



香港觀鳥會
THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY
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Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Committee Members

Chairman	Richard Stott	Membership	T.P. Luk
Vice-Chairman	C.Y. Lam	WWF Liaison	David Melville
Secretary	Jemi Wong	Chinese Bulletin	Chan Ming Ming
Treasurer	Julian Webster	English Bulletin	Mike Kilburn
Librarian	H.F. Cheung		Carrie Ma
Conservation	Ng Cho Nam		
Bird Report	Geoff Carey	English Birdline	(24 hours)
Recorder	Mike Chalmers	Chinese Birdline	(24 hours)

40th Anniversary AGM

Big Bird Race 1997

The Big Bird Race was once again was a huge success, with more than HK\$1.9 million being raised to fund WWF HK's neverending job of fighting to protect Hong Kong's biodiversity.

It was a tough year for finding birds however, with passerines in particular conspicuous by their scarcity. The event was won by the Professionals team, scoring a relatively humble 161 species (more than 20 fewer than the winning total in 1995), who once again topped the stakes for funds raised. The "Cooper's Crippler" bird of the day award was won by the DHL Police team, for an Oriental Scops Owl found at Robin's Nest.

Birdwatching Society Hide

A new angle...

The hide was repositioned during March and now face further north by 30°, allowing many more people to enjoy the birds in good light conditions as they congregate on the mud at high tide.

Since the new hide has now been paid for, any donations received by the Society will be placed in the Projects Fund, which will pay for the upcoming checklist of the birds of Hong Kong. This will be published initially in English, but there are high hopes for a Chinese language edition.

The most notable event of this year's AGM was the retirement of Richard Stott as Chairman (see page 4) and the installation of C.Y. Lam as the new Chairman. The recommendation to raise subscriptions was approved by the AGM and the following rates will apply from 30 September, 1997:

Ordinary/Family membership	HK\$355
Student (under 21)	HK\$ 50
Corporate Member	HK\$490
Overseas Member	HK\$390

Following vigorous debate, the category for Overseas Member (without publications) was eliminated.

After the formalities of the AGM, Geoff Carey presented a mouth-watering slide show on the birds of Happy Island and the opportunities for photography.

HKBWS Website

The HKBWS, designed and currently under construction by Carrie Ma will go online in either July or August this year.

The site will be bilingual, and will provide a wide variety of information about the Society, birds and birding in Hong Kong. It will also include links to other appropriate websites such as WWF (HK), TRAFFIC, OBC, IUCN and Birdlife International. The HKBWS Bulletin will be posted quarterly. The website is expected to grow as more information and ideas become available.

First Day Cover Marks 40th Year

Included with this bulletin is a first day cover which is being presented to each member to mark the Society's 40th Anniversary. Due to the huge popularity of philately in the Territory, the society has reserved enough copies to give one to each current member of the society.

The stamps depict three species of migratory birds which pass through Hong Kong each year, Yellow-breasted Bunting, Great Knot, Black-faced Spoonbill and Falcated Teal, and were printed from a design submitted by one of our members - Miss Lee Yuk Ying - congratulations!

The Last Four Years

1993 - 1997 A Chairman's View

by Richard Stott

It was with some surprise, when, four years ago, I was invited to become Chairman of the Society. I had worked on the Committee for several years, taking over as Secretary from Steve Smith in 1987 but had not thought of anything else. Looking back at Committee Meeting minutes in early 1993 there was concern about overcrowding of the boardwalk hide, the ICBP was changing its whole organization, there was to be a concerted membership drive to recruit local Chinese members and the cost of the Hong Kong Bird Report.

The ICBP has now become BirdLife International and the Society remains as its representative in Hong Kong. To become more involved would have required an office and permanent staff in Hong Kong which was felt to be beyond the Society's capabilities, particularly with the levels of Hong Kong rents!

By the time I became Chairman the Hong Kong Bird Report was enhanced by colour illustrations and under the editorship of Geoff Carey was moving quickly to become the excellent publication we have today. This was much helped by the increasing number of dedicated members willing and able to write papers for the Report. The cost of the Report has increased over the years due to inflation, colour illustrations and greater size. I believed that the membership appreciated the Report was and therefore its length and sophistication should not be limited, provided there was good material to publish and the cost to members could be controlled. The cost to the Society has been largely offset by advertising revenue and overseas sales. The 1995 edition is a testament to the hard work of the Editor in finding customers and sponsors that allow us to publish such a good Report. Several years ago I obtained the British Birds "Best Annual Bird Reports" and was pleased to be able to demonstrate to the Committee that our Report was at least as good as the UK Best Annual Bird Report.

The level of interest from local Chinese members has increased dramatically over the last four years, stimulated by the considerable efforts of the Committee.

The Chinese language Bulletin is taking on a life of its own and while the content is very similar to the English language Bulletin it has a different presentation designed to appeal to its readership. I believe these developments bode extremely well for the Society's future.

Four years ago, too many people wanted to use the floating hide at Mai Po. A second hide had been suggested but how to build it was an open question. WWF (HK) was not in a position to finance the hide but said if the Society could, then its members would enjoy privileged access. This was a major challenge, being by far the largest project the Society would have ever undertaken. We commenced fund raising, making a careful record of all donors, so that if everything went wrong we could return their money! The response was so enthusiastic that it suddenly became a very serious project. I had discovered that Society members had an amazingly diverse network of friends and contacts who were to play crucial roles in the hide project. With the help of WWF (HK) and contractors, the cost was fixed at roughly HK\$300,000. Meanwhile sponsorship was being sought. Cathay Pacific matched the amount raised by the Society. Mike Chalmers produced the design and tender documents and in late 1994 we instructed the contractors to proceed. To reduce costs, a team of members cut a path through the mangroves for the fixed boardwalk. Our friends in the Royal Air Force provided helicopters to carry and place the heavy concrete anchors which would secure the hide in position, an almost impossible task by other means. The

final effort was to get the hide from the shipyard in Aberdeen round to Deep Bay and this was achieved with the help of Hong Kong Salvage and Towage. The Hong Kong Marine Police towed it across the shallows of Deep Bay, and the Mai Po Reserve staff, together with a few members, pulled the hide by hand the 200 metres to its final position.

Mai Po has been a topic much on peoples minds in recent years due to recognition as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. It was a nail biting wait before Government gave approval for the application to the Ramsar Committee to go forward. Approval by the Ramsar Committee was assured, as Mai Po holds between 15% and 25% of the world population of the critically endangered Black-faced Spoonbill each winter.

As many of you know, Ramsar recognition is only the first stage. We must all work hard to prevent encroachment into the Site and ensure that it remains a haven for migratory birds. The Society has submitted a paper to Government on how the Ramsar Site should be managed and, we have commented on the management plan. It is important that our voice continues to be heard.

During my time as Chairman the membership of the Committee changed on a number of occasions. This is always a difficult time, as people often leave rather suddenly when they have to move on from Hong Kong. Each time, their efforts are greatly missed as all

members of the Committee have a large amount of work to do on behalf of the Society. We've been fortunate always to find excellent replacements, even for "indispensable" people. It is a credit to the Society that overseas visitors are surprised that we have no permanent staff. However as volunteers there are strict limits to the help we can offer to bird watching visitors. This is no longer the sort of place where one can take a day off work to show a visitor around the New Territories!

A Society is made by its members. The Chairman and the Committee can only achieve what they have with the support of the members. I am proud to have been associated with the Society and am fortunate to be able to count many of the members as good friends. I plan to continue my connection with the Society for years to come and wish it a successful future.

Conservation News

Broadening the Society's Role

On Saturday 1 June the Society held a meeting to discuss ways to increase our involvement in the conservation of birds and their habitats in Hong Kong and China. The suggestions raised at this meeting will become the key areas for a Conservation Subcommittee will focus.

David Melville, Director of WWF HK stated the enormous value of records submitted and collated by the Society in

providing data on sensitive species and localities. He highlighted the growing pressure on lowland wetlands and farmland in the New Territories, much of which is due to disappear under public and private housing schemes and infrastructure projects. He stressed the value to birds of this habitat, citing Kam Tin (which has been used by seven Red Data species including Imperial Eagle and Grey-headed Lapwing) and Long Valley as examples and remarked that there was scope for habitat creation within the Deep Bay Ramsar site to compensate for lost habitat elsewhere. Proposals to protect key areas included organising monthly counts at these sites, and initiating cooperation with botanists, entomologists and other wildlife and conservation groups to develop a full ecological picture of the habitats, so that concrete steps could be taken to recreate them at a different site should their demise become inevitable.

The preservation or development of breeding habitat for Oriental Skylarks and Savannah Nightjars was raised. The proposal referred to the disappearance of the rough grassland on Tin Shui Wai Reclamation is progressively developed over the next few years. WWF (HK) is currently making recommendations to AFD regarding a plot of land within the Ramsar site.

Improving links and relations with key influencers such as the Heung Yee Kuk (a powerful NT landowners association), District Board Members, journalists and legislators was raised as an area where the Society could increase understanding of conservation and birds.

An education programme aimed at schools, would encourage students to note birds in the vicinity of their homes or schools. The initial suggestion was to create a simple leaflet depicting some common species of birds, possibly with a competitive element. It was suggested that this would be a key area of involvement for Chinese-speaking members, who could visit schools to explain the leaflet and generate enthusiasm. A pilot scheme would focus first on rural areas and New Towns such as Yuen Long and Sai Kung.

New Towns developing parks are already creating conservation areas, which are specially managed to attract wildlife. It was proposed to build on this success by bringing such schemes to the attention of other New Towns who planned to create parks.

Beyond Hong Kong the issue of strengthening links with conservation bodies and wildlife reserves in China by members who travel frequently was raised. This is currently happening informally, but it was proposed that the Society play a role as a central point of contact. It was also suggested that Society publications accept articles from Chinese ornithologists. This would play a role in broadening international awareness of Chinese conservation issues due to the society's links with other conservation groups worldwide.

Concern was expressed about the wild bird trade in Hong Kong and China, particularly that widespread trapping of migrant birds must have a significant influence on the numbers of birds

wintering and passing through Hong Kong during migration. TRAFFIC is already fully occupied with monitoring and publishing information on this clearly harmful trade.

Members willing to become actively involved in conservation, or who have either comments on these issues or would like to suggest additional topics which the society might address, should contact C.Y. Lam.

**Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress and XII BirdLife Asia Conference
Coimbatore, India, 9-16 Nov, 1996**
by Fiona Lock

This was a joint conference organized by the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) and BirdLife Asia Council. I attended the Pan-Asian Ornithological Congress to present a paper, entitled "Breeding Biology of Birds in Urban Parks of Hong Kong". Then, I spent most of the time attending the BirdLife Asian Conference on behalf of the Society. BirdLife International is a union of NGOs concerned with bird conservation with 58 partners worldwide. Asia has 7 representatives and 4 partners. HKBWS is the representative for Hong Kong. The BirdLife Asia Conference meets every four years and this year was the biggest ever, with 98 delegates from 26 countries/territories. Topics discussed included the on-going work on the Red Data Book (RDB), the launch of Important Bird Areas (IBA) and a partnership development workshop.

Red Data Book

Data collection for the RDB will be finished by early 1998. A draft species account will be distributed for comments before publication in 1999. Many suggestions were made on the application of the RDB in bird conservation. HKBWS will take part in the data collection for Hong Kong. The work will be completed this summer.

Important Bird Areas

IBAs are places where birds can be used as an indicator for the conservation of biodiversity. IBA work is expected to start next year. Unlike the RDB, which is a collection of existing data, IBA also involves site surveys. It is expected to end up as an inventory of important bird areas with recommendations for site and habitat conservation.

Partnership development workshop

The partnership development workshop aimed at sharing experience in administration and fund-raising. There was also discussion on networking through the use of computers, e.g. the use of e-mail and World Wide Web homepages. Conservation work on Black-faced Spoonbill and Great Bustard were also discussed.

I had little time for bird watching although India is a wonderful place for it. I went to Anai Katty one afternoon, spotting 24 species, including Peafowl and Coppersmith Barbet. After the conference, I spent a day birdwatching in the protected woodland at Topslip. Many birds were new to me, some of the highlights were Grey Junglefowl, Blossom-headed and Blue-winged

Parakeets, Indian Lorikeet, Indian Pitta, Chestnut-headed Bee-eater, Great Pied and Malabar Grey Hornbills, Greater Golden-backed, Indian Great Black Pigmy, and Greater Yellownappe Woodpeckers, Ceylon Frogmouth, and Greater Racket-tailed Drongo.

Australian Curlew Satellite Tracking *by Fiona Lock*

In March the Wild Bird Society of Japan and NTT began a satellite-tracking project with Australian Curlews (*Numenius madagascariensis*) from Moreton Island in Queensland, Australia. Thirty-one birds were captured. Each bird was flagged, and "ArgoSat" satellite tracking devices were attached on the 15 largest Curlews.

Australian Curlew is categorized as near-threatened in the International Red Data Book. It is a migrant, passing through Japan, China and Southeast Asia in spring and autumn, and wintering in Australia. To protect this species, its required habitats have to be protected. This project will reveal information on breeding and wintering grounds, and migration staging posts.

If you see a bird with a flag or a transmitter, please contact the Research Center, Wild Bird Society of Japan immediately.

E-mail: KGB00707@niftyserve.or.jp

Home Page:
<http://www.wnn.or.jp/wnn-n/migrant/>

Overseas Reports

Inner Mongolia and Heilongjiang,

21 April - 5 May 1997

by C Y Lam

Wong Tin Wa and myself spent two weeks covering the Da Hingan Ling and the plains on both sides of these mountains. We were accompanied by Mr Liu Bowen of Northeastern Forestry University and a co-author of "A Field Guide to the Birds of Northeast China". For me this was the last corner of China in terms of bird-watching and I was looking forward to seeing Hong Kong's winter birds on their breeding grounds.

We arrived in Harbin by direct flight from Hong Kong on 21st. The train trip west to Qiqihar the following day gave our first glimpses of vast plains with occasional marshes. We then headed south-east for Jalaid Qi in Inner Mongolia by car, crossing the Chuo'er River. We were greeted by Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Redshank, Magpie Black-headed Gull, and Carrion Crow.

On 23rd, we travelled to Tumuji, where a county-level reserve had been recently established to protect the Great Bustard. We were not disappointed as local government officials showed us fifteen birds. The males in display were truly spectacular.

Unfortunately, we also observed much recent "opening up of the Wilderness" (a slogan of the provincial government), turning grassland into maize fields. A

government campaign to confiscate guns has helped reduce hunting, but during our train trip we overheard that hunting was still going on. The grassland yielded Asian Short-toed Lark, Northern Skylark, Japanese Quail, Daurian Partridge (note the word "Daurian"; see later) and Oriental Pratincole. In and around the lakes we added Common Gull, Crested Grebe, Curlew, Kentish Plover, Teal, Chinese Spotbill, Goosander, Reed Bunting, Merlin and Common Buzzard.

We surveyed Tumuji Lake early the next morning and were depressed by the sight of bulldozers turning the lake into fish ponds. We added Cormorant, Grey-headed Lapwing, Little Ringed Plover, Herring Gull and probable Bean Geese. Driving across the plain during the day gave us fine views of an adult male Marsh Harrier, Mongolian Skylark and the more plentiful Northern Skylark. The Mongolian Skylark is apparently suffering badly from the bird trade allegedly going through Hong Kong. We then travelled north-west to the eastern slopes of Da Hingan where we recorded White-cheeked Starling, Blue Hill Pigeon, Jay and a possible Upland Buzzard. We stayed overnight in Bayanwulan on the upper reaches of the Chuo'er River.

On 25th, we enjoyed a pleasant morning's birding near the river in spite of the freezing temperatures. David's Laughing Thrushes frolicked among the bushes like our Black-faced Laughing Thrushes - the Chuo'er River is close to the northernmost limit of this family. In the woods, Great Tit was joined by

Long-tailed Tit and Marsh Tit (breeding in tree holes) and Daurian Jackdaws. The first summering Yellow-browed Warblers had returned, with Little and Yellow-throated Bunting. Mallard and Shoveler also breed here. Later in the morning, we visited several remote hamlets. seeing few birds, but the vistas afforded by the hills and plains were well worth the effort. The striking red outer tail feathers of some Daurian Partridges flushed from under my feet added colour to the day.

Our next destination was Dalai Nur on the Sino-Russian border. We visited the lake on 27th and found it still mostly frozen. On the little exposed water we recorded hundreds of Crested Grebes and added Red-necked Grebe, Herring Gull, Red-breasted Merganser, Gadwall, and Goldeneye (the last species proving abundant). We then saw White and Citrine Wagtails and Buff-bellied Pipits feeding on floating ice, presumably picking up insects blown there by the wind. In the nearby grassland, interesting sightings included Lapland Bunting, Horned Lark, Isabelline Wheatear and good numbers of Marsh Harriers.

We then turned back, travelling eastward to Yakeshi (Xuguit Qi in some maps), the gateway town to the northern Da Hingan Ling. Birding on 28th yielded many pairs of Mallard in the marshy areas near the town, and a Long-tailed Rosefinch. A small lake at the edge of the town would have qualified as a reserve in the developed world, holding several species of duck, waders and wagtails but we were sorry

to hear from our birding companion from the Forestry Research Institute in Yakeshi that they had proposed without success to zone the lake as a park. In Yakeshi, we also saw both Snowy Owl and Black-billed Capercaillie, but unfortunately only as specimens in a restaurant.

On 29th, we travelled north to Orqohan and headed eastward early next morning. The "primitive" forest was disappointing, yielding little more than Willow Tit, Nuthatch and Sparrowhawk. But, some 100 km further out, wonderful scenery awaited us - a cluster of small "volcanic" lakes on a great plain lined with birch in the background. We also picked up among other things Tufted Duck, Crested Honey Buzzard, Olive-backed Pipit, Dusky Thrush, Daurian Redstart and Brambling. The day ended with a Hazel Grouse on the road, a bird which most Chinese people unfortunately associate with the cuisine of NE China.

On 1st May, we went south from Orqohan to look for Black Grouse. We did not see it, but instead had our first lesson in scatology, learning to distinguish male and female elks based on what they left behind! We sighted more Hazel Grouse and added Red-flanked Bluetail, Wryneck and Pale Thrush. The next day we moved on to Qiqihar, passing a Da'ur people autonomous county - no wonder we had been seeing Daurian this and that during the past few days. Interesting records included Ring-necked Pheasant, Hobby and Amur Falcon.

We spent 3rd in the Zhalong Reserve. The famous reed beds had largely been harvested, but in what remained we got all three reed buntings. Free flying (but domesticated) Red-crowned and White-naped Cranes were a fine, if artificial, sight. Common and Whiskered Terns and Oriental Pratincoles flew over the lake. In the trees we noted Yellow-browed amongst other Buntings and Redpoll and White's Thrush. Bird of the day was a Long-eared Owl so close that we had to step back to focus on it. The shock of the day was seeing a member of the reserve staff capturing a Scops Owl. He then followed us around with a home-made trap when he noticed us finding the Long-eared Owl. Sadly, we had to look in the wrong direction to divert him away from his target.

Another train took us back to Harbin on 4th, where I gave a talk to students of Northeastern Forestry University. It was gratifying to see a keen interest in nature and to answer questions on what they could do to save it. My visit even found its way into the front page of a local paper. It is a positive sign that attitudes are changing in China and some people do care about nature now.

Before catching our return flight, a stroll by the university turned up Red-breasted Flycatcher, Grey-backed Thrush and a variety of Buntings, including Grey-headed which was the last addition for the trip. Black-tailed Hawfinch and Snow Buntings were in cages near nets found in the area. Red-rumped Swallow marked the end of the trip, reminding us that Hong Kong and north-eastern China have much in common.

To a twitcher, this probably wouldn't rate as a great trip - we saw only 100+ species with few major ticks. But this is where many of our winter visitors breed. It was nice to see them at home.

Che Ba Ling, Guangdong Province

14-18 May, 1997

by Mike Kilburn

This was a lightning-fast tour to see Blyth's Kingfisher and to check out the prospects for birding this excellent winter site a little later in the year. It was hard work, to be frank, too hard. Two of us managed only 55 species, including many seen only in transit to and from the reserve. Few birds were singing, and we went several hours seeing nothing at all at least once a day.

However we did see Blyth's Kingfisher very easily thanks partly to an excellent map provided by Peter Hopkin and partly to the abundance of the birds on the reserve. They're larger, fatter and darker than the familiar Common Kingfisher, with an all-black bill. They also have a lower-pitched call, lacking the reedy, slightly hysterical note of Common Kingfisher.

In addition we had excellent views of the spectacular Crested Kingfisher and numerous views of Brown Dipper and Slaty-backed Forktail, also on the river. Away from the river, the breeding rituals of Black Baza, Chinese Goshawk and Dollarbird were well under way, yielding excellent views. Chestnut Bittern showed both from the train and in the reserve.

Of the other species which do not occur in Hong Kong, we heard one Drongo Cuckoo and several Black-browed Barbets Collared Finchbill showed well, but there was no hint of Red-headed Trogon, Black Eagle, White-crowned Forktail or Chinese Bamboo Partridge. We did well for reptiles, seeing several Greater Green Snakes, including one hunting along the bank of a river. There was a huge range of insects and frogs.

In summary, two full days is plenty this late on in the year, and unless you're desperate to see Blyth's Kingfisher and have no flexibility, leave it until the October-March winter months to make the most of the reserve.

Emei Shan, Sichuan Province

7 - 14 June, 1997

by Mike Kilburn

Three weeks after a ten-strong team of Hong Kong birders returned from Emei Shan, having seen over 150 species, Andrew Callender and I arrived at Chengdu airport and were whisked off to the Hongzhushan Hotel at the foot of the mountain for my first visit since 1991. Two things remained the same - it was raining and the birding was pretty good. We saw Black Bulbul, Collared Finchbill, Red-headed Tit and what I suspect is a new subspecies of Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps seenbutheard*. Instead of calling repeatedly and being impossible to see, as Rufous-capped Babblers are in Hong Kong and Che Ba Ling, this family group allowed close approach and gave excellent views!

The next day, accompanied by our excellent guide, Joshua, and our ever-smiling driver Mr Xia (I'm convinced his ability to stay alive in Sichuan's traffic -5 accidents seen in 8 hours driving - is responsible for the smile) we headed for the 3,077m summit, which was blanketed in thick cloud. We set out anyway to see what we could see. Quite a lot, it turned out. The place was heaving with warblers - we sorted out twelve species - nine phylloscs, Golden Specky and Aberrant and Chestnut-crowned Bush Warblers. For anyone who's puzzled over Two-barred Greenish or Blyth's Warblers in Hong Kong winters - this is the place to sort out your doubts ... or get really, really confused.

Apprentice pishers should definitely start here - birds swooped in out of the gloom and came so close we couldn't focus on them. Lower down the mountain birds were far more cynical and ignored us. While the mist made birds approachable, it still hid any sign of the four parrotbill species which headed our wish list.

But Golden Bush Robins, Sooty and Orange-gorgetted Flycatchers, Rufous-breasted Accentors, a hepatic Lesser Cuckoo, a pair of Riverchats and a runaway monkey kept things interesting. The next day it rained, but was clear - Vinaceous and Dark-breasted Rosefinch sat up and got counted, we were closely scrutinized by an exceptionally inquisitive Golden Bush Robin, picked up a pair of Brown and a single Three-toed Parrotbill near the reservoir, and had fabulous views of a Spotted Bush Warbler singing from the top of a

young fir. We added Grey-crested Tit and Blyth's Leaf Warbler lower down the trail. The latter has an extraordinary display - waving its right wing around - both while singing and calling. We finished with a flourish - a chattering group of phylloscs turned out to be mobbing a Tawny Owl, which was sitting on a fully exposed perch about 15m away - the bird of the trip for me.

The sun broke out on Monday morning, giving us fantastic views across the mountains of central Sichuan, including Wa Shan, which still holds Takin and Bear, and was one of Pere David's haunts when he first birded in Sichuan over a century ago. The birds responded superbly to the sunshine, and we got crippling views of Great and Brown Parrotbills, saw an immensely fat Long-tailed Thrush on a rubbish dump, and added a dozen Grey-headed Bullfinches and a couple of Spot-winged Rosefinches.

We took the cable car down to about 2500m and from there walked down to Xi Xiang Chi (2000m), collecting Verditer, Ferruginous and Slaty-Blue Flycatchers, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, and a brown, singing White-bellied Redstart. With close views the dark grey feathers of adult male plumage were visible beneath the juvenile feathers. Curiously, the same phenomenon was also recorded here in spring 1988 (by Jesper Hornskov of Qinghai fame).

Xi Xiang Chi is a well-established site for Temminck's Tragopan - almost everyone sees them. We didn't. In June the side-trails where it is seen are

overgrown, the birds have stopped calling and you might as well be looking for intelligent conversation in a karaoke bar. Don't bother. However we did see Emei Shan Liocichla and Red-winged Laughingthrush and picked out a couple of pairs of White-bellied Pigeons from the resident flock of Speckled Wood Pigeons the next morning.

Below the summit, birding became increasingly difficult - probably for the same reasons as we didn't see the Tragopan - many birds had stopped singing and were hiding while they bred - we had to work hard to add new species for the remainder of our trip. The descent to Xianfeng produced two pairs of Chestnut-crowned Warblers below Xixiang Chi, three Bay Woodpeckers screaming at each other at Yuxian Monastery, and Little and Spotted Forktails, a pair of Plumbeous Redstarts, a Riverchat and Black Whistling Thrush in the valley bottom.

Xianfeng (1800m) is another site for the Tragopan - not! However we did hear Lady Amherst's Pheasant and found Fukien Niltava, Ferruginous Flycatcher and Verditer breeding within 50 square metres. This was our best site for flycatchers - we also saw Slaty-Blue, Sooty and Snowy-browed, and had two singing Vivid Niltavas. The forest also supported Crimson-breasted, Darjeeling Grey-headed, and White-backed woodpeckers. Grey-winged Blackbirds were a surprise.

Next morning we descended to Hong Chun Ping at 1100m. It's like lowland forest birding in southern China - Black

Baza on the nest, Chinese Goshawk, Besra, Hair-crested Drongo, Koel and Blue Whistling Thrush predominated. More exciting was a big population of singing Chinese Blue Flycatchers (with a similar song to Hainan Blue), a pair of Brown-breasted Flycatchers, Black-chinned Yuhina and Yellow-browed Tit. That evening we stayed in a room which had hosted Chiang Kai Shek, and heard Oriental Scops Owl and Grey Nightjar from the balcony. You don't need an alarm clock here - Buddhist pilgrims chanting sutras wake you up at around 5am every morning! The next morning was our last day and finding birds in the forest continued to be hard work except for river birds - we saw Brown Dipper and fledged Little Forktails and Plumbeous Redstarts. We also saw Plumbeous Redstarts and Slaty-backed Forktails nestbuilding.

Our last surge of birds came along the trail between Qing Yin Pavilion and Wu Xing Gang. We birded on both sides of the gorge, along the main path and a track across a red single arch bridge - highly recommended! We saw a family group of 12 Sulphur-bellied Warblers, Ashy-throated Parrotbills carrying food, a male Mrs Gould's Sunbird, 15 Red-headed Tits, Grey-cheeked Fulvetta and Collared Finchbill, and heard two Drongo Cuckoos - all in thirty minutes. We also saw our first Mountain Bush Warbler, having heard them call since Xianfeng. Rufous-capped Babbler showed well - and didn't call once!

We met the still-smiling Mr Xia at Wu Xiang Gang and survived the return to Chengdu - including an incident when all

four lanes of the highway held oncoming vehicles!

In summary we had a great trip - good weather, excellent food, and we were able to bird throughout. It would almost certainly be easier to see birds from mid April to the end of May when the vegetation is less mature and more birds are singing, but there is still plenty to see mostly from the main trails. We saw 125 species well into the traditionally quiet breeding season.

Local Birding

Sunset Peak 17-18 May 1997

By Peter Hopkin.

There are not many corners of Hong Kong that remain unexplored, but the woodland that lies below Sunset Peak on Lantau is one of them. I have long wondered how best to explore the apparently impenetrable chasm that drains north into the Tung Chung fields. A single trail traverses one side of the valley, and passes through dense woodland with a moss covered boulder floor. Numerous streams indicate the high rainfall. Keith Wilson's discovery of some interesting dragonfly species, one new to science, strengthened my resolve to give the forest a go.

But the problem is one of access, either a climb of at least two hours from Mui Wo or 1 1/4 hours from the Tung Chung road before reaching the wood. How best to reach the wood for dawn? The

answer lies in the cabins on the summit. I finally found someone who was prepared to rent one to me. So late afternoon on the 17 May I was joined by a group of friends at the top of the mountain. The climb from the Tung Chung col was easy enough, a steady 75 minutes with good views of parties of Fork-tailed Swifts, House Swifts and Swallows. Tim Woodward spotted a Birdwing Butterfly above the picnic site.

We found our first Upland Pipit just below the summit, in characteristic display flight: it landed on a rock thirty metres away but the mist came down and we could only see a dim shape. Around the cabins there were more Upland Pipits, a Chinese Francolin, and a solitary Englishman indulging in some personal jingoism by flying a Union Jack. The cabin was surprisingly well furnished, and after tea on the "verandah" with a birds' eye view of Chek Lap Kok, we set off for some dusk birding in the valley.

The misty weather suppressed all bird song, but we did hear Collared Scops Owl, Violet Whistling Thrush and about two million frogs. My attempts to tape one out, and thereby tick Cascade Frog, were not a success.

We awoke at dawn with another thunderstorm raging. Tim's valiant attempts to tape record Upland Pipit from his bed were rather spoiled by the wind noise, but it should make for an atmospheric recording. By six a.m. the mist had cleared slightly, and we were able to spend nearly two hours walking down the one accessible path.

Everything was very wet and off-trail walking would have been suicidal. The habitat looked superb, and I could easily imagine a Pygmy Wren Babbler creeping around the stones, or a flock of Fulvettas and Yuhinas in the trees.

Our species list on a very quiet morning consisted of Hwamei, Great Tit, Chinese Bulbul, Blue Magpie and Jungle Crow, but we did see another Birdwing Butterfly and were able to appreciate the variety of dragonfly species. Returning to the cabin, we saw more Upland Pipits before descending to Mui Wo. So the trip was hardly a great success in terms of Hong Kong ornithology, but the logistics worked well and I am keen to have another go. The numbers of Upland Pipits were high - I estimated ten singing birds just on Sunset Peak, many more than on my previous visits. I know the peak was thoroughly burnt at Christmas 1995, and it could be that two season's re-growth provides the best grassland for this poorly known species.

We found no evidence of Richard's Pipits, which were common in the spring of 1994. It would be interesting to survey the patterns of Upland and Richard's Pipit territories and see how they relate to the grass succession over several years.

If anyone wishes to rent the cabin, call me on _____, and I can pass you on to the owners. They normally charge \$200. The hut sleeps about ten. The key holder lives on Lantau but works in Central so key collection is easily arranged. I'll probably try again in the autumn.

Recent Reports

by *Richard Lewthwaite*

Please note that these are all unchecked records. Only those records submitted to the Records Committee with a full description will be considered. Members are **strongly encouraged to submit records of all species** on HKBWS cards.

March 97

Highlights were a Chinese Leaf Warbler trapped on 4th, a Christmas Frigatebird on 10th and Elisa's Flycatcher on 29th.

Apart from news of a Grey Nightjar at Robin's Nest on 1st, two Black Vultures at Chau Tau on 1st and 8th, a Hoopoe at Sek Kong on 3rd, A Brown Crake at Ho Chung from 5th to 8th, and the 116 Black-faced Spoonbills at Mai Po on 8th, the main feature of the early part of the month was an influx of passerines, with reports from several sites, including Kadoorie Farm, where a Chinese Leaf warbler *Phylloscopus sichuanensis* trapped on 4th is a potential first record for Hong Kong. Other productive sites were Tai Mo Shan, where two Dusky Thrushes of the race *naumanni* were present on 1st, 2nd and 8th, five *eunomus* (rare in Hong Kong) on 9th and eight *naumanni* on 10th, Queen's Hill Camp (Fanling), where a White's and a Dusky Thrush remained from 1st for much of the month, and To Fung Shan, which held a Pale Thrush on 1st, and four Eye-browed Thrushes, a

White's Thrush and a Red-tailed Robin on 4th. The mid-month period produced a succession of interesting records and rarities, with a Blyth's Reed Warbler and ten Penduline Tits trapped at Mai Po on 9th, A Christmas Frigatebird from the Mai Po boardwalk on 10th, five Great Bitterns and a Purple Gallinule (probable escape) at Mai Po on 12th, five Grey Thrushes and a Chestnut-flanked White-eye trapped at Cape d'Aguilar on 14th, a female Baer's Pochard, the only report of the winter at Nam Sang Wai on 15th, five White-vented Needletails at Kap Lung on 16th, and three Oriental Plovers and a Saunders Gull, the first record away from the Deep Bay Area, at Chek Lap Kok on 17th. Flycatcher records at this time concerned a Mugimaki at Kap Lung on 16th and a Blue-and-white, the first of the spring, on Cheung Chau the next day.

Except for a Brown Thrush on Po Toi on 21st, a Common Ringed Plover and a *barabensis* gull from the boardwalk on 22nd, the rediscovery of the over-wintering female Bull-headed Shrike at Shuen Wan on 25th and a Long-billed Dowitcher from the boardwalk on 28th, the majority of notable reports in the final ten days of the month concerned species which are normally regarded as spring migrants. A Forest Wagtail was seen at Mai Po on 23rd and 31st, six Asian House Martins were at Mui Wo on 22nd and three at Lin Barn Tsuen on 23rd, and three Oriental Pratincoles at Sandy Bay on 22nd were followed by one on Lantau on 23rd and 50 over Mai Po fishponds on 26th, the largest flock of the spring

A flock of 120 White-vented Needletails over Kap Lung and the Sek Kong Plain on 25th proved to be the only sizeable count in a poor spring for needletails. While numbers of Grey-faced Buzzards (just 12 at Mai Po and three at Shek Wu Wai on 28th, with singles at Mai Po Wong Chuk Yeung and Sai Kung the next day) were lower than usual, unprecedented numbers of Red-necked Stints for early spring arrived at Deep Bay, with 384 on 28th, and 750 on 31st. A male Blue-and-white Flycatcher found in Tai Po Kau on 28th was still present on 29th, with a Ferruginous Flycatcher at the same site and Mugimaki Flycatcher and Elisa's Flycatcher (a potential first record of a rare and distinctive form that is lumped by some authors with Narcissus Flycatcher) at Ho Chung woods on the same day. Sadly, this bird could not be relocated the following day. At Mai Po on 29th, the arrival of three Asian Dowitchers, the first of the spring, was noted while 31st produced two Spoon-billed Sandpipers from the boardwalk.

April 1997

Though generally poor for passerine migration, the month was redeemed by a sustained series of Spoon-billed Sandpiper sightings. Other highlights were a Common Swift on 6th and 7th, three Japanese Waxwings on 20th and a late influx on 24th.

The month opened with a Painted Snipe and four chicks at Kam Tin and Long Valley, one to four Spoon-billed Sandpipers were reported from Mai Po

on at least sixteen dates, mostly during 1st-12th and 20th-27th, the Long-billed Dowitcher was seen again on 2nd and Asian Dowitchers were present all month, with numbers increasing to 15 by 4th, 60 by 14th and 200 by 27th. Numbers of Nordmann's Greenshanks were again low, with a high count of five (compared to the record count of 58 on 13 April 1993), though birds were reported on at least 16 dates from 4th to 30th.

The first part of the month also produced a Chinese Grosbeak at Lam Tsuen and two Siskins, probably the latest ever record, a Ferruginous Flycatcher and a Red-tailed Robin in Tai Po Kau on 1st. A Blue-and-white Flycatcher, another Red-tailed Robin and an Eye-browed Thrush were found the following day at Ng Tung Chai, while a male Tristram's Bunting in the casuarinas at Mai Po on 4th was unusual. A flock of four Blue-tailed Bee-eaters found at Lin Barn Tsuen on the same date was rather early. The recent run of Citrine Wagtails continued with singles at Kam Tin on 4th and Tsim Bei Tsui on 5th.

Although a trip to Dong Ping Chau on 5th produced an Ashy Minivet, four Red-tailed Robins, a Pale-legged Leaf Warbler and a Narcissus Flycatcher, the most interesting discovery was a massing of Chinese Bulbuls, with at least 2,500 birds in three separate flocks beside the Tolo Channel. On the same date, three Mugimaki Flycatchers were found in Tai Po Kau, a Black-headed Bunting was claimed at Lin Barn Tsuen and about 1,000 Yellow Wagtails flew in

to roost in a reed bed at Mai Po. In a spring with only moderate numbers of swifts passing through, the discovery on 6th of a Common Swift over the Mai Po Fishponds, almost a year, to the day, since the first record, gave rise to speculation that the same individual might be involved.

On the same day a Ruddy Crane was found near the Tower Hide at Mai Po and Hainan Blue Flycatchers at Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Kap Lung were the first of the year. A Pallas' Rosefinch at Nam Chung on 7th excited its finders, as must a Swinhoe's Minivet in the orchard at Tai Po Kau on 8th. The same day a Wryneck and the first two Red-winged Crested Cuckoos of the year were trapped at Kadoorie farm and a Grey Nightjar was heard calling near Tuen Mun. A visit to Po Toi on 9th produced a Long-tailed Skua, 41 Rubythroats, 17 Red-tailed Robins, a Narcissus and two Ferruginous Flycatchers, as well as small numbers of Grey, Grey-backed and White's Thrushes. On the same date Asian Paradise Flycatcher at Tai Po Kau, Japanese Yellow Bunting at Mai Po, and an Indian Cuckoo on Cheung Chau were the first records of the year.

The 11th was the eve of the Big Bird Race, and in addition to the usual Collared Scops Owls, Barred Owlets and Savannah Nightjars, it produced a remarkable series of nocturnal species, including a Brown Hawk Owl at Shek Wu Wai, an Oriental Scops Owl at Robin's Nest, an Eagle Owl at Mong Tseng, a Brown Fish Owl near Sai Kung and a total of at least six Slaty-legged Crakes at Mong Tseng, Yung Shue O

and Shuen Wan. A flock of nine Japanese Grosbeaks were found at Lam Tsuen. The race itself was won by the Professionals team with a score of 161 species. Though a Brambling and a Chinese Grosbeak flew over Mount Austin and a Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo and a Narcissus Flycatcher were noted in Tai Po Kau, the highlight of the day, a Fairy Pitta on Dong Ping Chau, went unrecorded by any team.

A boat trip into southern waters on 14th produced a Swinhoe's Egret, a Greater Crested Tern, six Common Terns, an Aleutian Tern, and 588 Red-necked Phalaropes. On the same day a Japanese Paradise Flycatcher in Tai Po Kau and a Red-breasted Flycatcher at Mai Po were both rather late. The following day two Red Turtle Doves, a declining species in recent years, were at Lin Barn Tsuen, while on 18th a Baillons Crake was found in the Mai Po fishponds area and two Grey-streaked Flycatchers were on Dong Ping Chau.

A flock of 16 Silky Starlings at Ting Kok and three Japanese Waxwings, only the third record, photographed at Long Valley on 20th, a singing male Orange-headed Ground Thrush at Kap Lung on 21st and Sooty Flycatcher at Mount Austin on 22nd presaged an influx which was first noticed on the morning of 24th, when four Japanese Sparrowhawks, 320 Chinese Goshawks, two Grey-faced Buzzards, a Black Baza and a Crested Honey Buzzard flew over the Mong Tseng hills.

Later that day a Lesser Frigatebird flew over Lin Barn Tsuen, and the largest

ever arrival of Yellow Wagtails of the race *simillima* was recorded, with 2,500 at Lin Barn Tsuen, 500 at Mai Po, 625 flying NE past Chek Lap Kok and 150 at Shuen Wan. Other birds recorded on this date included a Little Whimbrel at Long Valley, a Barn Swallow of the race *tytleri* at Shuen Wan and two Pechora Pipits at Mai Po.

During this period good numbers of Blue-tailed Bee-eaters were noted in the Mai Po area, with two on 21st, 20 on 23rd, 11 on 24th and eight on 25th. The month closed with a Pechora Pipit at Long Valley from 25th to 27th, up to four singing Russet Bush Warblers at Tai Mo Shan on 25th and 27th, a Pheasant-tailed Jacana at Mong Tseng on 26th, a Mountain Hawk Eagle and a White-throated Needletail over Tai Mo Shan on 27th, a hepatic Oriental Cuckoo at Sha Lo Tung on 28th and an Oriental Plover at Mai Po on 30th.

May 1997

A Grey-headed Woodpecker on 9th was the highlight of the month.

The first day of the month saw a series of late migrants, with an Asian Paradise Flycatcher in Tai Po Kau and a Daurian Starling at San Tin on 1st, an adult male Chinese Grosbeak at Shuen Wan on 2nd and five Ancient Auks from the Dong Ping Chau ferry on 3rd. Reports of three Grey Nightjars at Yung Shue O on 2nd, A Chinese Francolin near the Park View complex on 3rd and eight Blue-tailed Bee-eaters at Mai Po on 8th helped to maintain interest.

On 9th, a single Grey-headed (Black-naped Green) Woodpecker was seen at Ho Sheung Heung. Despite all efforts it was not subsequently relocated. This report is the third within a six month period for a species which was last acceptably recorded in 1977.

On 10th a very late Daurian Redstart was seen at Ho Chung. Six Brown Shrikes, the best count in a poor spring for this species, two Arctic Warblers and a Red-rumped Swallow were noted at Mount Austin, and a Black-naped Oriole, a declining species in recent years was found on Cheung Chau.

This bird was present until at least 23rd. A visit to the Mai Po Scrape on 11th produced four Nordmann's Greenshank and an Asian Dowitcher. Both species were subsequently at Mai Po up until 24th. A Pectoral Sandpiper remained in the Frontier Closed Area at Lin Barn Tsuen from 13th to 17th. A Dusky Warbler at Kam Tin on 18th was possibly the latest ever.

During the final third of the month, the following migrants were noted: a Black Bittern at Tsim Bei Tsui on 20th, a Pechora Pipit at Chek Lap Kok on 23rd, 10 Yellow Bitterns at Mai Po on 24th, a Schrenck's Bittern at Tai O on 25th and a Brown Shrike and five Yellow Bitterns at Po Toi on 30th. Of the rarer breeding species, two juvenile Eagle Owls were seen near Shau Kei Wan on 27th, an Oriental Greenfinch was found near Fo Tan, and three Savannah Nightjars were present at Sek Wu Wai on 31st. On the same date there was an intriguing report of three Black Bulbuls on Tai Mo Shan.

Payment to the society may be made in two ways:

- a) Please return the attendance with a cheque in **English** made out to the "**Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**"
- b) Payment can also be made by Electronic Transfer to Account No 004-567-899661-001 Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank in favour of "**The Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**", but please send the attendance slip in as well to confirm your payment and attendance.

On all outdoor meetings please bring drink and food, appropriate clothing for the location, and sun cream and mosquito lotion if needed!

Leaders are requested to find a substitute leader and contact C.Y.Lam if they are unable to attend.

Telephone numbers : John Holmes ; Yu Yat Tung ; Cheung Ho
Fai ; Fung Po Kei ; Fiona Lock ; Mike
Leven ; Wong Tin Wa ; Tai Sheung Lai ; Carrie Ma
; Paul Leader

Remainder of numbers on the front cover, or telephone a Committee Member.

Plug for Porcupine!

If your interest in Hong Kong's countryside, ecology and conservation goes beyond birds, to cover insects, fish, dolphins, reptiles - basically all that wriggleth upon or groweth out of the earth and that swimmeth in the sea, then you need Porcupine! This is the FREE quarterly newsletter of the Hong Kong University Department of Ecology and Biodiversity. Porcupine! is not however, a stuffy academic journal, but an entertaining mix of articles ranging from sex, murder and survival in the heavily polluted waters of Tolo Harbour - of marine snails, to identification pieces on insects, fish, animals and common plants and trees. There's a big section reporting interesting sightings - I was amazed at how often larger animals such as Leopard Cat, Crested Porcupine, Civets, Wild Pig, and Python and are seen in Hong Kong. There's a lively letters section, conservation issues from around the region and in Hong Kong, and there are sections dedicated to the work of faculty members and students. To receive or contribute to Porcupine! contact the editors, Graham Reels, Gary Ades and John Fellowes at:

Porcupine!
Kadoorie Agricultural Research Centre, HKU
Lam Kam Road, Yuen Long
New Territories, Hong Kong

Future Meetings

Please contact the leader several days before the meeting to confirm attendance, otherwise you may miss out on changes in timing.

DATE	LEADER		VENUE	TIME
13 July Sunday	Cheung Ho Fai		Visit to Society Library, Island House Yuen Cham Chai, Tai Po. Meet at Tai Po Market KCR exit.	10:00
24 August Sunday	Yu Yat Tung	@	Boat trip for terns, south of Hong Kong Meet at public pier outside City Hall, Central	08:00
3 Sept Wednesday	Wong Tin Wa	#	Bird photography course (in Cantonese) Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Observatory	18:30
10 Sept Wednesday	Wong Tin Wa	#	Bird photography course (in Cantonese) Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Observatory	18:30
21 Sept Sunday	Mr & Mrs T.P.Luk		Kowloon Park for beginners. Meet at top of MTR exit at Mosque	08:00
5 Oct Sunday	Fung Po Kei Carrie Ma	^	Target 100 Whole day trip to tick as many species as possible. Minibus leaves Haiphong Road, T-S-T at 08:00, or meet leaders at MTR exit near mosque at 07:00.	
15 Oct Wednesday	Cheung Ho Fai Paul Leader		Slide show: Qinghai and Tibet Lecture Hall, Hong Kong Observatory	18:30

@ Please send return slip with payment. Call leader five days ahead to confirm departure time, or in case of bad weather

Course for members free of charge. Guests may attend at a charge of HK\$100. Those who wish to attend please register with the reply slip (this will allow us to prepare sufficient copies of the lecture materials)

^ Special whole day coach trip. \$100 deposit required in advance, additional money may be required to share the cost of the coach, tips for the driver etc, on the day. Enquiries to C.Y.Lam.

* Members who use the coach must confirm their attendance by returning the booking slip with payment. Those using own transport please also notify C.Y. Lam. The maximum number of members who can attend a **Mai Po** meeting is 50, as set by the AFD permit. Failure to do so will result in being refused access to the reserve.

BOAT TRIP FOR TERNS - SUNDAY 24 AUGUST 1997

I wish to reserve _____ places on the boat

I enclose a cheque for \$ _____ (In English. Payable to **Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**)

Send to C.Y.Lam, Royal Observatory, 134a Nathan Road, Kowloon, to arrive before Friday 11 April.

NAME.....TELEPHONE.....

WORLD BIRDWATCH DAY TARGET 100 - SUNDAY 5 OCTOBER 1997

I wish to reserve _____ places on the coach. (Deposit HK\$100 per person)

I enclose a cheque for \$ _____ (In English. Payable to **Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**)

Send to C.Y.Lam, Royal Observatory, 134a Nathan Road, Kowloon, to arrive before 25 March

NAME.....TELEPHONE.....

MAI PO - SUNDAY 19 OCTOBER 1997

I wish to reserve _____ places on the coach.

() \$40 Members () \$60 Guests () \$20 Students.

I enclose a cheque for \$ _____ (In English. Payable to **Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**)

Send to C.Y.Lam, Royal Observatory, 134a Nathan Road, Kowloon, to arrive before 28 April.

NAME.....TELEPHONE.....

BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY COURSE #1 - WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 1997

I wish to reserve _____ places for this lecture (_____ members, _____ guests)

I enclose a cheque for \$ _____ (In English. Payable to **Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**)

Send to C.Y.Lam, Royal Observatory, 134a Nathan Road, Kowloon, to arrive before Friday 11 April.

NAME.....TELEPHONE.....

BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY COURSE #2 - WEDNESDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 1997

I wish to reserve _____ places for this lecture (_____ members, _____ guests)

I enclose a cheque for \$ _____ (In English. Payable to **Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**)

Send to C.Y.Lam, Royal Observatory, 134a Nathan Road, Kowloon, to arrive before Friday 11 April.

NAME.....TELEPHONE.....

NT.T WOODS & PLAINS - SUNDAY 2 NOVEMBER 1997

I wish to reserve _____ places on the coach.

() x \$100.

I enclose a cheque for \$ _____ (In English. Payable to **Hong Kong Birdwatching Society**)

Send to C.Y.Lam, Royal Observatory, 134a Nathan Road, Kowloon, to arrive before 28 April.

NAME.....TELEPHONE.....