



THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

BULLETIN NO. 143

MARCH 1992

Annual General Meeting

The 1992 AGM will be held on Tuesday April 7th at 1830 in the Auxiliary Police Officers' Mess, 3/f Beaconsfield House, Queen's Road Central. After the meeting proper, John Edge will show some of his slides taken on his recent trip to Namibia. As usual the evening will conclude with an informal dinner for those who wish to join in (venue decided on the night).

Society News

Old Reports Auction

Dr. Walther Thiede of Cologne, Germany won the Auction for the 1959, 1961 and 1962 Reports, bidding HK\$101 for each Report. Single copies of 1969-75 Reports are still available on a first come first served basis.

Bulletin Illustrations

Once again this edition of the Bulletin is greatly enhanced by Jeremy Pearse's illustrations. If you would like to see more of his work, he is holding an exhibition entitled **Water colours and Wildlife** in the Trigram, Rooms 316 and 343, Hong Kong Hotel, Kowloon from April 8th for two weeks. Contact Jeremy for more details (tel 661 7949).

Articles for the Bulletin

The editor is always pleased to receive articles for the Bulletin, on any item of interest to members. However, it may be necessary to edit the articles for one reason or another - usually to shorten them! Unfortunately, the Bulletin has to be put

together just before it is printed, and it is not possible to refer edited articles back to authors for approval. I hope authors will appreciate the problem, and continue to provide the comments, reviews and trip reports which make up most of the Bulletin.

Treasurer's Thanks

The Treasurer would like to thank virtually the whole of the membership for writing their cheques correctly when renewing subs!

Big Bird Race 1992

On 10/11th April, eighteen teams will be chasing round Hong Kong in an attempt to raise HK\$1.5 million for Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve. Have you sponsored a team yet? If not here is your chance. A sponsor form is enclosed in this Bulletin, so there is no excuse now. As usual Richard Stott will be leading the HKBWS Team, but Society members are involved in just about every team so feel free to sponsor the team of your choice.

The next committee meeting will be in early May 1992. If any 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

Li Wai-ki

Ian Tyzzer

John Edge

Mike Turnbull

Liz Leven

Oriental Bird Club - Forktail Leica Award

The 1991 winner was **Madhusudhan Katti**, who will be using the GBP 1000 award to fund equipment for a **7 month study on the distribution and diversity of bird species in Arunchal Pradesh, India**, particularly frugivorous species. Details of the 1992 award will be announced in the June Bulletin

Chinese Egret - Colour Ringing

Once again the Asian Wetland Bureau and the Institute of Ornithology, Seoul, are colour ringing fledgling Chinese Egrets in South Korea. Birds are marked with two rings, one on each leg. **In 1990 the colours were red and white and in 1991, green and white.** Please report any sightings to **David Melville at WWF HK**, who will pass the information to the relevant people.

Birds Flying into Windows

Dr. Daniel Klem Jr. is gathering data on birds flying into windows. He has been collecting data in North America for some years and is now looking at the rest of the world. He would like to know (if possible): species;date;location;habitat;result(death or injury);type of building etc. Please send any information to **Dr. Klem at Department of Biology, Muhlenberg College, 2400 Chew Street, Allentown, PA 18104-5586, USA.**

Squirrels

Ho Ching-yee, a post-grad zoology student at Hong Kong University is researching squirrels in Hong Kong. If you have any information on location, behaviour, appearance, frequency in particular areas, and records of first sightings in an area, please send them to Ho ching-yee, University of Hong Kong, Department of Zoology, Hui Oi Chow Science Building, Pokfulam Rd. Hong Kong.

Telescope Wanted

Second-hand telescope wanted. Please contact Mike Chalmers if you have one to sell.

Luk Keng Update

The Rural and New Town Committee of the Town Planning Board has just **rejected** the application to build a golf course at Luk Keng Marsh, and the Country Parks Board has deferred a decision on the portion of the proposal within Pat Seng Country Park. So far so good, **but this is likely to be the first battle in a long war!** Any information you may have on species using the marsh would help to support the SSSI proposal. Please pass any data to David Melville at WWF HK

Curry Lunch

The annual Curry Lunch on 15th December was a great success with over 40 members and families enjoying good food in superb weather. Thanks are due to Ian Tyzzer who organised it all, and John Holmes and Nigel Croft, who manned the bar with their customary enthusiasm

Mai Po Update

The Mai Po Update was unfortunately omitted from the December Bulletin so this is a bumper edition!

New Reserve Manager

Lew Young has now taken over as Mai Po Reserve Manager. Lew can be contacted on the usual reserve number

Records.

Every year hundreds of bird watchers pass through Mai Po, and many of them will take away with them important information including species counts, new records, accounts of unusual bird behaviour, and so on. If all this information could be collected then the reserve could try to make some sense of it. For example species counts during spring migration when Mai Po receives most of its visitors. If each visitor could note species and numbers seen in the reserve, then it should be possible to see patterns of arrivals and departures of migrant birds. To this end a **NEW** record book is now located in the shop at the car park. This should be a better location than the book at the Ag & Fish post since not everyone

leaves the reserve that way. Please use it!! Any thoughts on this subject from HKBWS members would be gratefully received.

Stork Sightings

When the Oriental White Storks first returned to Mai Po, it was hoped that over 100 would arrive as last year. It was intended to undertake a study on habitat preferences over the winter. Eventually only 10 arrived, but any notes of sightings would still be very helpful. Useful details include date, time, number, age (adult:juvenile ratio if possible), habitat and location, and if possible behaviour and associated bird species. Please send your notes to Simba Chan, GPO Box 12721, WWFHK, or, use the record book in the shop.

Earth Moving. Work started at the end of November in front of the Tower Hide in order to create areas of open water, with small scattered islands and grassy swamps. This work should last until March.

Selling of Wild Birds

One Sunday in November, several people saw fishermen from mainland China selling wild caught waders and ducks across the border fence at Pakok Chau (the village by the helicopter pad). According to Hong Kong law, these fishermen cannot be arrested unless they cross into Hong Kong territory. So please, keep an eye on the fishermen, and if you see any wild birds being sold, contact John Holmes at Lok Ma Chau police post immediately,

Disturbance

The disturbance caused by mainland Chinese fishermen out in Deep Bay is definately getting worse. All that can be done is to put more pressure on the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to gazette the Mai Po mudflat as a part of the nature reserve. Please, if you see fishermen causing disturbance to birds out in the Bay or on the mudflats, write to the Director of Agriculture and Fisheries, 12th Floor, Canton Road Government Offices, 393, Canton Road, Kowloon with all the details. This Winter there have also been several incidences of people in boats from main-

land China, shooting at birds in Deep Bay. If you do see such an incident please tell a gurkha and ring John Holmes (Sub-divisional Commander) at Lok Ma Chau, tel. 4711684 as soon as possible. For both disturbance and shooting incidents please also tell Lew Young, so that he can take follow up action.

Mai Po Guides

Part time, Cantonese speaking guides are needed at Mai Po to lead the public visits, especially in April and May, when the students who normally do it are studying for exams. The job pays \$170 per trip. Please contact Simba Chan on [redacted] if you can help.

Use of Boardwalk Hide

Recently there have been complaints about the Mai Po Education Officers taking groups of students out to the boardwalk hide, where the subsequent noise has disturbed the birds. It is unfortunate that there is only one floating hide, and birdwatchers and students have to share it. The Education Officers have been told to tell the students to be quiet, both entering and leaving the hide, but 30 pairs of feet make some noise, however hard the owners try to be quiet. This is the same if it is expert birders looking for their first Spoon-billed Sandpiper, or a group of students experiencing birdwatching for the first time! Student groups are not used to the unwritten code of conduct that should be followed each time they enter a hide. If we are to protect Mai Po, then we must show these students how important the place is - including the mangroves and mudflats. It may be the only time in their lives they ever walk on the boardwalk to the edge of Deep Bay. So please be patient. If you are taking a large group of people out to the hide, please let Lew Young know in advance so that a clash can be avoided.

Board Walk Repairs

Over the next month, on some weekdays, the Board Walk may be closed for repairs. If you intend to use the board walk to get to the floating hide, check with Lew Young first to avoid a wasted journey.

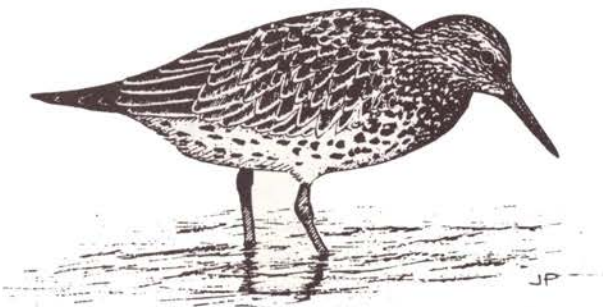
Christmas Count 29 December 1991

(C Y Lam)

The Christmas Count could not have occurred on a more unusual day. It was the coldest day in Hong Kong for some sixteen years. One group had the rare experience of birdwatching in icy conditions on Tai Mo Shan. Most observers reported that it was a rather quiet day. However, when the results were put together, surprisingly, the total number of species reported turned out to be 172 (subject to further verification), which is six more than the 1990 count.

Ten species were recorded for the first time in a Christmas Count. They were : **Baikal Teal**, **Lapwing** (total more than 100; 65 in one flock), **Knot**, **Eastern Crowned Warbler***, **Grey-streaked Flycatcher***, **Chestnut-flanked White-eye**, **Grey-headed Bunting**, **Rufous-necked Scimitar Babbler**, **Grey-cheeked Fulvetta*** and **Bright-capped Cisticola**. (The species marked * are still under review). The last named species was also new for Hong Kong in 1991.

Other species of interest included: **Oriental White Stork** in Deep Bay (returning again after the unexpected mass influx into Hong Kong in 1990), **Lesser Frigatebird** on the Peak and **Frigatebird sp.** (possibly the same bird) on Stonecutters and above Tolo Harbour, **Great Knot**



Great Knot

(unusual winter record) and **Hoopoe** at Mai Po, **Mountain Bush Warbler** on Cheung Chau and **Yellow-eyed Flycatcher Warbler** at Tai Po Kau.

The only regret was that poor weather prevented any observers from visiting Lantau. One wonders if the cold surge had deposited any unusual species on the island. We shall never know.

OVERSEAS BIRDING

Dinghu Shan

(Martin Williams)

Dinghu Shan is a forest reserve in Guangdong Province, lying 86km west of Guangzhou, 19 km north-east of Zhaoqing.

Easily reached from Hong Kong, it holds several species which are scarce in, or absent from, the Territory. These include Silver Pheasant, Drongo Cuckoo (summer), Collared Pygmy Owl, an as-yet unidentified barbet, possibly Black-browed, Speckled Piculet, Bay Woodpecker, Short-billed Minivet, Mountain Bulbul, Slaty-backed Forktail, Rufous-capped Babbler, Mountain Tailorbird (at low elevations, only in winter?), Red-headed Tit and Plain Flowerpecker. The reserve ranges from c. 20 to 1000 metres; I know of no observations at the highest altitudes. It is very scenic, with steep ravines, waterfalls and temples and has some good forest (like a grander, mature version of Tai Po Kau).

The lower parts of the reserve are readily accessible (entry tickets cost c. HK\$4). Permits are required for the restricted areas; these cost 15 yuan (c. HK\$25) for overseas Chinese; foreigners' permits are set at US\$15 per day, but the Director has allowed a discount for trips I have been on, to US\$15 for three days (seems likely to hold for further visitors); they can be obtained from the reserve headquarters, just past the entrance archway with the ticket booths, on the right (in the ground (Chinese 1st) floor of the highest building). Most, or all, of the above species can be seen in non-restricted areas. The restricted area is perhaps best for trails with few visitors - especially in summer, Dinghu Shan is popular with tourists.

A hotel in the non-restricted part of the reserve - the Dinghu Shan Summer Resort - is conveniently located for covering much of the area on foot (simple maps are on sale). Rooms cost c. HK\$170 for triples or (better) twins; tel 0258-298668. A hotel in the village outside the reserve entrance is cheaper at c. HK\$100 for twin rooms; the headquarters may be another possibility for accommodation.

Dinghu Shan can be reached by minibus from Zhaoqing - these cost maybe 20-30 yuan (HK\$30-45); the journey should take less than 30 minutes.

Probably the most convenient way to travel

between Hong Kong and Zhaoqing is by overnight ferry (there are also ferries during the day); Chu Kong is the shipping agent; 1st and 2nd class are OK, 3rd class is very basic; restaurant is not great (better to eat before getting on). In Zhaoqing, restaurants of Overseas Chinese Hotel are OK and not expensive - Chinese on Ground (1st) floor, western on 1st (2nd). There should be minibuses waiting at Zhaoqing ferry terminal, if not, try entrance to Star Crags Park, at the northern edge of the city. Return minibuses can be found near the Dinghu Resort.

I plan to write a paper on birds at Dinghu Shan, so would appreciate any records from the reserve. My address is 1/F 15 Siu Kwai Wan, Cheung Chau Island.

Japan November-December 1991

(Tim Woodward)

I had six weeks in the Tokyo area but could only take two of those for birding. The big plans for Hokkaido and Kyushu in search of cranes and fish eagles had to be curtailed by lack of time. However armed with *Birds of Japan* and Mark Brazil's guide we made the most of the Tokyo area. The cost of staying in Japan is not really prohibitive, more akin to expensive B&B in the UK. Food is cheap but transport is not.

The highlight was undoubtedly Miyakejima, one of the Izu Islands group and 150km south of Tokyo. I spent 4 days on this volcanic island, which last erupted 1983, and saw most of what could be expected in Winter (ie missing Ijima's Warbler). The endemic Izu Islands Thrush is very common and tame. Around Tairo Ike, a crater lake surrounded by semi-tropical forest, I had some good views of Japanese Robin (one of its few wintering spots in Japan). Also found on the island is the large but shy Japanese Woodpigeon and the island race of the Varied Tit. The only mammal I saw was a marten (Japanese?) that trotted past me on the path one morning.

As regards raptors, aside from the Black Kite I was treated to good views of Osprey and also Peregrine, mobbed on a cliffside by Jungle Crows. The boat back was worth the 'gritted teeth in face of gale' posture as I saw around 25 Laysan Albatrosses and a single Black-footed Albatross. There were also some skuas, but of the expected murrelets and petrels there was no sign.

Back on the mainland we made visits to Nikko and Hakone (in the snow). At Nikko we had a chance to renew acquaintance with such species as Willow and Long-tailed Tits, Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers are common everywhere but we dipped on the Japanese Green. We also dipped on Mt. Fuji at Hakone (heavy snowfalls) but the recompense there was Japanese Accentor, Japanese Grosbeak, Slavonian Grebe and Common Merganser. Mention should also be made of the buntings with Siberian Meadow, Rustic and Black-faced (Masked) the commonest, but I also had a Yellow-throated on Miyakejima.

Tokyo itself can be quite good with such species as Mandarin Duck, Pale Thrush, Daurian Redstart and Brown-eared Bulbuls. The latter is probably Japan's commonest bird; big, ugly and shriek-voiced. You can also find Grey Starlings and Azure-winged Magpies in Tokyo parks. Total species list for the trip numbered 79. And it doesn't have to be that expensive though the dollars per tick ratio is admittedly high!

Kunming 1-8 December 1991

(Stewart Smith)

Stott's Gentlemanly Tours took Richard and me to Kunming for a week in early December. We had had more fanciful plans, which may yet mature, but for the time being opted for a standard Dragonair tour with a view to birding the West(ern) Hill(s) (Xishan). And very good it was too.

We stayed at the Green Lake Hotel, older style and refurbished a few years ago with, in part, Singaporean money. The refurbishment today is perhaps 85% extant, but all was very acceptable and the staff, stimulated perhaps by an employee incentive programme which was afoot, were A1. The hotel was opposite about 10,000 Black-headed Gulls under which lay a park lake. The park, which we found on the Sunday of our arrival, also held Common Kingfisher and Plumbeous Water Redstart in the interstices of thick crowds.

Our general pattern was to disrupt the order of the hotel by demanding cars and taxis before first light to take us the 16km (to the bottom) or 22km (to the top) of Xishan. With a modest wrinkle on day one, this we did for five of our six days, bussing back each day for 1/125th of the cost of the car. Kunming is at 1,895m, with the top of Xishan being at about 2,404m.

We variously ambled back down the well wooded, well travelled and well spat upon road along the scarp above the Dianchi Lake, and over the brow of the ridge by three different routes to the more agricultural slopes on the western side, and returned a good number of species. The main features were that, despite the continued disturbance by day-trippers, birds were frequent, and that in general they occurred regularly all day. A particularly striking feature was a series of extraordinary blasting or artillery explosions, and a daily broadcast of "Colonel Bogey" to the world and beyond. There was no evidence of hunting; perhaps the existence of temples discourages it. By contrast, the adjacent paddy and lake were completely devoid of bird-life.

We opened with an exciting burst of many of the species which were to be our constant companions during the week - Blue-fronted Redstart (a dead ringer in ecological niche for the European Robin), Red-headed Tit and Pallas's Warbler (both on the hill in thousands), Ashy-throated Parrotbill and Streak-throated Fulvetta - and superb views of Pygmy Wren-Babbler in full voice.

Among others, we were through the week commonly treated to Long-tailed Minivet, Striated Prinia, Green-backed Tit and Blue-winged Minla, and flushed out Chinese Song Thrush, Maroon-backed Accentor, Spot-breasted (Rusty-cheeked) Scimitar-babbler, Grey-backed Shrike, Brambling and Goldcrest. Brown-capped Fulvetta *Alcippe brunnea* feed on the road like sparrows and Richard decided they were race *macadami*. We were particularly pleased to be able to distinguish - we think - some of the more obscure Cettia sp. warblers, with a clear notion now in our minds of Aberrant and Yellowish-bellied Bush Warblers. Our last day produced a flock of about 100 Oriental Skylarks.

We broke our regular pattern with a bit of tourism on the Thursday but managed, on our trip round hot springs and an associated temple near Anning (30km southwest of Kunming), to draw in a number of new species, including Grey-headed Lapwing, and 3 or 4 Black-shouldered Kites to supplement one we had already had on the hill. Xishan seemed to have retained or regrown some reasonable tree cover, at least on its eastern slopes, but there was much barren and eroded hillside round Anning, and the older trees which had survived around the temple were very noticeable in consequence. Anning, in contrast to

the hill, was also strong on catapults and airguns.

In practical terms our arrangements were excellent, in particular we formed a good relationship with one of the local restaurants who accommodated their opening egg and chips menu to our more esoteric tastes with considerable aplomb during the week. By a misunderstanding in map-reading, one foray away from this established pattern in search of an (apparently) demolished restaurant led a most attractive (girl) taxi driver to an attempt to enter us as patients in the Yunnan Provincial People's Hospital, deflected only by a remarkable Basil Fawcett-style display of "we are very fit" gymnastics by Richard.

Trip list 79 species (or 80 if we can include the Richard's Pipit at Kai Tak), of which 70 were on the hill. We were much "helped" by Richard Lewthwaite's earlier list, though we take issue with him on a couple of species; pistols at dawn can be expected. Altogether an excellent trip in pretty universally excellent weather, and so easy to do. Kunming too, as we discovered on an amble around on the day we left, is a city of much interest and delight.

We are putting together a full report which will be available - at modest cost - in due course. It will give details of travel, costs etc as well as of birds. Why can't others do the same? We in HKBWS have collectively a huge fund of China knowledge which is presently going to waste because people don't write up proper reports. Please do. Ding Hu? Sea of Grass?

Korea 1-8 February 1992

(Mike Chalmers)

Verity Picken, Ian Tyzzer, Mike and Liz Leven, Paul Leader and myself travelled to Korea for the week over Chinese New Year to visit a variety of sites including the Nakdong Estuary at Pusan.

We flew to Seoul on 1st February and hired a self-drive mini-van for the week. The next day we visited two areas north of Seoul. The first was woodland at Kwong-nong, the site of royal graves and a National Monument for the White-bellied Black Woodpecker. We didn't see any Black Woodpeckers (they apparently no longer breed there due to too much disturbance) but we did see a fine selection of woodland birds including up to five White-backed Woodpeckers, 15 Pallas Rosefinches and good numbers of Varied Tits

and Eurasian (White-browed) Nuthatches. The stream there also held two Brown Dippers and we also saw several Naumann's Thrushes (the red-tailed race of Dusky Thrush). Throughout the rest of our trip both races of Dusky Thrush proved to be widespread.

We then drove north to the DMZ, the area next to the North Korean border, in search of Japanese Cranes. We encountered many military road blocks and tank convoys but no cranes. However, we did find several bunting flocks including many Rustic and Yellowthroated Buntings, one large flock of Pine Buntings and, most unexpectedly, a single Japanese Yellow Bunting, a species which should be much further south at this time of the year. We then found the bird of the trip - a male Chinese Merganser fishing and preening on an unfrozen reach of the Imjin River. The day ended near the Han River Estuary with Bean Geese flighting to rice stubble fields, two Short-eared Owls quartering a river bed and a single Rough-legged Buzzard in flight at dusk.

The next day we drove south-east across the country suffering the worst ice, snow and traffic jams of the trip. At Pohang on the east coast we enjoyed the first of many groups of Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes and saw 10 Velvet (White-winged) Scoters. The coastal drive from Pohang south to Ulsan gave excellent sea coast birding with all four grebe species, Harlequin Duck, Brent Geese, Red-throated and Pacific Divers and many Red-breasted Mergansers and Ancient Auks. Gulls included several Glaucous,



Ancient Auk

Glaucous-winged and Slaty-backed with the more common Black-tailed, Herring, Common (Kamchatka) and Black-headed Gulls. Passerines were

also memorable with several Siberian Accentors, a group of five Alpine Accentors, Siskins, Bramblings and more buntings and thrushes. Several Brown-eared Bulbuls and widespread Bull-headed Shrikes (as on other days) were also observed.

We spent the next three days visiting the Nakdong Estuary and nearby areas around Pusan. The estuary held good numbers of ducks and geese (Bean, White-fronted plus three Swan Geese and one Brent Goose), around 1400 Whooper and Bewick's (Whistling) Swans, two White-tailed Sea Eagles, several Hen Harriers and a single Peregrine Falcon and Merlin.

We found our main target species, Relict Gull, with ease with at least 36 birds present in first-winter, second-winter and adult (winter) plumages. The birds were feeding on the mud flats, in the same areas as up to 15 Saunders Gulls, and were observed feeding on molluscs which they flew up with and dropped onto the mud from a height of about 10m.

More ducks, divers and large numbers of grebes (mostly Great Crested) were found at a rocky coastal site south-west of Pusan with two Northern Goshawks en route. Inland the Chunsan and Tongpan reservoirs held around 3,000 Bean Geese, 500 White-fronted Geese, 1 Swan Goose, 92 Smew, more swans and other ducks and three White-naped Cranes. The speciality at Tongpan is Baikal Teal, and here we were amazed to count 12,000 birds (probably a major part of the remaining world population) in a small corner of the reservoir protected by dense willow-type vegetation.

On the return trip to Seoul we stopped at West Taegu for the wintering flock of 170 Hooded Cranes. Here we also saw one White-naped Crane and a flock of 40 Goosanders on the river.

The total species count for the trip was 119 including the much sought after Asian specialities of Relict Gull, Baikal Teal and Chinese Merganser. The fine collection of waterfowl, seabirds and northern passerines was greatly enjoyed and a visit to Korea is strongly recommended to those who enjoy this sort of winter birding, not to mention the delights of sleeping on heated floors Korean style.

Omei Shan, Sichuan 16-23 June 1991

(John Edge)

I have been stung into writing something on this by Stewart Smith's entreaty in his report on his recent visit to Kunming. The reason I have not so far done so is that frankly we (John Holmes and I) found the visit disappointing birdwise; perhaps we had expected too much after reading Craig Robson's account in the OBC Bulletin No. 10. There must, however, be something to be learned from the trip.

We had understood that at the time of year of our visit the best area would be the top of the mountain, at 3100m, where many of the more interesting species are said to breed. We had intended to spend more than one night in the summit area but a combination of bad weather and worse accommodation forced us downhill to Xixiang Temple after only three hours on the summit. In that time we did, however, record the very local Crested (Grey-hooded) Parrotbill, Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler, Grey-headed Bullfinch (most handsome, and easy to see), Rufous-bellied Tit, Streak-throated Fulvetta and White-browed Rosefinch. Other birds were there in abundance but it was impossible to identify them; in the conditions, the Parrotbill did not seem like a megatick!

The previous afternoon, in the Jieyin Hall area by the lower cable-car station (one can take a bus there from the Baguo Temple in Omei) we saw Wren, Red-breasted and Sooty Flycatchers, Chestnut-headed Tesia and Aberrant Bush and Large-billed Leaf Warblers. Cuckoos were very much in evidence. One tip here - try to arrange accommodation at Jieyin Hall itself, rather than in the village at the roadhead; this will encourage you to stay longer where the birds are.

The Xixiang Temple was below the cloudline, magnificently situated, the accommodation comfortable and the people friendly, but thin on birds. At a small pavilion nearby, there were Golden-breasted Fulvettas and Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler, the latter with its extraordinary 'winding-down' song. Verditer Flycatchers were nesting in the eaves of the pavilion in which we were sheltering, so it is no wonder we saw them so well. The following day we walked down the trail to the Wannian Temple at c. 1000m, where we had more comfortable accommodation and the luxury

of two nights in one place (we were backpacking), noting Red-winged Laughingthrush and White-tailed Robin en route. From here, an attractive catchment path (a bit hairy in places) leads into some magnificent gorge scenery; a knowledge of calls and/or good recording equipment would have been useful here, as again we heard, but did not see, much that was unfamiliar. We saw Ashy-throated Parrotbill, Yellow-bellied Tit, Black-chinned Yuhina and Blue-throated (Chinese) Flycatcher, along with other species, particularly babblers, familiar from Ba Bao Shan trips. We dipped, however, on the endemic Omei Shan Liocichla, which was probably breeding higher up the mountain.

Curiously, the birding around Omei village itself, with its riverine and partly-cultivated habitat, was as enjoyable as anything on the trip. I watched a charming Forest Wagtail shimmying down a branch onto its nest in a tall tree by the river; Gould's Sunbird was surprising at that altitude (c. 500m); we had Brown Hawk Owl in the hotel grounds, and Grey Bushchat, Tiger Shrike and Black-naped Oriole were other good species to see. Fulvous-faced Flycatcher Warblers darted to and fro in the bamboo. In Chengdu, a quick visit to Du Fu's Cottage was very satisfying, with Blackbirds and Vinous-throated Parrotbills evidently breeding, and Tiger Shrike, Night Herons and a Common Cuckoo also present. The food at the Jinjiang Hotel is delicious, by the way.

Read this through, and the list does not actually appear too bad! We were, however, disappointed not to record more parrotbills (nine species are present on the mountain) and laughingthrushes in particular; we felt a winter visit to Wannian Temple would be worthwhile, when the birds would move to lower altitudes. Birding on the main trails is difficult because of the huge numbers of pilgrims, and backpacks can be a hindrance if one wishes to leave the main paths. Lastly, take plenty of FEC's with you; everything was more expensive than we anticipated and it is difficult to exchange cash or traveller's cheques for FEC's away from Chengdu; neither of the relatively major hotels in which we stayed in Omei provided this service.

Omei Shan does of course contain much of interest apart from the birds. It is good to see religion being practised so openly and enthusiastically, the temples have great atmosphere and the views, weather permitting, are superb.

Guan Shan and Poyang Lake 20-26 December 1991

(Richard Lewthwaite)

My wife Mo-yung and I spent a week from 20-26 December 1991 visiting two nature reserves in Jiangxi Province, China: first to a little-known forest site at Guan Shan, about three hours drive from the provincial capital of Nanchang, and afterwards to Poyang Lake, which is about four hours from Nanchang.

Guan Shan Nature Reserve, Yifeng county, was recommended to us by the Jiangxi Nature Reserve Management Office as a site for the rare and endangered Elliot's Pheasant *Syrnaticus ellioti*. The reserve covers an altitudinal range of 500-1,500 metres and contains over 30,000 hectares of good quality mixed forest, which is believed to support a population of over 100 Elliot's Pheasants, as well as a number of Clouded Leopards and monkeys.

Prior to our visit Forestry Bureau staff had discovered a night roost, and on our first morning we had brief views of up to five Elliot's and three Silver Pheasants flying out of a bamboo stand at dawn. Unfortunately, none were there when we returned the next morning. Elliot's Pheasant is an elusive species, and although we had several fleeting views of large pheasant-like birds crashing through the undergrowth, our only sure sighting after this was of the remains of a dead male whose feathers were scattered beside a forest track.

We stayed two days and only covered a small part of the forest. As in other parts of South China, Black Bulbul, Chestnut Bulbul, Greycheeked Fulveta and Pekin Robin were common. Apart from the pheasants, notable birds were Crested Goshawk (two adults seen in display showed how far eastwards this species has now reached), Mountain Hawk Eagle, Bay Woodpecker and a flock of 40 Grey-headed Parrotbills. Our single-minded pursuit of Elliot's Pheasant meant that we were taken to a number of the mid-altitude valleys and not, unfortunately, to the core area of the reserve where there is apparently a wider range of forest birds, including Koklass Pheasant and some *Garrulax* laughingthrushes. In all we recorded a total of 60 species inside the Guan Shan Nature Reserve and in transit from Yifeng county town. The rice-stubble behind the Forestry Bureau office at Yifeng county town proved to be productive,

giving us views of Crimson-legged Crane, Brambling, Yellow-browed Bunting and Rustic Bunting, while beside the road we found Siberian Meadow Bunting, Daurian Jackdaw and Rook.

The reserve has its problems, especially through logging and poaching, but it has got at least three species of pheasant and there is much that remains to be discovered about its avifauna. Visits by birders from Hong Kong and overseas could make a significant contribution to the conservation of the reserve and its wildlife, especially Elliot's Pheasant.

From Guan Shan we were taken to Poyang Lake, which we had previously visited in 1988. Our visit this time was severely affected by a combination of low water levels and bad weather. While we were there, the cold front that came through Hong Kong over Christmas brought sleet and snow to Poyang. When conditions allowed us to get out, we found that water levels on the major lakes were very low and most of the lakes had been reduced to vast expanses of dried out mud. There were far fewer birds than we had expected. Apart from one gathering of 2,500 Spot-bills and Mallards, we never saw a flock of more than two or three hundred birds. It seems that the low water levels had forced many birds off the reserve.

The reserve management at Poyang is apparently aware of the importance of controlling water levels on the major lakes, and there are plans to purchase two of the lakes, Dahu Chi and Sha Hu, in the near future. Another encouraging piece of news is that a management plan drawn up by WWF HK has finally been accepted. In contrast to our experience, a WWF HK group who had visited Poyang just four weeks earlier (Ian Tyzzer, Peter, Peggy & Freda Stevens, Bob Ferguson and Christine Sarcosa) were well satisfied with the spectacle and the range of species they had seen, as also were a Danish group who stayed there six weeks after us.

The three groups made some interesting additions to the Poyang list. Red-necked Stint, Lanceolated Warbler, Black-necked Starling and Japanese Reed Bunting, were added by Ian Tyzzer's group, while Mo-yung and I found a Chinese Grey Shrike.

Through Mr. Wang Ban Jin, Director, Jiangxi Nature Reserve Management Office, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China, we had arranged to be met at

Nanchang airport and then, with all food and accommodation provided, to be taken to Guan Shan and Poyang and driven back to the airport in time for our flight. A rate of US\$ 35 per person per day plus a transport fee of RMB 1.5 per km in a land-cruiser (or RMB 2.2 per km in a minibus) had been agreed, which for the week we spent at Guan Shan and Poyang worked out at just over HK\$ 300 per person per day. Throughout our visit we were accompanied by staff led by Mr. Song Xiangjin, who showed himself to be a very capable man with an excellent understanding of conservation problems.

A full species list for the trip is available from Richard Lewtwaite (665 8180)

OUTING REPORTS

Wu Kau Tang 30 November 1991

(John Edge)

We were joined by three visitors (two from the UK, one from the US) on this overcast and rather humid morning; we recorded 61 species on the usual Wu Kau Tang/Lai Chi Wo/A Ma Wat Circuit, rather more than the average but there was a feeling that the birds were generally rather subdued.

The list was fairly predictable but the more interesting records included several Mountain Bush Warblers; a "Zeebit" warbler (? *Bradypterus seebohmi*) at sea level at Sam A Chung; a flock of 14 Greater-necklaced Laughingthrushes in the dwarf bamboo beyond Sam A Tsuen and a Woodcock put up by JEB near Mui Tsz Lam. Chestnut Bulbuls were heard near Wu Kau Tang and two Pied Kingfishers were at the fishponds near Lai Chi Wo.

Two of the nicest cameos were a male each of Red-flanked Bluetail and Daurian Redstart together on one twig near Kau Tam Tso, and a stunning close-up view of a perched Crested Serpent Eagle above Li Chi Wo, with its yellow facial skin and white-tipped lax crest feathers easily visible to the naked eye. The scenery was as usual much enjoyed, particularly by the visitors.

Hok Tau and Sha Lo Tung 15 December 1991

(Mike Turnbull)

About a dozen members and their friends and relatives chose this outing as a means of working up an appetite for the annual Curry Lunch at Fanling over rival attractions which included a Pallas's Reed Bunting 'twitch' at Mai Po.

In fact another very recent addition to the Hong Kong list was the highlight of a relatively quiet, but nonetheless extremely pleasant walk around this remote, yet threatened corner of the Territory. A minimum of four Bright-capped Cisticolas were seen in typical long, thick, dry grass habitat at Sha Lo Tung, with two or three Fantail Warblers present for comparison. In addition two Mountain Bush Warblers were believed to have been heard, one of which gave a short, loud outburst somewhat resembling the song of this species.

Finally, a word of thanks on behalf of all present to Nigel Croft, John Holmes and Ian Tyzzer who arranged and hosted another excellent Curry Lunch at Fanling.

Tai Po Kau 4 January 1992

(Jerry Ziarno)

At 0750 and with no leader in sight, the nine members present conducted a democratic election that would have made LEGCO envious and named "Zed" as Leader Pro-Tem. The weather was damp, dark and somewhat windy but fairly comfortable temperature-wise. Considering the lack of any "experienced-ears" in the group the walk produced a number of good sightings with birds being quite active throughout the morning.

The slow walk from the car park to the gate produced four Red-headed Tits clearly seen in the same, leafless tree in the orchard. An active flock of minivets was followed by Yellow-cheeked Tit and some of the more common species.

On the Red Walk, at the upper picnic area at the stream, the group observed a Hair-crested Drongo and a female Orange-bellied Leafbird in the same tree. A feeding frenzy by a flock of White-eyes almost caused us to miss a nice Fork-tailed Sunbird.

The group split at about 1000 with four of the members returning via the Red Walk whilst the remainder of us took the Blue Walk. Those returning on the Red Walk later reported sighting a Black-winged Cuckoo Shrike, much to the envy of the other group.

On the Blue Walk, however, we spotted an Ashy Minivet in a bare tree along with a group of Scarlet Minivets and Chinese Bulbuls. Also keeping us alert were a flock of Greater-necklaced Laughingthrushes, a flock of 8-10 brilliantly coloured Pekin Robins, a pair of Tristram's Buntings spotted by sharp-eyed Betsy in some tall grass and a Short-tailed Bush Warbler.

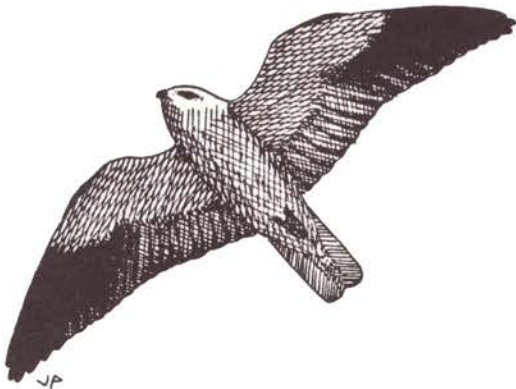
The walk from the park to the gate again proved fruitful as we sighted Brown Flycatcher, another Yellow-cheeked Tit, several White-backed Munias and several Velvet-fronted Nuthatches.

The tally for the day totalled 33 species with some good quality sightings.

Mai Po 23 February 1992

(John Edge)

The twenty-five or so participants were able to split into three manageable groups who between them logged 90 species for the day. C.Y. Lam stood in for Simba Chan and John Holmes kindly took a posse to the floating hide. The turnout was smaller than we expected, possibly due to Saturday's vile weather, but we were lucky on the day, with some warm sunshine which brought out the best in Mai Po.



Black Shouldered Kite

Undoubtedly the best bird was a Black-shouldered Kite, unfortunately not seen by all the groups. Raptors generally were highly visible, with ten

species recorded including a juvenile Bonelli's Eagle. A male Common Pochard was also noteworthy. Other unusual records were a Yellow Bittern and Red-vented Bulbul; C.Y.'s group saw a female Chinese Francolin.

John said that Deep Bay was disappointing in terms of variety but that the two large flocks of Curlew and Avocet were impressive. The Curlew spent much of their time in the air over the marsh, uttering their lovely call. Excellent views were had of birds regarded as regular but which we should never take for granted, e.g. both species of spoonbill, Purple Heron, Falcated Teal, Spotted and Imperial Eagles (the latter now a threatened species), Marsh Harrier and, of course, White Stork. As ever, it was pleasure to be there.

Sek Kong 16 February 1992

(Ian Tyzzer)

This outing was intended as a bilingual follow-up to the indoor talks on common winter visitors a few days earlier and was aimed at newer members of the Society who wished to improve their skills. As it turned out 13 birders turned up on a cool (16 degrees), cloudy and windy morning and about half had attended the talk. The morning started very productively and we had hardly left the gathering point when we had good views of Kestrel and Sparrowhawk sp. circling overhead and a Two-barred Greenish Warbler foraging in nearby trees. Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warblers were also present as were White-backed Munias. Highlights of the remainder of the trip included three confirmed Common Rosefinches (although a large flock of unidentified finches was also seen), Japanese Quail, Red-flanked Bluetail, Brown Flycatcher and Black-tailed Hawfinch. However, most importantly, the common birds of the area all performed on cue and good views were had of the pipits, wagtails, starlings, snipe and Stonechats. Altogether 49 species were logged and a good day was had by all.

Luk Keng 29 February 1992

(Michael Leven)

Nine members including myself as substitute leader were present for this morning circuit of Luk Keng and Nam Chung. It was a damp day with intermittent drizzle and low cloud, but despite this 60 species were seen including a perched

Bonelli's Eagle, one or two Sparrowhawk sps. and a Banded Rail. The trip was not billed as a "swamp bash" so no systematic coverage of the marsh was attempted but the leader heroically dived in finding little except for Fantail Snipe and Fan-tailed Warblers and providing entertainment for the rest of the party.

The consensus reached at the noodle stall was that we had seen much of what we expected but no real surprises; perhaps birding effort here is best rewarded from late spring through to late autumn when the freshwater marsh birds for which the site is so important are more likely to be present.

REPORT ON THE BIRDS

(These unchecked reports include sightings of possible escapes)

1 December 1991 to 29 February 1992

(Mike Turnbull and Paul Leader)

December

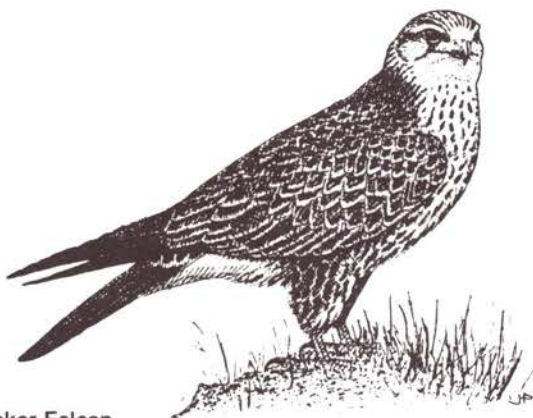
At least seven Bright-capped Cisticolas were still present at Ping Yeung on 1st and another bird was trapped there (WLY,PJL *et al*). On 4th an attempt to catch a *Bradypterus* sp. at Wu Kau Tang was unsuccessful, but five birds were believed to be present, one of which was seen well. Three Mountain Bush Warblers were also noted (PRK,PJL). A Ruddy Shelduck was reported from Mai Po on 5th (SC).

A visit to Lantau on 6th proved particularly interesting. Two Grey Bushchats were seen - an adult male at Ngong Ping and an immature/female near Tung Chung - as well as four Mountain Bush Warblers near Ngong Ping and, most interesting of all, five Bright-capped Cisticolas in the paddies at Tung

Chung (MDW,WLY, RWL). At least four were still present at Ping Yeung on 7th (JSRE *et al*). On 8th a Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallas* was seen on the landfill site at Mai Po - yet another new species for Hong Kong, pending acceptance. A Northern Skylark had joined the small group of Oriental Skylarks present at the same location for some weeks already, and a Hoopoe was also seen there. In addition the same observers reported a male Baikal Teal at Mai Po and a Sulphur-breasted Warbler at Tai Po Kau (PRK,PJL).

A White Ibis was seen at Mai Po on 13th and a probable *Acrocephalus* sp. was heard in song (RWL). The following day a Blyth's Reed Warbler was seen and then trapped there. A Styan's Grasshopper Warbler was also seen on 14th at exactly the same spot as the Blyth's Reed. Later in the day at the nearby Landfill the Pallas's Reed Bunting, having narrowly avoided capture the previous Sunday when it was discovered, was this time successfully trapped, and a Black Vulture passed overhead. A Mealy Redpoll *Acanthis flammea* was also seen at Mai Po, but was in poor condition and considered to be an escape from captivity (PJL *et al*). Also on 14th Ho Chung was discovered to be yet another site holding Bright-capped Cisticolas; at least three were present. A female Plumbeous Water Redstart was again noted at the same location, having first been seen there in November (WLY). A pair of these birds were present on a stream in

north Tai Po throughout most of the month (SES). Again on 14th another Chestnut-crowned Warbler was reported, on this occasion from Tai Po Kau (SES). Meanwhile a visit to Lantau that day produced a female Bull-headed Shrike at Ngong Ping, with the male Grey Bushchat still present there. Also noted were several Mountain Bush Warblers, a *Bradypterus*



Saker Falcon

sp., a Woodcock, two Common Rosefinches and at least two Bright-capped Cisticolas still present at Tung Chung (JSRE *et al*). On 15th, perhaps rather predictably by this stage, another group of

Bright-capped Cisticolas was found during an outing to Sha Lo Tung (MT *et al*), while at Luk Keng four Grey-headed Buntings were present, two of them being trapped (PJL,PRK). Several observers were able to see the Pallas's Reed Bunting at Mai Po, where a Hoopoe, about six Japanese Quail and two or three Oriental Skylarks were regularly noted around this time.

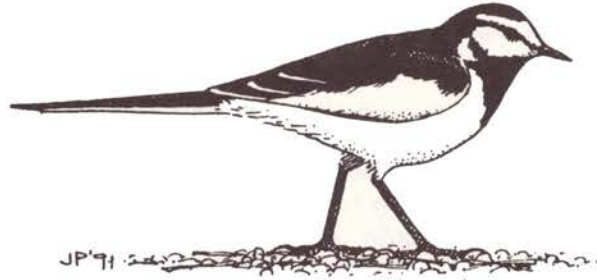
A possible Saker Falcon was seen at Plover Cove on 17th and 18th (JNP), and a White Wagtail showing characters of the race *lugens*, was reported from the same location on 19th. On 20th yet another Chestnut-crowned Warbler was seen, this time near Bowen Road on Hong Kong Island (MMC), and the following day a Chestnut-flanked White-eye was seen in Tai Po Kau (SES). A frigatebird at Stonecutter's Island on 21st and 22nd may have remained unidentified, but it was apparently the first Hong Kong rarity to have been videoed for posterity (RRC). On the latter date the Pallas's Reed Bunting was again seen by an appreciative audience (MLC,MT,PRK) and a Ringed Plover, perhaps the same bird reported in November, was seen from the Boardwalk hide (MT,PRK,MH). A Styan's Grasshopper Warbler was trapped at Mai Po on 26th, while at the Boardwalk the same day a first-winter Slaty-backed Gull was believed to be present (PRK). Also on 26th a Chestnut-crowned Warbler was again seen at Tai Po Kau (DAD).

A frigatebird, possibly the same bird that had earlier been seen at Stonecutter's was seen at Aberdeen Country Park on 27th and again on 29th (VBP,MT). It appeared to be a juvenile Lesser. The following day a Yellow-eyed Flycatcher Warbler was seen at Tai Po Kau (PRK).

January

The year started extremely well with a first for Hong Kong being trapped at Mai Po - a Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* of the nominate race (PRK,DSM). Like Blyth's Reed Warbler, and Chiffchaff this race winters largely in India. The Styan's Grasshopper Warbler originally trapped in December was retrapped the same day. On the Peak the Lesser Frigatebird was still present and

was seen most evenings throughout the month (VBP *et al*). A wintering flock of 70 Blackbirds were present at Cheung Shui Tan on 2nd. At Coombe Road on 4th and 5th a Chestnut-crowned Warbler was observed (MT *et al*). On the latter date a Besra was trapped at Mai Po (PRK,DSM), and a Mountain Bush Warbler was in the Aberdeen Country Park (VBP). The same site held a Yellow-eyed Flycatcher Warbler and a Blyth's Leaf Warbler the following day. At Sheun Wan, also on 5th there



White Wagtail *lugens*

was a male Scaup.

An injured Brown Fish Owl was picked up at Tai Tam, Sai Kung on 5th. and is now in care (*per* TJA). Interestingly large owls have apparently been seen in the area for the past two to three years. Another Yellow-eyed Flycatcher was recorded from Tai Po Kau on 7th (MH), and at Mai Po three Black Storks were noted (SC). On 8th one of the Two-barred Greenish Warblers wintering in the Lam Tsuen Valley was seen along with a Verditer Flycatcher (VBP,WLY). Another Verditer was seen at Shek Kong Woods, while at Mai Po a Black-shouldered Kite and a White Ibis were noted (SC,RWL). Also on 8th six White Storks and a Caspian Tern were reported, with 40 Grey Starlings in the paddies nearby. The Wildfowl collection at Mai Po continued to attract interesting wild duck with 4 Mandarins (2 males) and 3 Gadwall on 9th (RWL) and 2 Baer's Pochard and 3 Tufted Duck on 11th (PJL,PRK). A female Pochard on the fishponds outside the fence was also seen on 9th (RWL).

From the Boardwalk Hide on 10th came a report of 2 Ruddy Shelduck, followed by an unusual winter record of a Greater Sandplover, and 38 Saunder's Gulls the following day. In Tai Po Kau on 12th the long staying Orange-headed Ground Thrush was present (CYL *et al*) as were 20 Tristram's Buntings, a Sulphur-breasted Warbler (PJL,MRL), and three Red-tailed Minlas (KDW,ND). A different Two-barred Greenish Warbler was reported from the Lam Tsuen Valley as well as a Mountain Bush Warbler (PJL,MRL,EPL). Ping Yeung also held a Mountain Bush Warbler on the same date, plus a Bright-capped Cisticola

and a singing Blyth's Leaf Warbler (VBP,WLY). The Pallas's Reed Bunting and Hoopoe were still on the reclamation near Mai Po and the 'Crake-ditch' held a Ruddy Crake (MT). On the Marsh 11 White and three Black Storks were noted (CAV) as was a Bluethroat. A female Pied Harrier was seen at San Tin (RWL) and a male Plumbeous Water Redstart at Nam Chung.

A Yellow-eyed Flycatcher Warbler was again reported from Tai Po Kau on 13th with another at Ho Cheung the following day (MH). Ideal viewing conditions for waders from the Boardwalk on 14th produced 2000 Kentish Plover, 3000 Dunlin, 40 Broad-billed Sandpipers, 150 Lesser Sandplover, 5 Long-toed and 10 Red-necked Stints, and best of all a Spoon-billed Sandpiper, only the second winter record (PJL).

On 15th a male Brown Thrush was found at Plover Cove (RWL), while 10 Mountain Bush Warblers at Sha Lo Tung the same day gives some indication of how common this species has been this winter. A possible Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler was seen near Tai Mei Tuk on 16th (JYP) and another visit to Sha Lo Tung produced a Besra (RWL), whilst a long staying Black-backed Wagtail was first noted from Plover Cove (RWL,JYP).

Thrushes and chats were noticeably widespread during this period and were often much more approachable than normal. White's Thrushes were recorded in ones and twos from Tai Po Kau, Sha Lo Tung, Brides Pool, and Aberdeen Country Park with three from Shek Kong on 19th and nine from Kadoorie Farm on 21st. Also at Kadoorie Farm on 21st were 40 Red-flanked Bluetails, 51 Pale Thrushes, and 50 Grey-backed Thrushes (PJL,VBP,WLY). Up to four Pale Thrushes and 50 Grey-backed Thrushes had been noted in Tai Po Kau the previous week and 15 Red-flanked Bluetails the following week. Two Red-tailed Robins in the Aberdeen Country Park on 18th were considered unusual. Seven Red-headed Tits were seen in Tai Po Kau, a Lapwing at Tin Shui Wai, and 46 Great Crested Grebes at Lau Fau Shan on the same date.

One of the Two-barred Greenish Warblers in the Lam Tsuen Valley was still present on 19th (PJL,VBP), whilst a Common Rosefinch was at Tai Mei Tuk, and 11 Black-tailed Gulls were recorded from Starling Inlet. A Radde's Warbler at Victoria Peak on 20th was a good find (LM,TS) and a Brown Thrush was seen in Tai Po Kau on

21st (LM,TS). Three Dalmation Pelicans finally arrived in Deep Bay on 22nd. The Brown Thrush put in another appearance at Plover Cove on 24th, two Plumbeous Water Redstarts, a Pale Thrush and a Blyth's Leaf Warbler were also seen (VBP).

Visitors to the Boardwalk on 25th were rewarded with a Ringed Plover (WLY *et al*) and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper (PJL *et al*). 64 Red and 25 Great Knot had been seen there the previous day, and a second-winter Common Gull was there on 26th (PJL,PRK,GJC *et al*) and also 7 Long-toed Stints with another at Lok Ma Chau. A Black-shouldered Kite was again reported from Mai Po and the White Storks still numbered 11 (PRK,PJL,GJC *et al*).

Widespread reports of Bradypterus Warblers during the month resulted in one being trapped at Sha Lo Tung on 25th (PJL,PRK *et al*). However this family is difficult even in the hand and while this matter is not completely resolved it was considered that the bird trapped was probably a Russet Bush Warbler *B. seebohmi*.

One of the undoubted highlights of the month was Hong Kong's first twitchable Japanese Robin being found at the entrance to Tai Po Kau on 27th (WLY). This much desired and much admired bird, a female, remained well into February.

A Mountain Bush Warbler and a Plain Flowerpecker were reported from Mount Davies on 30th (VBP), and a Barred Owlet in Tai Po Kau the following day was unfortunately in the claws of a Crested Goshawk (MH).

February 1992

The Lesser Frigatebird on the Peak was present all month (VBP *et al*). Two male Baikal Teal were at Mai Po on 1st and 2nd with one remaining for most of the month (RWL). A female/immature Pied Harrier was also seen (RWL). The first notable influx of Black Bulbuls for many years took place about this time with 40 in Tai Po Kau (DSM) and 21 at Ho Chung (MH) on 3rd, 50 plus in Tai Po Kau on 6th (JSRE, KCS *et al*), 7 on the Peak on 10th (GW), 36 at To Lou Peng, Sai Kung on 15th, 17, including a flock of 13 flying overhead, at Tsim Bei Tsui on 16th (PJL) and a huge flock of 250 at Mount Austin on 17th (JSRE). A female Japanese Green Pigeon was seen in Tai Po Kau above the orange grove on

3rd but despite apparently associating with the Rufous Turtle Dove flock there was unfortunately not to be seen again (RWL). At Mai Po, also on 3rd, came a report of a drake American Wigeon (DSM). However, during its lengthy stay (still present at Tsim Bei Tsui on 1st March) it soon became apparent that whilst showing many features of drake American Wigeon (including 'diagnostic' white underwing coverts and American Wigeon-like facial pattern) it also had some features of male Wigeon, and was therefore considered by many to be, unfortunately, a hybrid Wigeon x American Wigeon.

Mt Austin Road produced two White's Thrushes and a Pale Thrush on 4th and on the same day a Grey Thrush and a Common Rosefinch were seen on the Governor's Walk (JSRE). A single Oriental Greenfinch was at Cheung Shu Tan on 5th with two there on 28th (GJC). The Chestnut-crowned Warbler was again seen in Tai Po Kau on 6th (JSRE *et al*) and was noted irregularly during the first half of the month, a Blyth's Leaf Warbler and some Red-headed Tits were also present, two of which had been seen carrying nesting material on the 3rd (RWL).

Swift passage was unusually heavy, presumably due to the unseasonably awful weather, with 100 Pacific Swifts at Mai Po on 6th and 250 on 22nd. A Turnstone and two Glaucous-winged Gulls (or hybrid gulls?) were seen from the Boardwalk, also on 6th (RWL) and in the Lam Tsuen Valley, one or two Two-barred Greenish Warblers and a Blyth's Leaf Warbler were noted. Seven Oriental Pratincoles at Mai Po on 9th were the first of the year. Black-faced Spoonbill numbers had increased with 39 being counted and a first winter Common Gull was also seen (RWL). Another excellent session in the Boardwalk Hide on 8th produced an adult winter Great Black-headed

Gull, a Saker and Hong Kong's second ever Kittiwake, a first winter bird - seventeen years after the only other record (GJC, PRK *et al*). Five hundred and five Marsh Sandpipers were counted at Mai Po on the same date.

An adult male White-throated Rock Thrush and a Brown Thrush were reported from Old Peak Road

on 10th (GW) and at Mai Po there was a Brown-headed Gull, 109 Saunderson's Gulls and a record count of 810 Curlews. Single Brown-headed Gulls were recorded regularly during the rest of the month. A Dusky Thrush was at Tsim Bei Tsui paddies from 12th - 22nd (GW), and a Ruddy Crake at Cheung Shu



European Starling

Tan from 13th-17th (GJC). The same or another first winter Common Gull was at Tsim Bei Tsui on 16th, and at the paddies nearby, the Dusky Thrush had been joined by an Eye-browed Thrush, 70 Grey Starlings and the first record of an European Starling for about four years (PRK, P JL). At Sek Kong there was a Two-barred Greenish Warbler (MRL *et al*) and the Black-backed Wagtail wintering at Plover Cove was still present. (RWL, JNP). A Northern Sparrowhawk was watched harrassing a displaying Crested Goshawk at Mount Austin, also on 16th (JSRE) and the following day an adult Bonelli's Eagle was seen over Central (JSRE).

Another week-day twitch on 18th took place in the more unlikely location of Kowloon Park for an even unlikelier Slaty-legged Crake. Initially found on the 13th by some visiting birdwatchers (TL, TC, HM, MH) and still present in early March this confiding individual was in immaculate condition and shared its home with Grey-backed Thrushes, Blackbirds, a female Rubythroat and a Short-tailed Bush Warbler! At Plover Cove on the same date was an Upland Buzzard (GW) and the following

day from the Boardwalk Hide a first winter Slaty-backed Gull was seen (PJL, GJC, VBP, MH), whilst on the 20th five Asian House Martins were seen at Plover Cove (GW). Two first winter Common Gulls were recorded on both 22nd and 23rd involving at least three different individuals (PJL, PRK *et al*). Also seen at Mai Po over the same two days were White Ibis, Bittern, female Mandarin, three Baer's Pochards and a Rose-ringed Parakeet (GJC, RWL, PRK, PJL, MRL).

A Mountain Bush Warbler was at Lok Ma Chau on 22nd (GJC), the Japanese Robin was still at Tai Po Kau (MRL) and at Yuen Long Industrial Estate an Oriental Skylark and six Japanese Quail were seen (JSRE, GW *et al*). Three

Oriental Skylarks were also at the Mai Po reclamation on 23rd as was a Chestnut-eared Bunting. A Black-shouldered Kite was at Mai Po on 23rd and 26th (JGH, TW), whilst a female Chinese Francolin also at Mai Po on 23rd (CYL) was perhaps more unusual. A Black-naped Monarch was at Cheung Shu Tan on 24th (GJC) and a Pale Thrush and a Two-barred Greenish Warbler were there from 26th (PJL, GJC, VBP) until at least early March. An excellent month for rare gulls ended with a first winter Glaucous Gull at Tsim Bei Tsui on 29th (WYL, VBP, MRL) and at Mai Po the Paddyfield Warbler trapped on 1st January reappeared in the same net after disappearing for two months in the reedbed opposite the Education Centre (PJL, ACG *et al*).

FORTHCOMING OUTINGS

<u>DATE</u>	<u>LEADER</u>	<u>VENUE</u>	<u>TIME</u>
20 April Easter Monday	Richard Stott C Y Lam	Mai Po ++ * (bilingual) Meet Car Park	1000-1600
25 April Saturday	Ian Tyzzer	Tai Long Wan (travel arrangements to be advised at AGM or contact leader)	Ferry cancelled
26 April (Sunday)	Mike Leven Li Wai Ki	Tsim Bei Tsui // (bilingual) Meet Car Park	1000-1500
3 May (Sunday)	John Edge Simba Chan	Mai Po // * (bilingual) Meet Car Park	1000-1600
10 May (Sunday)	Ian Tyzzer - Chan Ming-ming	Tsim Bei Tsui (bilingual) Meet Car Park	1000-1600
17 May (Sunday)	Peter Kennerley	Luk Keng Swamp Bash Wear wellingtons and/ or long trousers	0730
17 May (Sunday)	C Y Lam	Mai Po // * (bilingual) Meet Car Park	1000-1600
23 May (Saturday)	Mike Turnbull	Tai Po Kau ** (Breeding Bird Survey) Meet Car Park	0600
6 June (Saturday)	Wendy Young	Tai Mo Shan Meet Lower 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, leaving Kowloon Tong one hour before assembly time and returning there after the outing, but did not send off the form in the last bulletin, please phone Ian Tyzzer to see if there are still seats available. Please bring packed lunch and drink.

// 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 Birdwatching Society if you wish to use the coach. Please bring packed lunch and drink.

* WWF HK has asked that all participants on a Mai Po outing must inform the leader that they will be attending before the meeting. Please co-operate with this request as there have been problems of too many people attending in the past. Members using the coach need not inform the leader, as they will have already confirm their attendance by returning the coach booking slip.

** This outing will be the fifth annual Tai Po Kau Breeding Birds survey. A considerable number of members are necessary to cover the whole forest properly - please come along. Please contact Mike Turnbull in advance and submit records on the following day for inclusion in the survey report.