of Broad-billed Rollers. A further two Meadow Buntings were seen and photographed at Magazine Gap Reservoir on 29th (F&SE) and another Baillon's Crake was seen, this time in the duck enclosure at Mai Po on 30th (ML).

The high tide wader roost on gei-wai 16/17 provided the staggering spectacle we have come to expect, certainly until around 16th after which numbers of most species fell away quite sharply, the frequent presence of a Peregrine probably being one factor responsible. Curlew Sandpipers peaked at 6,000 on 10th, when four Spoon-billed Sandpipers were present. This species hit its regular peak of five individuals on 16th. On 11th 1,800 Marsh Sandpipers were present, with a similar number of Black-tailed Godwits and around 200 Great Knot. This date also held the maximum number of Nordmann's Greenshanks on any one day, 25 birds being present. A count of 150 Terek Sandpipers was also made. By 14th Spotted Redshanks (975) and Common Redshanks (800) had hit their peak, which Greater Sand Plovers achieved on 15th (559) as did Broad-billed Sandpipers (190). 1,000 Red-necked Stints were present on 17th. Numbers of Asiatic Golden Plovers grew around this time, reaching 260 on 18th when 1,500 Black-tailed Godwits were still present. Greenshanks did not reach their peak number until 21st, when 505 were noted. Of the scarcer species, Turnstones peaked at six on 10th, at least three Sanderlings were noted from 5th and there were 18 Australian Curlews on 7th, while individual Red Knots were noted on six dates between 5th and 22nd, and three Dunlin were seen on 15th. Five different Ruff were present between 5th and 19th. Single Little Stints were noted on 13th, 14th and 18th with two present on 15th and 17th. (A really big thank-you must go to Geoff Carey for collecting these wader figures and to him and his visiting friends for actually counting all those birds!).

## May

A further two Meadow Buntings were found at Sandy Bay on 1st and again on 7th (SPS). There were four Black Bazas at Tai Mei Tuk on the former date, with two or three being seen at Tai Po Kau on 2nd and 4th (RWL). A Horsfield's Goshawk was also present at Tai Po Kau on 2nd. Small numbers of Nordmann's Greenshanks continued to be recorded at Mai Po with three on 1st, one on 2nd and two on 4th (RWL). There were also four there on 19th (PJL) and numbers had risen again to eight by 28th (GJC, MT).

Spoonbilled Sandpipers were noted at Tsim Bei Tsui on 4th (RWL) and at Mai Po on 13th (PRK, MT) with further reports of singles noted at the latter site on several dates throughout the month until 28th when two were present (MT, GJC). Two Little Whimbrels were located on the Scrape on 5th (GJC). There were widespread reports of Arctic Warblers during the first half of the month and Grey-streaked Flycatchers were most numerous around 5th. Large numbers of hirundines were observed at Tsim Bei Tsui on 4th, and certainly included both Sand Martin and Red-rumped Swallow (RWL). A Pale-legged Leaf Warbler was trapped on the Peak on the same date (ACG). The 6th produced two exciting reports from Mai Po with three Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (FW) and two Slaty-legged Crakes (RDES, JMS), while a Watercock appeared in front of the tower hide.

Four White-collared Yuhinas (Yuhina diademata) at Stubbs Road on 6th and fourteen there the next day (KCS), together with an out-of-season report of three Collared Sivas from Mount Nicholson on 7th (JSRE) pointed to a release of birds in the area. In fact many of the birds were reported to be in 'rough' condition. The Swinhoe's Egret which had turned up at Mai Po in April was still present until at least 8th (PJL) by which time a passage of White-winged Black Terns which peaked at 100+ around 10th was well under way (RWL et al.). Over a hundred were also present on 28th (MT). On 10th a pair of Black Bazas was seen at Ho Chung, where a Red-winged Crested Cuckoo called throughout the month (MH). A Pechora Pipit was trapped at Mai Po on 12th (DSM), with another individual finding its way into the nets the next day (PJL). How many others must have escaped detection around that time? A Japanese Quail was also noted at Mai Po on 13th and a male Pochard was amongst the captive stock where it remained until at least 28th (SC). On 17th a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler was seen well beside gei-wai 19 (WY, SO'B). A falcon observed over the fish ponds at Mai Po on 18th may have been a first-summer Amur Falcon (RWL). The following day two Hobbies were present there (PJL). A Society outing to Luk Keng on 19th produced one female Von Schrenck's Little Bittern (RWL et al.), but Tai Long Wan seemed to confirm that it may be a more favoured spot for that species with three males and a female (GJC). It had also held a lone male on 5th (MT). The Society outing also heard a Watercock and saw a Banded Rail. Two Pekin Robins at Nam Chung indicated possible breeding in the area and the two Anderson's Bulbuls were still present at Luk Keng. A reconnaissance of Mirs Bay on 20th produced seven Black-naped Terns, five of which were briefly around Gau Tau, as well as brief and distant views of what were probably two Bridled Terns (RWL et al.) However, on the same date came an interesting report of between 30 and 50 Black-naped Terns from the Soko Islands (DF). On 23rd an immature male Horsfield's Goshawk gave superb views at Coombe Road (WY) and on the same date the first offspring from the captive stock at Mai Po - 11 young Mandarins - were seen (SC). A Grey-headed Lapwing was something of a surprise at the same location on 26th (GJC) when two Watercocks were also noted, while on 27th and two or three times subsequently before the end of the month, the Purple Gallinule was seen near the concrete path across the marsh (GJC et al.) A Red-headed Tit at Ho Chung on 28th had a yellowish cap and may have been a juvenile (MH).

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

| <u>DATE</u>              | <u>LEADER</u>               | <u>VENUE</u>   | <u>TIME</u> |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--|-------------|
| 8 July<br>Sunday         | John Edge                   | Mai Po<br>Meet: car park   | 0600        |
| 15 July<br>Sunday        | Gavin Cooper                | Mai Po<br>Meet: car park<br>Bi-lingual   | 1500        |
| 24 July<br>Tuesday       |                             | KENYAN SAFARI - WWF OFFICE<br>Illustrated talk by the Stotts   | 1830        |
| 5 August<br>Sunday       | John Edge                   | Mai Po<br>Meet: car park   | 0700        |
| 2 September<br>Sunday    | C Y Lam<br>Gavin Cooper     | Tsim Bei Tsui<br>Meet: car park<br>Bi-lingual  | 0800        |
| 8 September<br>Saturday  | Peter Stevens               | Luk Keng/Nam Chung#<br>Meet: Luk Keng car park   | 0700        |
| 16 September<br>Sunday   | Paul Leader                 | Mai Po<br>Meet: car park   | 0600        |
| 23 September<br>Sunday   | Mike Chalmers<br>Li Wai-ki  | Tai Po Kau<br>Meet: car park<br>Bi-lingual   | 0700        |
| 29 September<br>Saturday | Nigel Croft                 | Ting Kok Road<br>Meet: Tai Mei Tuk<br>Visitors' Centre   | 0730        |
| 7 October<br>Sunday      | Simba Chan<br>Mike Turnbull | Mai Po*^^<br>COMPLETE ENCLOSED FORM<br>Bi-lingual  | 1100-1700   |
| 13 October<br>Saturday   | Mike Bishop                 | Tai Po Kau<br>Meet: car park   | 0730        |
| 21 October<br>Sunday     | C Y Lam<br>Richard Stott    | Tsim Bei Tsui*<br>COMPLETE ENCLOSED FORM<br>Bi-lingual   | 1000-1600   |
| 27 October<br>Saturday   | John Edge                   | Tai Long Wan<br>Meet: top deck Tolo Harbour<br>ferry. Check time with<br>HK & YF Co. Leaves<br>from Ma Liu Shui where<br>parking is difficult/<br>impossible - best take<br>KCR. | Ferry: 0715 |

28 October  
Sunday

Stewart Smith

Ping Yeung

0730

Meet : where road ends in  
Ping Yeung village

Leaders are requested to find a substitute leader if they are unable to take an outing.

# Wellington boots and/or long trousers are recommended for swamp wading.

\* A coach will collect members from Kowloon Tong KCR one hour before assembly time and will return them there at the end of the outing. Please return the form at the end of this bulletin with a cheque for \$30 (\$15 for students) made out to the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society if you wish to use the coach.

^^ Would members who plan to use their own transport to reach this venue please inform the leader in advance as problems with permits can arise if the Mai Po outings are over-subscribed.