



# THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

P. O. Box 12460, G. P. O., Hong Kong.

**BULLETIN NO. 139**

**MARCH 1991**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The 1991 AGM will be held on **Tuesday 26 March** at 1830h in the **Auxiliary Police Officers' Mess, 3/F Beaconsfield House, Queen's Road Central**. After the necessary business has been dealt with, David Melville will give a talk on 'Conservation Problems of Subantarctic Islands' illustrated with some of the thousands of photographs he took while on his recent voyage round these islands. As usual the evening will conclude with an informal dinner for all those who wish to join in (venue to be decided on the night).

## **Society News**

### **New Bulletin Editor**

Although Verity Picken will continue to edit the Annual Report, the Bulletin will now be compiled by Liz Leven who has kindly offered her services. Contributors are asked to send items to her at Flat 53 Buxey Lodge, 37 Conduit Road, Hong Kong. If the items have been written on a word processor, it would be very helpful to have the floppy disk as well as the hard copy. Liz is using a programme which can read almost all other packages, and it would save a lot of typing time! As the Bulletin editor sits on the Committee Liz is now a co-opted member.

This is an appropriate place to thank Verity for all her hard work on the Bulletin, which she

has compiled for several years, in addition to all her other work for the Society.

### **Bulletin Pictures**

It is hoped to include bird sketches, maps, cartoons and so on in future Bulletins. All contributions would be much appreciated.

### **New Secretary sought**

Once again we are seeking a Society Secretary as Shirley O'Brien is unfortunately leaving Hong Kong. We are grateful for all Shirley has done during her brief tenure. Would any member who is interested in taking over please contact one of the Committee members (names and telephone numbers are given below).

### **Slide Collection**

A series of the more interesting slides from the collection held by the Society, are now available for use by members. They can be borrowed by contacting either C Y Lam or Peter Kennerley. The society would like to thank Martin Williams for his donation of a series of slides of the Fujian Niltava, recorded on Cheung Chau last year. We also thank Mike Webster for the donation of a large number of photographs taken by N. Shiota, a Japanese member of the Society.

The next committee meeting will be held in May 1991. If any Society member wishes a matter raised, please contact one of the committee members listed below.

Gavin Cooper  
Mike Chalmers  
Peter Kennerley  
David Melville

Richard Stott  
Simba Chan  
C Y Lam  
Verity Picken  
Mike Webster

Shirley O'Brien  
John Edge  
Mike Turnbull  
Liz Leven



## Wanted for the Annual Report

(Verity Picken)

**Photographs.** As colour photographs made such a difference last year, I hope to include some again in the 1990 Report and should therefore be very grateful for any slides of interest. Obviously the more unusual species would be most welcome. Black and white photographs will also be needed. Photographers will, as always, be credited.

**Written contributions.** I would also be glad to receive any 'Notes' or articles as soon as possible. These should preferably be typewritten and double spaced. Please refer to previous Reports for the style and layout required. Please send all items to me at C22 Carolina Gardens, 30 Coombe Road, Hong Kong.

## Submission of Records ('non-rarities')

Members frequently express uncertainty over which of their observations are worth submitting. The assumption seems to be that if something does not warrant inclusion in the monthly summaries in the Bulletin it is probably not worth submitting. With the reversion to a more complete Systematic List in the annual report, **ANY** reports are welcome - especially those relating to high counts, early or late dates or birds in unusual locations. Why not try to review your observations on a monthly basis and send your more interesting records each month, preferably in systematic order to: **Mike Turnbull, Flat 39 Buxey Lodge, 37 Conduit Road, Hong Kong.**

## Colour flagged waders

Australian wader ringing groups have started placing coloured leg flags on a variety of species caught in south eastern Australia and Java, Indonesia, as part of a cooperative East Asia - Australasia Flyway project, to increase knowledge of wader migration routes.

By mid February over 3200 birds had been flagged, and it was hoped to mark a further 1000 birds in March/April. Species flagged are: **Oriental Pratincole, Asiatic Golden Plover, Knot, Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed**

**Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit and Turnstone.** Other target species are **Australian Curlew, Grey Plover, Sanderling, Great Knot and Greenshank**

The flags are either orange or dark green plastic bands with a flap at right angles to the band. Most of the flags have been placed on the upper right leg, but a few are on the lower right leg or on the left leg. The exact position is not important.

Please keep a look out for these birds, especially in the migration periods April/May and July/September. Reports of sightings, including species name, place, date and approximate numbers and wader species present should be sent to: **Peter Kennerley, Flat 2C Crane Court, 45 Sassoon Road, Hong Kong.**

## Oceans of Birds - talk by Tony Soper.

Tony's talk on 2 March was a great success, with \$2500 being raised for WWF. Thank you to everyone who supported this event, and special thanks to Tony himself, for giving up his evening to give us a taste of birdwatching on a 'Round the World Cruise'

## Mai Po Boardwalk Hide

There have been one or two occasions recently of birdwatchers inadvertently disturbing birds at the boardwalk hide, by entering or leaving the hide near to high tide. Please check the tides to avoid arriving or having to leave when the birds are close to the hide. Also, please keep the noise down. Five or six people talking 'quietly' can still be disturbing to birds (not to mention other birdwatchers!)

## MAI PO UPDATE

(Michael Lau)

### Deep Bay

This winter there have been several instances of shooting by people on sampans in inner Deep Bay. The police have been alerted about this, but on site action has been impossible because these cases were only made known to them days or even



weeks later. If members observe such illegal activities, please report to the Marine Police (telephone number 452 9201, and ask for Mr. Hollingsbee) and WWF Hong Kong staff immediately.

The disturbance caused by the Chinese fishermen in Deep Bay has already caused a drop in numbers of sensitive species such as the endangered Dalmation Pelican. Shooting is totally incompatible with the conservation projects in Deep Bay and this unlawful act must be stopped. Nothing is more important than the watchful eyes of birders and your input is critical to the future of wildlife in inner Deep Bay.

#### **Earthmoving in Mai Po**

The earthmoving work in the scrape to improve and enlarge the area of mudflats has finished. Although it is still early for the spring wader migration, Oriental White Storks, Grey Herons and Cormorants have already taken advantage of it and roost in the pond.

The work in gei wai 18 is slower than we expected and we are sorry that the hides at the southern end of the scrape have been inaccessible this winter. The bridges will be assembled in mid March and during the spring migration not only will the three hides be open again, but the two large hides facing gei wai 18 will be worth checking out.

#### **Swire Hide**

WWF Hong Kong has decided to relocate the Swire Hide, the very first one built at Mai Po, to gei wai 8 where a hide is much needed and the view will be improved. The re-erected hide will not be raised above ground level in order to give a different perspective from the other hides and may suit wildlife photographers better.

## **OVERSEAS BIRDING**

### **Sea Of Grass, Guizhou, PRC. 23-30 December 1990.**

(John Holmes)

Richard Lewthwaite did the preparation for this trip with a future Kingfisher Tour in mind. He was joined by Kevin Lewis and myself. A

pleasant Sunday Dragonair flight to Kunming, tactical discussion in a hotel bar and eight hours on the sleeper train found us at Liubanshui in Guizhou Province. There we were met by our hosts from the Environmental Protection Department at the prearranged 07:00hrs. We drove through mist and gloom at first, but had picked up Yellow-throated Bunting, Great Spotted Woodpecker, and Daurian Jackdaws -among others- by the time we arrived at Caohai (The Sea of Grass) some three hours later.

The Environmental Protection Department's complex at Caohai is at the edge of Weining town overlooking the 25km<sup>2</sup>. lake from a hillside to it's north-east. From our first floor balcony we were able to tick (Sorry, Ornithologically SURVEY) White-tailed Eagle, Bar-headed Goose, and the bird of the area, Black-necked Crane. There were then "formalities" which preceded a lunch where much toasting with "Mao Tai" was done, and an afternoon punt trip that found our powers of observation somewhat dimmed.

While your wimpish correspondent spent Christmas Day in bed, the real men went to a woodland some 80km. distant and found 10-12 Reeve's Pheasants in two parties. Other species at this site included 50-100 Dusky Thrushes, Ashy-throated Parrotbills, Spectacled Fulvettas, and White-collared Yuhinas.

Our time about the lake shore itself revealed Ruddy Shelduck by far the commonest duck. In any scrub or vegetation White-cheeked Laughingthrush and Brambling were present in good numbers.

Although Caohai is not as great a bird spectacle as Poyang, the reserve management seems to be effective in deterring hunting. There were several different raptors present, and the other birds -especially the Bar-headed Geese- were very tame.

The overnight train got us back to Kunming in plenty of time to see dawn at the Western Hills. In one-and-a-half very pleasant days there we saw Crested Finchbill, Maroon-backed Accentor, Blue-headed Redstart, Chinese Song Thrush, Blue-winged Minla and (Thanks PRK!) Fukien Slaty Bunting, among others to take our trip list to 125.



The Western Hills near Kunming are recommended for the pleasant walking almost as much as the birds themselves. Anyone interested in the Sea of Grass should note that Weining Town is "closed" to foreigners. The only way to stay there is by writing in advance to the Environmental Protection Department Headquarters in Guiyang. Richard and I have the address.

## **Poyang Lake and Lushan, 28 November- 3 December 1990**

(C.Y. Lam)

Two of us (Li Wai Ki and C.Y. Lam) made a bird-watching trip to Jiangxi in late autumn of 1990. The itineraries were arranged with the help of the Jiangxi Nature Reserves Administration Office. We had planned to fly to Nanchang and then travel to Poyang (by car and by boat) on the same day on 27 November. If everything had turned out smoothly, we would have reached the reserve at Wucheng by 7 p.m.

In the event, our flight was delayed. We missed the connecting boat at the pre-arranged rendezvous point and had to spend the night in Yongxiu which is a short way upstream on the Xiu River. The stop-over was not a total loss, we saw some fifty Yellow-bellied Tits and the same number of Chinese Greenfinches among other things before boarding the boat for Poyang the next morning.

Three days (28 - 30 November) were spent visiting various places in the reserve. The climax was the sight of more than 500 Siberian White Cranes in Dachahu in the company of nearly 800 White-naped Cranes and a few Hooded Cranes. For several hours in front of our eyes, the cranes roamed freely in small family groups in the wilderness of Dachahu., and we were immersed in the affectionate atmosphere which prevailed in the crane community. On a more discordant note: we were told that the cranes had apparently deserted their previous haunts at Dahuchi and Banghu owing to the pressure of human disturbance. (See the article by Peter Kennerly in the Hong Kong Bird Report 1984/85 for

locations. "Hu" means "lake" and "chi" represents "small lake" or "pond".)

The other memorable event was our encounter with some 100,000 ducks and geese in a small lake called Meixihu which is located between Dachahu and Poyang Lake proper. Pintails and Swan Geese were the most numerous. The presence of a few Pochards and Falcated Teals was of some interest, in the light of PRK's remarks in his article. We were also lucky to see a Great Bustard in flight, which was I believe the first record for the reserve this winter.

At the reserve, the abundance of Skylark, Water Pipit, Ruddy Shelduck and Lapwing was striking for people like us from Hong Kong which is in fact not so far away from Poyang. Japanese Quails were flushed from time to time and the sight of Ring-necked Pheasants added considerable colour to our visit.

On 1 December, we travelled to Lushan, a well known summer resort in the hills about 180 kilometres to the north of Poyang. We shivered through two chilling mornings in temperatures close to minus ten but were rewarded by seeing more than a hundred Vinous-throated Parrotbills and as many Rufous-capped Babblers near the hotel. Apart from Collared Finchbill and Rufous-necked Scimitar Babbler (by now standard affairs for trips to China), we were particularly pleased to record within one day two fork-tail species viz White-crowned Fork-tail and Little Fork-tail.

The foothills of Lushan were not so cold and we visited Weijia in the north and Tongyuan in the south. Masked Bunting, Rustic Bunting and Yellow-browed Bunting were present in good numbers. Smaller numbers of Yellow-throated Bunting and Siberian Meadow Bunting as well as a single Russet Sparrow were also seen. A few Bramblings were recorded in addition to the more numerous Chinese Greenfinch. The bird we treasured most was probably a Black-naped Green Woodpecker at Tongyuan, a splendid male seen in good light shortly before we returned to Nanchang on 3 December.

The return flight to Hong Kong on 4 December was smooth and comfortable. As we flew



over the Nanling Range which separates Jiangxi from Guangdong, I could not help wondering why this rather low line of hills should make so much difference in the birds seen in Hong Kong.

## Mindanao

(Gavin Cooper)

Taking up an offer from Tim Fisher I used my Lunar New Year holidays plus a few extra days to visit Mindanao Island in the Philippines together with Hugh Buck.

Our chosen birding area was Mount Katanglad in the north/central area of the island. This was because Tim was preparing a camp site for an incoming group and we were able to utilise the facilities before they arrived.

This island has many endemic bird species and so is a must for anyone wanting to improve their Philippines/Asian/World list(s) or who just want to enjoy good birding. The first evening on the mountain I came upon a mixed flock which included no less than 12 different species of which six were new to me. These included two flycatchers, two white-eyes and a nuthatch.

The next morning we saw the Philippine Eagle and that evening the much sought after Giant Scops Owl. We finished with some 75 species and I got about 30 new ones despite this being my sixth or seventh birding trip to the Philippines.

The weather was excellent with only two showers, the food good and the tents etc were comfortable. Travelling was not tiring and the journeys reasonably short. The whole trip was not particularly expensive with the air fares being the main expense. As an added touch, prior to flying down to Cagayan de Oro on Mindanao's north coast, we had made an extra, very early morning, trip to Mount Makiling, south of Manila, and this also produced some very good species, three of which, an owl, a pitta and a tailorbird, being new for me.

There is a good possibility that this camp will be available to us in February 1992 and 1993 or at least one of these years. I am sure that a visit to this island would prove very rewarding

to our members and I would be willing to organise a trip there.

Anyone who would like to be included is requested to contact me and I shall provide further information as necessary. Depending on the time available to the group we could also arrange side trips to Mount Makiling and the Candaba Swamp both of which, I am sure, will produce new and exciting species for every one of us.

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## Outing Reports

### Sai Kung 25th November 1990

(Stewart Smith)

There was, as my recent readers will see, a distorted element of the *deja vu* about part of this outing.

We started as a party of five, with one overseas visitor, Roger and Margaret Lygoe and loyal Little John joining me at the Sai Kung pier at 7.30 am. Graham and I had already put in 40 minutes or so at Nam Wai (which in the event produced one or two for the day list not seen/heard elsewhere) and we were, not unjustifiedly, greeted with some scepticism as we embarked on the outing proper in, essentially, blooming urban habitat. I intended to cover first the Sai Kung reclamation and adjacent areas, and had hoped that we would have caught the end of "wasteland" instead of, as it was, the beginnings of "development". Much of the habitat of 12 months ago was gone, and we perhaps set a precedent by opening an outing to the accompaniment of (working) diggers and scrapers.

Nonetheless we had a few good birds, with a Blue Rock Thrush, a couple of Daurian Redstarts, John's White-bellied Sea Eagles, initially against the light, giving us a fine display after an hour or so, lots of Stonechats, Little Ringed Plover and Common Sandpiper as the only waders, a couple of Richard's Pipits, and (hold your breath) a Wryneck. This was initially seen only by me and, as you may imagine, gave rise to much ribald disbelief in certain quarters, but I am pleased to say then re-



appeared to give us all fine views.

We then moved up to the Ho Chung catchwater, and a rather dry patch - relieved only by a couple of finely displaying Crested Goshawks - eventually led to an interesting walk down the "traditional path" and a circuit back to the cars. This produced several Red-flanked Bluetails, Brown Flycatcher, Short-tailed Bush Warbler, Little Bunting, Chestnut Bulbul and Treepie (both heard) and several Chestnut Buntings.

The mystery of the day for me remains a smallish crow at Sai Kung, which all of us simultaneously decided was a jackdaw (sp.), but probably wasn't - the light was very funny. House Crow perhaps? I shan't put in a card.

Beers at Ho Chung at noon ended the day.

## Wu Kau Tang 1 December

(John Edge)

The wind this morning was NNE, force 6/7, and Plover Cove Reservoir looked decidedly ruffled. Mark Nunns was the only other birder to have turned up at the start time, clad in shorts for a long walk. Fortunately, he had the nous to bring a change of clothes and his Mai Po permit, so we quickly decided that, given the cold and windy conditions and the arrival of the Oriental White Storks 48 hours earlier, Mai Po was the place to be. We had a great day there, after logging Blackbird and Red-flanked Bluetail at Wu Kau Tang, recording 64 species on the Marsh; we counted about 65 White Storks and at least one Black Stork, both of us managing to photograph the two species together.

Other highlights were a single Yellow Bittern, Purple Heron, plenty of Falcated Teal, two or three Imperial Eagles, c. 6 Spotted Eagles (we watched one Imperial and two Spotted Eagles on a carcass on the scrape for about half an hour), flocks of Black-winged Stilt and Avocet and, second only to the storks, a Ruddy Crake very well seen near the Mai Po Hilton - our last bird. Also reported were a Black-naped Monarch, a Pale-legged Leaf Warbler and a Saker Falcon. We may very well have seen the Saker without realising it, when a very large falcon with notably pale underparts flew

over; we took it to be a Peregrine.

Not bad for Wu Kau Tang!

## Mai Po 2nd December 1990

(John Holmes)

A clear, sunny but decidedly crisp 10:00hrs start saw even the substitute "Pearl Channel" leader in long trousers. No unannounced car loads arrived at the last minute and the group permit number was not exceeded. Thank you folks!

There being two other groups on the Marsh at the same time Simba Chan and I led a group of about thirty-five along the fence anti-clockwise. Large numbers of Cormorant, Coot, Grey Herons and assorted Egrets were in view. A flock of fifteen Lapwings were seen in flight. Lunch was taken by most in the boardwalk hide. A view of the bay, for once unimpeded by mudskipper collectors, was enjoyed by all. The only disturbance to the waders at the waters' edge was a Saker Falcon.

The final highlight for everyone was the presence of Oriental White Storks in or near Gei Wai 23. Species tally for the day: forty-eight.

## Tsim Bei Tsui, 15 December 1990

(C.Y. Lam)

The timing of this outing was intended to show members Deep Bay more or less at its best. Some twenty members came, mostly by the Society coach, and all returned satisfied with the spectacular sight of thousands of birds in the wide open space (by Hong Kong's standard).

From the lookout point near the car park, several species of bay ducks were seen. Some ten Tufted Ducks were found among a big group of Coots. A male Common Pochard was spotted in the proximity of a female Scaup and it was puzzling why they should be there together (owners of Nikon and Kowa telescopes had slightly different views regarding identification). Members were also delighted to see the diving performance of a



## Great Crested Grebe.

In the bay as seen from the Fence, there were more than 10,000 Black-headed Gulls, with quite a number of Herring Gulls among them. For those who had never seen Herring Gulls before, their size was rather startling. There were lots of Cormorants, probably more than a thousand of them. Marsh ducks were well represented and there were hundreds if not thousands of them. Several members happily announced that they managed to see "all the species on p. 54" in one day for the first time in their life. (I suppose we now have a few more twitchers in Hong Kong!) Apart from the most common species, there were some ten Mallards and at least three Gadwalls. We also enjoyed seeing more than a hundred Avocets parading elegantly in front of us. Several Grey-headed Lapwings added more interest to the day's list. A Peregrine Falcon mounting an unsuccessful attack on the waders represented the climax of the day.

As we left, the setting sun was giving a majestic golden shine to all that was alive in the bay. It was plainly beautiful. May it stay that way forever.

## Christmas Count 1990

(C.Y. Lam)

For some reason, many birdwatchers were out of Hong Kong on 30 December, 1990 on which day the sixth Christmas Count was to take place. At one point, it was doubtful whether the count could proceed as planned. Fortunately, various people came in for the rescue and some fifty birders were in the field on that day.

The returns from members have been examined with the help of the Society's Hon. Recorder. Counting only those species which the Hon. Recorder has accepted so far, a total of 165 species were recorded in the count. This figure is lower than last year's total of 170 - another indication that the bird population is suffering from deterioration of the natural environment. There are three new additions to the Christmas count list. They are Siskin (Castle Peak area), Oriental White Stork (Deep Bay area) and Siberian

Meadow Bunting (Tung Chung). Other "rare" species are still under consideration. A full report on the count will appear in the 1990 Annual Report of the Society. The closest guess of the total number of species recorded was put in by the O'Brien's. They will therefore receive a copy of the 'Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Hong Kong' as the prize.

## Kap Lung Trail 5th January 1991

(John Edge)

Wind again! By 07.30 only Jerry Ziarno had arrived at the lower Tai Mo Shan car park, and it was not a day for hanging about. We were completely caught out by the northerly wind, force 5/6, and the sudden drop in temperature to about 10C. Not to be deterred, however, we had a long look near the summit for Chinese Babax, but in vain.

The trail itself was a little disappointing, probably because of the weather, but it gave us up to six Jays, Hair-crested Drongos, three separate flocks of Tristram's Buntings, Chestnut Bulbuls and a probable White's Thrush, which flew off with a whirring flight like a gamebird. A short stretch of the Sek Kong catchment was very active around 12.30, with a male Bluetail, White-backed and Spotted Munias, Brown Flycatcher, Grey-backed Thrush, Pallas's Warbler, a male Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker and a Bonelli's eagle. Thirty species for our part of the outing - I gathered subsequently that Mike Leven and Ian Tyzzer, among others, turned up, but our paths did not cross.

The outing, the first at this venue, was experimental. It is probably unsuitable for large numbers of people, given the narrowness of the trail, but as a maturing piece of woodland, and as a complement to Tai Po Kau, it is well worth keeping an eye on.

### Alternative Report (Ian Tyzzer)

Five hardy souls, missed the leader, and despite the weather decided to press on with the trip. The Trail itself, although a pleasant walk, proved to be somewhat of a disappointment with birds being hard to come by despite the cold weather. Thrushes were noteworthy



by their absence, and by the time we reached the Sek Kong Catchment, only 19 species had been recorded of which Tristram's Bunting, Jay and Emerald Dove were the most interesting. Red-flanked Bluetails were much in evidence, including 3 males in nearly full plumage. The catchment gave us Brown Flycatcher and a male Grey-backed Thrush, and encouraged us to press on to visit the Sek Kong Woods and plain.

In complete contrast to the trail in the morning, this area was alive with birds. The (still disgusting) stream gave us Woodcock, a female Plumbeous Water Redstart and Red-breasted Flycatcher, whilst the fields and plain provided over 20 Blackbirds, plus Silky and Chinese Starlings, Rose-ringed Parakeets, an Indian Grackle and a large flock of Black-tailed Hawfinches. Pipits and wagtails were abundant, allowing the less experienced of us the opportunity for good comparisons. The day finished with a total of 52 species - but no raptors.

## **Mai Po 20th January**

(Mike Chalmers and Simba Chan)

About 35 members and visitors turned up for the civilised start at 1pm. including a group of Japanese birders impressively armed with massive Nikkon 800mm. telephoto lenses. With limited time available, we hurried to the boardwalk hide to catch the tide before it receded too far. En route we were 'buzzed' by low level Imperial and Spotted Eagles near the Warden's Post, and enjoyed a magnificent fly past of Oriental White Storks.

Conditions at the boardwalk were superb, with large numbers of gulls, duck and waders close to the hide in excellent light. Specialities here were good numbers of Saunder's Gulls, four Caspian Terns, one Australian Curlew with the Eurasian Curlews and two Great Knot and one Knot with the Grey Plover.

As the scrape hides were still closed because of the dredging works, a slow return was made along the fence. Further birds of note were the Black Stork on Pond 8 and male Tufted Duck and Baer's Pochard to take the total number of species to about 60.

## **Tai Po Kau 26th January**

(Andrew Young)

Being heartened by an excursion the previous Saturday, Wendy, Maxine Sorensen - a visiting American enthusiast - and I duly set out on the 26th to find a cold wet and leaden skied morning for our venture. Arriving at Tai Po Kau at 7.30 we found no one to join us. Not surprising, considering the weather. Gone was the flock. Gone were the special birds but, remarkably, with the help of Scott Shaum (eagle-eyed on thrush) who joined us on the way up the road, John Burton who joined us later and Mike Turnbull who had the woodpecker after he left us, we came to the grand total of 32 species by mid day.

Grey-backed Thrush were identified and a Short-tailed Bush Warbler heard but a lot of pishing didn't produce a view. Grey-headed and Brown Flycatchers were seen and a Yellow-cheeked Tit and Scarlet and Grey-throated Minivets are always worthwhile.

## **Tsim Bei Tsui 3rd February**

(John Burton)

Richard Stott was unable to lead the gwailo half of this bi-lingual jaunt so I stepped in as his "deputy". Happily, C.Y. had ignored his own Department's prophesies of Arctic storms and Biblical deluges and arrived with a football team's worth of enthusiasts who, poor souls, actually believed the weather forecast! That meant that there were two of us suitably attired for a beautiful warm spring morning, humid, a touch too much mist to see far out into the Bay, but the whole area teeming with life.

Members and visitors saw at first hand just why Deep Bay is so important. C.Y. elected to patrol the Fence, so I took the gwailos counter-clockwise, road, paddy, woods, village, (beer), Fence and home.

I arrived an hour earlier than the scheduled start and was therefore able to do a little preliminary scouting. In the event this gave me an unfair advantage because before any of the "tour group" had arrived, I had managed super clear views of Osprey (to be expected),



Buzzard (likewise) and a female Brown Thrush, a distinct bonus, also a Koel calling loudly.

In company with C.Y.'s team we had a quick scan of the mud below the car park lookout. The stars of the show were the 300 Avocets, but Shoveler, Teal, Wigeon and Pintail were all appreciated. A leucistic male Pintail was conspicuous and obviously embarrassed! From the same perch we saw egrets posing and good numbers of Redshanks, Curlews, Greenshanks, gulls aplenty and Cormorants with both coucals putting in an appearance. Going on down the road, I was able to astound my appreciative group with aural, then visual identification of some very tricky bulbuls (Chinese, Crested and Red-vented), likewise White-eye, Tree Sparrow, Chinese Pond Heron and eventually, a pesky little Yellow-browed Warbler. Out into the fields, ignoring a neurotic dog, we found a Buzzard, Grey-backed Thrush, Black Kites, Magpie Robins, Olive-backed Pipits, Masked Buntings, Great Tit, a flowerpecker and a pair of what I took to be Siskins.

In the disused paddy fields, Silky, Grey and Black-necked Starlings were all evident, likewise Rufous Turtle Doves, prinias, some shy Fantail Warblers and a skulking Chinese Bush Warbler. Called to the 'phone, I did not see the flock of Black-tailed Hawfinches my party told me about on my return.

Rendezvousing with C.Y.'s group at the bridge all were much impressed by 40 Oriental White Storks spiralling on the thermals.

At the end of the day the tally was 41 species.

## Lam Tsuen 9th February

(John Burton)

Mr and Mrs Stevens were late-comers to a party of eight "newish" members some of whom claimed to be novices at birding. Like a sucker I fell for this communist plot (or was it the CIA, Beth?) and confidently identified the sparrows, magpies, mynahs, expounding knowledgeably on the points to look for to make sure that Hair-crested Drongos really were! Koels, coucals, Great Barbets, a noisy Red-tailed Robin, Black-necked Starlings,

Yellow-browed Warblers, Fork-tailed Sunbirds, Hwamei and Blackbirds all chorused away, largely unseen to an audience that was clearly beginning to think about wanting a refund.

But a welcome flush of Grey-throated and Scarlet Minivets plus glimpses of Grey and Silky Starlings restored interest, while a resplendent Great Barbet on a Bombax tree gave excellent views when not making itself totally invisible on a bare branch. I wonder how they do that?

Also in the woods we had a Grey-headed Flycatcher plus sight and sound of a Serpent Eagle; thrush squeaks/glimpses not seen by all. A ramble through the orange and peach blossoms turned up the expected Stonechats and a single Red-flanked Bluetail, Masked Bunting, Common and Green Sandpipers.

Getting up to the "golden triangle", a dedicated researcher was looking for impossible phyllosc warblers (the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable?) but at least put we plebs onto Brown Flycatcher and Yellow-bellied Tits, well seen by all, likewise a pride of Black-tailed Hawfinches which posed obligingly.

Flushed with success it was Carlsberg time and the fortunes of Cooper's favourite noodle stall once more prospered. At the end of the day the tally was 52 confirmed non-stringy identifications. Nothing spectacular, but a good mix on a funny sort of a day which, given the disturbance from roadworks, flower sales and firecrackers was not bad at all; a nice friendly stroll in pleasant company. I enjoyed it and I hope that everyone else did.

## Nam Chung/Luk Keng 23rd February

(John Holmes)

Six members of varying levels of experience turned out on what proved to be pleasantly warm day. Two Anderson's Bulbuls were seen at the usual spot, followed by a Red-breasted Flycatcher. A good variety of commoner birds brought our tally in four hours to fifty-two.



## REPORT ON THE BIRDS

### 1 December to 28 February

(Mike Turnbull)

#### December

At the beginning of the month considerable excitement still surrounded the Oriental White Storks which had arrived in late November. Up to 120 were reported to be present, with the one Black Stork also remaining throughout the month. The flock of Siskins at Shek Kong also continued to be seen, about 28 being noted on 1st. Fresh reports on 1st were of Ruddy Crake at Mai Po (JSRE), and of three Pale-legged Leaf Warblers at Mount Davis (PRK) and one at Mai Po (CAV, MT *et al*). The following day proved a particularly memorable one, with two White-throated Rock-Thrushes and a Two-barred Greenish Warbler in Tai Po Kau, and a Saker Falcon at Mai Po (PRK, PJJ *et al*).

Tai Po Kau received a lot of attention over the next few days. On 3rd a rather late Eastern Crowned Warbler was noted (ARL), and a Yellow-eyed Flycatcher-Warbler was seen on 4th. This species was seen again there on 17th. Two Chestnut-flanked White-eyes were also seen on 4th (all WLY). A Gold-fronted Leafbird was again noted on 5th (ARL), while on 6th a Pale-legged Leaf Warbler and two Red-headed Tits were seen (RWL).

A White-capped Redstart was seen at Shatin on 6th (per PRS). On 8th a Radde's Warbler was in Tai Po Kau (CAV, MT), an Orange-headed Ground Thrush was in Aberdeen Country Park (WLY), a male Baer's Pochard was at Mai Po and a small auk, possibly an Ancient Auk, was seen in Mirs Bay (ARL). The Society outing to Hok Tau on 9th produced records of a Mountain Bush Warbler and an unidentified buttonquail (MLC *et al*). Another record of a White-throated Rock Thrush came from Tai Po Kau on 11th (ARL).

Also on 11th a Citrine Wagtail was briefly seen at Mai Po (VBP). Mallard were noted in small numbers there around this time, with a leucistic Pintail also amongst the ducks. A Hen Harrier was reported to be on the Marsh for a week or so from 17th, and a Black Vulture was

seen there on 19th (ARL). The sight of it soaring amongst the Storks there on 26th must have been an impressive one (WLY).

A Large Hawk-Cuckoo at the ZBG on 15th was an unseasonal report (PA). On 21st two more Mountain Bush Warblers were seen at Hebe Haven (ARL) and a Northern Goshawk was noted in Tai Po Kau (RWL). There was another sighting of a Ruddy Crake at Mai Po on 22nd. Five or six Grey-headed Lapwings were also there around this time (SC), and a pair of Common Pochard were present on 27th (NSJG). The first report of the winter of a Black-tailed Gull came on 29th, with a first-winter bird at Tsim Bei Tsui (PRK).

In Tai Po Kau on 26th another Two-barred Greenish Warbler was seen (MDW). On the 30th fleeting views were obtained at Tai Tam Catchment of what was probably a Rufous-capped Babbler (SPS). Meanwhile, the same day, from little visited and much threatened Tung Chung on Lantau, came reports of a Rustic Bunting, a Meadow Bunting and a Grey Bushchat (TRC). A flock of thrushes in Tai Po Kau, also on 30th, appeared to contain at least nine Brown Thrushes (PA). A further interesting report the same day involved a Long-tailed Tit at Luk Keng (MRL). On 31st an Orange-headed Ground Thrush was found in Tai Po Kau (JH *et al*), and a Mountain Bush Warbler was trapped at Kadoorie Farm (PJJ).

Grey-headed Flycatchers continued to be reported in good numbers, including the ZBG bird, noted again on 20th (GJZ). There were also regular reports of Blyth's Leaf Warblers, mainly from Tai Po Kau. Reports of Yellow-cheeked Tits included a bird near Bowen Road on 21st (MMC).

#### January

The Orange-headed Ground Thrush in Aberdeen Country Park was seen again on 2nd, along with a Tristram's Bunting (SO'B). The following day at Tai Po Kau the same observer was able to enjoy four species of flycatcher in the same tree at the same time - a Brown, a Grey-headed, a Black-naped Monarch and, most interesting of all, a Fukien Niltava. The Orange-headed Ground



Thrush there continued to be noted throughout the month. At Mai Po, also on 3rd, ten Mongolian Sandpipers, two Broad-billed Sandpipers and a Penduline Tit were seen, and the Purple Gallinule put in one of its rare appearances (WLY). On 5th there was an even bigger count of 60 Mongolian Sandpipers. There was also one Greater Sandplover, one Great Knot and 11 Knot. Up to 13 of the latter, seen regularly from the Boardwalk Hide into February, represented the first known wintering of this species in Hong Kong. Similar numbers of Great Knot were also noted throughout the month (PRK *et al*). Around 100 Saunders' Gulls were also regularly counted.

On 6th Hong Kong's second Yellow-browed Warbler of the Central Asian race *humei* was discovered at She Shan (PRK,PJL). It was still present the following day (VBP). Two or three Yellow-bellied Tits were also reported from Lam Tsuen Valley around this time. A Woodcock and a Plumbeous Water Redstart were seen at Shek Kong Woods on 9th (JH). The following day off Lau Fau Shan there were 32 Red-breasted Mergansers, 60 Tufted Ducks, 15 Scaup and a Pochard (WLY). A Hoopoe was also reported from Mong Tseng. One Red-headed Tit was seen at Tai Tam on 12th (JEB), and there were five Yellow-bellied Tits at Shek Kong Catchwater (SES) on the same day. Amongst birds caught at Mai Po on 12th were a Styan's Grasshopper Warbler and three Von Schrenck's Reed Warblers (PJL *et al*). The following day at the same location two Pochard were seen (ARL), with a Baer's Pochard noted at Tsim Bei Tsui (PRK,PJL).

On 14th another White-throated Rock Thrush was located in Tai Po Kau (MH). It was to be seen regularly to the end of the month. On 19th two Black-tailed Gulls were seen from the Boardwalk. Five Caspian Terns were also present that day and were seen regularly on several subsequent occasions. A Turnstone, also on 19th, was another unusual wintering wader at Mai Po. On the same day a Black-naped Monarch Flycatcher was seen at Shek Kong Catchwater (SES). On 20th a Swinhoe's Snipe was amongst the Fantail and Pintail Snipe trapped at Lok Ma Chau

(PJL *et al*). A Baer's Pochard was found at Mai Po the same day (SC), and a Verditer Flycatcher, seven Yellow-bellied Tits and 60 Black-tailed Hawfinches were seen in Lam Tsuen Valley (PJL,VBP).

On 26th Hong Kong's second Relict Gull - a second winter bird - was seen, again from the Boardwalk. A male Baikal Teal was also found (PRK,PJL) and was still present on 27th, when a Crested Honey Buzzard was seen at Hong Lok Yuen and a Two-barred Greenish Warbler was found in Lam Tsuen Valley (RWL,MDW).

## February

On 1st a Plain Flowerpecker was claimed at Mount Davis (WLY,SO'B) and five Oriental Skylarks were seen near Baguio Villas (RCN). Also that day a first-winter Common Gull was seen off the Boardwalk (MDW). It was still present the following day. On 3rd a first for Hong Kong was claimed in the form of a male Ferruginous Duck at Mai Po (PRK,PJL). The same day at Lok Ma Chau another Swinhoe's Snipe was caught, as well as a Painted Snipe (PJL *et al*). A Ruff was seen at Mai Po on 7th.(WLY). A female Grey Bushchat was reported from Aberdeen Country Park on 8th (VBP). Also on 8th a flock of up to 30 Siskins were seen at Chung Lung on Route Twisk. Two were subsequently seen at the same location on 14th (NSJG). On 10th a first winter Citrine Wagtail was found at Lok Ma Chau and two second winter Common Gulls were reported from the Boardwalk (MH).

On 14th a *Bradypterus sp.* was giving the 'zeebit' song near Tai Lam Chung Reservoir (WLY). A Baer's Pochard was again noted at Mai Po on 14th and 17th. On the former date a record count of 57 Black faced Spoonbills was made there (PA), and Penduline Tits were again reported around this time. A Brown-headed Gull was seen at Starling Inlet on 15th, and another was reported from the Boardwalk, along with a Black-tailed Gull on 16th (PRK). Also on 16th a flock of skylarks was found on a landfill site near Mai Po. Two Japanese Quails were also present (RWL).

A Bay Woodpecker was believed to have been heard at Bride's Pool on 18th (NJGC), and on 19th both Blyth's Leaf and Sulphur-breasted Warblers were noted there, as well as a



Black-naped Monarch Flycatcher (RWL). Also on 19th there were two Ruff at Mai Po (WLY). There were widespread reports of 'Greenish'-type *Phylloscopus* warblers throughout the month, but apart from the Lam Tsuen bird, which continued to be seen regularly, the only one seen well was at Kadoorie Farm on 21st (VBP,WLY,SO'B).

On 23rd a Relict Gull, rapidly assuming adult breeding plumage, was seen from the Boardwalk (PA,WLY). Meanwhile, the skylark flock on the landfill site nearby was now believed to contain several Northern Skylarks - potentially the first time the identification of that species has been clinched in Hong Kong - with Oriental Skylarks also possibly present (PRK,PJL,PA). There was also an Anderson's

Bulbul in the Police Post trees (MRL). The following day, the larks were still present and an adult Common Gull was seen from the Boardwalk (PRK). Also on 24th the Mountain Bush Warbler, first captured on December 31st, was retrapped at Kadoorie Farm (ACG *et al*), and another was reported from Bride's Pool (WLY,SO'B). It was still present on 28th when a first winter Common Gull was again seen from the Boardwalk (WLY).

The majority of the torks, including the Black Stork, continued to be reported into late February, as did the Rufous-bellied Woodpecker at Tai Po Kau, where the Orange-headed Ground Thrush was present until at least the middle of the month.



## FUTURE MEETINGS

DATE	LEADER	VENUE	TIME
31 March Saturday	Michael Leven	Mai Po Meet: Car Park	0730
13 April Saturday	Stewart Smith	Tai Po Kau Meet: Car Park	0700
20 April Saturday	John Edge	Tai Long Wan Meet: Top Deck Tolo Harbour ferry. Check time with HK & YF Co. Leaves from Ma Liu Shui, parking impossible, take KCR	Ferry 0715
21 April Sunday	Simba Chan  Gavin Cooper	Mai Po+++ Bilingual	0900-1500
28 April Sunday	Mike Chalmers  C.Y.Lam	Tsim Bei Tsui Meet: Car Park Bilingual	0900
5 May Sunday	Gavin Cooper  Simba Chan	Mai Po Meet: Car Park Bilingual	0900
12 May Sunday	Peter Stevens  LI Wai Ki	Tsim Bei Tsui Meet: Car Park Bilingual	0900



DATE	LEADER	VENUE	TIME
18 May Saturday	Nigel Croft	Luk Keng/Nam Chung Swamp Bash - wear wellington boots . and/or long trousers!	0730
25 May Saturday	Mike Turnbull	Tai Po Kau Survey** Meet: Car Park	0600
1 June Saturday	Shirley O'Brien	Tai Mo Shan Meet: Lower Car Park	0700
9 June Sunday	John Edge	Mai Po Meet: Car Park	0630
10 June Monday	ORIENTAL MISCELLANY Slide Show by John Holmes WWF Office - 1 Tramway Path, Central		1830
14 July Sunday	Mike Turnbull	Mai Po Meet: Car Park	0630

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

++ If any member wishes to use the coach (which will collect members from Kowloon Tong KCR one hour before assembly time and will return them there at the end of the outing) but did not send off the form provided in the last bulletin please phone the leader to see whether there are still seats available (\$30 coach hire charge). Please bring drink and packed lunch.

|| 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.

\*\* This outing is intended as the fourth annual Tai Po Kau Breeding Birds Survey. A considerable number of members are necessary to cover the whole forest properly so **PLEASE** come along and participate. If you plan to take part please contact Mike in advance. Tai Po Kau records for the following day should be sent to Mike for inclusion in the survey report.