



香 港 觀 鳥 會

THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

GPO BOX 12460, HONG KONG. 香港郵政總局信箱12460號

WEBSITE 網頁: <http://www.hkbws.org.hk> E-MAIL 電郵: hkbws@hkbws.org.hk

通 訊 Bulletin 172 Summer 夏季 1999



池鷺 (米埔)
Chinese Pond Heron (Mai Po)

蘇毅雄
Samson So

雀影集 *Photographing Birds VI:*

飛鳥 *Feiniu*



褐翅燕鷗 (塔門)
Bridled Tern (Tap Mun)

16X 錄像機鏡頭
16X video lens
(685 x 553 x 16.7million)

黑翅長腳鶴 (南丫島)
Black-winged Stilt (Lamma Island)

180mm 照相機鏡頭接錄像機
180mm camera lens connected to camcorder
(689 x 561 x 16.7million)



小白鷺 (新疆)
Little Egret (Xinjiang)

180mm 照相機鏡頭接錄像機
180mm camera lens connected to camcorder
(689 x 561 x 16.7million)

Contents

Society News	Big Bird Race 1999.....	2
	Richard & Janet Stott.....	2
	1998 Annual Report - request for short notes	3
	Request for Heron/Egret Photos	3
Conservation News	Tai Ho Wan and Mui Wo	3
	Shuen Wan Marsh.....	4
	Pressure Intensifies on Long Valley	4
	San Tin EIA seriously flawed	5
	Mai Po Update	5
Hong Kong Birding	Recent Reports: February - June, 1999	6
	Take a Closer Look - Large Terns	9
	Photographing Birds VI: Digital Pictures.....	10
Features	Farmland Birds	10
	Front-line Workers at Deep Bay	16
	"One More Bottle"	18
Overseas Reports	Honshu and the Izu Islands , Japan	19
Society Events	August - November, 1999.....	23

Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Committee Members

Chairman	C.Y. Lam	Recorder	Geoff Carey
Vice-Chairman	H.F. Cheung	Chinese Bulletin	Henry Lui
Secretary	Ada Chow	English Bulletin	Mike Kilburn
Treasurer	Julian Webster	Website	Carrie Ma
WWF Liaison	Lew Young	Membership	T.P. Luk
Conservation	Ng Cho Nam	English Birdline	(24 hours)
Bird Report	Tai Sheung Lai	Chinese Birdline	(24 hours)

Big Bird Race 1999

This year's Big Bird Race was held on 16/17 April. It was comfortably won by the Eagles Team who saw 158 species of birds. However with a new format for the event beginning this year, the team were allowed to compete without an official sponsor, and therefore the All Stars and the Professionals, with 152 species were declared the winners of the event. These teams also shared honours in sponsorship raised for WWF, while the team which raised the most individual sponsorship was the Junior Police Call Team. More than HK\$1.3 million was raised by HKBWS members for WWF. Many thanks to all corporate and private sponsors for your generosity and to BWS members for their considerable fund-raising efforts.

Cooper's Crippler, the prize for the best bird of the day, was Black Baza, beating off stiff competition from Little Whimbrel, Long-billed Dowitcher, Spoon-billed Sandpiper Blue-Tailed Bee-eater, Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo and Mountain and Russet Bush Warblers. The Kingfisher Tours Award for Birding Excellence was won by The Jebson Local Ladies Team, who won a trip to Chebaling National Nature Reserve in northern Guangdong.

Farewell: Richard and Janet Stott

by *Mike Chalmers*

After over 16 years in Hong Kong, Richard and Janet Stott left earlier this summer to

live in Worcestershire in the UK. Both have been stalwart supporters of the Society and have worked hard as Committee Members and Officers over many years. Richard was Secretary from 1987 to 1989, Treasurer from 1990 to 1992, and finally Chairman from 1993 to 1997, and Janet was Treasurer in 1988 and 1989, joint Secretary in 1989 and Treasurer again in 1993.

With her computer training at IBM she was instrumental in updating and computerising the Society's membership database. Richard's wise leadership ensured the Society grew in a strong and stable way during the transitional years before 1997.

Richard was also a keen bird watcher, and contributed records to the Annual Reports throughout his time in Hong Kong. He also made many exploratory trips to China and elsewhere in the region. He was a member of the Society's Big Bird Race team right from the beginning of this event in 1984 and went on to Captain the HKBWS team and raise funds for Mai Po for many years. During much of this time, Janet assisted with the hectic processing of the Bird Race results on the evening after the Race ended and during the following Sunday. Richard was also a member of WWF's Mai Po Management and Development Committee, where he represented the Society's interests.

The Society is indebted to both of them for their contributions over the years. We take this opportunity to thank them again for all they have given, and to wish them both health and happiness in their new home, and interesting birding of course.

1998 Annual Report: Request for Short Notes

Tai Sheung Lai is requesting submissions for short notes for the 1998 Annual Report. Those wishing to submit notes are advised to study previous annual reports to deliver notes in a similar style. Contact Tai Sheung Lai on [redacted] for further information, or to submit notes.

Request for Heron/Egret Photos

Dr. Heinz Hafner (Wetlands International Heron Specialist Group Co-ordinator) is co-editing a book for Academic Press on the status of the world's herons - primarily to promote their conservation. The book is currently with the printers.

However, he is urgently looking for slides to illustrate the chapter on East/Southeast Asia, especially slides relating to threatened herons (e.g. Chinese Egret), conservation issues (e.g. hunting of herons for food), and the range of the habitats where they are found. Do you have, or know someone who has appropriate pictures? Heinz has said that Academic Press will offer a complementary copy of the book to any photographers who have pictures selected. The book cover will be in colour and illustrations inside in black and white.

Should you have pictures that you would like to contribute to the book, get in touch with Heinz asap. To help provide the correct information, a few words of where

the slide was taken, when and what it illustrates would be useful. It would be fastest if you could send these pictures (by courier) directly to Heinz Hafner at: Station Biologique de la Tour du Valet, Le Sambuc, 13200 Arles, France. His e-mail is hafner@tour-du-valet.com.

Conservation News

Tai Ho and Mui Wo Threatened by New Road

A controversial plan by the Highways Department to construct a road from the N Lantau Highway through the Tai Ho Valley and south to Mui Wo looks set to cause serious ecological damage to some very good birding areas and a river holding unusually high numbers of fish species. In addition, an ominous proposal to build a small housing estate of 17,000 people at the estuary has also been tabled.

This road was proposed as an alternative to widening the road from Tung Chung to South Lantau, which was shelved following the findings of an EIA. It seems no attempt has been made to draw comparisons between building a completely new road and widening the existing one. Were this to happen it is almost certain that widening the Tung Chung Road would cause less environmental damage than the new road through Tai Ho Wan and Mui Wo, and certainly so when the additional impact of the housing estate is considered.

During the planning for the airport concerns were raised that the whole of Lantau would be opened up for development. Following strong protests from green groups and Lantau residents, Government made a commitment that South Lantau would remain largely unchanged and would not be subject to large scale development. The road to Mui Wo would be the first step to opening up South Lantau as it would be a two lane highway, and according to its submission to EPD, Highways has already made provision for road widening.

The Tai Ho valley has some importance for birds. The river- mouth mangroves hold a pair of Striated Herons and four species of Kingfisher have been recorded. The area attracts Red-winged Cuckoos in summer and one day both Bonellis and Crested Serpent Eagle were seen soaring above the valley. Chinese Francolin, Black Drongo Black-necked Starling and both Coucals are among the breeding birds. During winter this is a good area for cettia warblers and thrushes. The area is well worth exploring during migration seasons, with good numbers of Dollarbirds seen this spring, while the hills between Tai Ho and Mui Wo held several Woodcock through the winter and a Fairy Pitta in September.

On the Mui Wo side the very good fung shui woods at Pak Ngan Heung, Wo Tin and around Luk Tei Tong, the farmland and the marsh are even more important. Most important are the records of Red Data species Styans Grasshopper Warbler, Schrencks Bittern Japanese Paradise Flycatcher, and White-Bellied Sea Eagle - a threatened

species in China. In addition, records from Mui Wo residents show the value of the woodland and the marsh particularly - five species of bittern have been recorded on the marsh and in the woods Black Baza, Hair-crested Drongo and Blue Whistling Thrush breed.

Another interesting area is the valley and low hills around Wo Tin village, behind Pak Ngan Heung. This is an area of orchards, small fields and a marsh surrounded by mature fung shui woods and intersected by several streams. These streams feed a waterfall, a local beauty spot.

Other wildlife resident in the area includes the rare Tokay Gecko, Barking Deer and several species of snake. The Society will continue to monitor developments on this lovely area of Lantau and a Society outing will visit the area on 18 September. (see page 23 for details).

Shuen Wan Marsh

It is a pleasure to report that Government has removed the mud which was dumped here illegally, and that the marsh is returning to its previous state. However a member reported filling at another part of the marsh on a small scale. This has been reported and a response is awaited.

Pressure Intensifies on Long Valley

A note on the Society bulletin board has brought attention to the Executive

Councils endorsement of plans to build a railway line from Sheung Shui to Lok Ma Chau. This will cut right across Long Valley, further destroying and segmenting this highly threatened dry and wet agricultural habitat.

The main feature article of this issue highlights the wealth of birds making use of these habitats, of which Long Valley is undoubtedly the most important in Hong Kong. A full EIA is required by law and will begin before the end of the year.

A recent visit to Long Valley showed that villagers were planting previously fallow land along proposed route of the railway with fruit trees, it is suspected with an eye on land resumption compensation. WWF is coordinating an agricultural land use study which will be conducted over the next couple of months. This survey will deliver invaluable information on the agricultural history of Long Valley and the attitudes of local landowners.

Another road of dubious value is planned to cut right across the valley from near Yin Gong village to the north-east corner. Developments will be followed closely.

San Tin EIA Seriously Flawed

HKBWS has commented on the environmental impact assessment for the construction of the main drainage channel at San Tin, a part of the area of fishponds and wetlands which runs from Deep Bay east along the Shum Chun River. This channel

will cause the loss of several hectares of fishponds, and will further damage the existing wetland on the site.

The proposed mitigation measures - concrete-lined flood alleviation ponds, a grasscrete-lined drainage channel and an unmanaged marsh - have been dealt with sparingly, and do not seem to be substantiated by scientifically valid data. It was also discovered that illegal filling of ponds and preliminary construction work was conducted before the EIA was even submitted, let alone approved.

Mai Po Update

by Lew Young

Mai Po Management Plan

The Mai Po Management Plan for the years 1999-2003 was endorsed by the WWF HK Mai PO Management Committee in May, and will be going up to the Governments Wetland Advisory Committee for approval in the coming months.

Members of HKBWS are welcome to borrow copies of the plan. Contact Lew Young at Mai Po.

Futian Management Plan

Two years ago the Urban Planning and Design Institute of Shenzhen was contracted by the Shenzhen Government to draft a management plan for Futian National Nature Reserve. In May a group of Chinese wetland experts were invited to Shenzhen to comment on the final draft of the plan. Many of these experts expressed the view that apart

from protecting wildlife, the reserve should also be used for raising the awareness of local students and the public about the importance of conservation. Any groups visiting the reserve would also need to be carefully controlled in order to minimise disturbance to the reserves wildlife.

The experts also suggested, as a long-term goal of the reserve, that a cross-border protected area should be established one day, incorporating Futian, Mai Po and the Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site.

Once the comments have been included in the plan, it will be submitted to the municipal government for approval. Afterwards, the government will release funds to build visitor facilities, including hides, boardwalks and a new administration block.

Hong Kong Birding

Recent Reports:

March - June 1999

by *Richard Lewthwaite*

Please note that these are unchecked records and not accepted records. Members are strongly encouraged to submit records of all species on the Excel spreadsheet, or rarity card, which can be downloaded from the Society website. If you have no access to the website, please submit hard copy reports to the Recorder at the HKBWS postal address.

March

On 2nd, one of the Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrushes was again at KFBBG and a flock of at least 10 Grey-cheeked Fulvetta were in Tai Po Kau. Highlights of the gull passage in Deep Bay were single Slaty-backs during 2nd-7th, a Kamchatka Gull on 8th and a first-winter Glaucous Gull from 20th-30th (the sixth record, and the first since 1994). A female Baikal Teal was at Mai Po on 14th, as was an early White-vented Needletail. Four Red-breasted Mergansers were in Deep Bay on 21st-22nd and a record 14 Great Bitterns, were at Mai Po on 25th. The Chestnut Bulbul invasion continued with birds at the Chinese University, and on Cheung Chau.

April

Reports from Mai Po or the boardwalk in the first half of the month included the female Baikal Teal, a Long-billed Dowitcher, the first Nordmann's Greenshank of the year and a very early Grey-tailed Tattler on 2nd, a Black-shouldered Kite on 3rd, the years first Spoon-billed Sandpiper on 4th, a Swinhoe's Egret on 5th, a Japanese Yellow Bunting on 8th, an Oriental Plover from 9th-11th, and a Narcissus Flycatcher on 12th.

In Tai Po Kau during the same period, reports included a Hill Blue Flycatcher on 1st, a late Chestnut-flanked White-eye on 2nd, a Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo singing from 4th, a male Japanese Robin on 5th and a Mountain Hawk Eagle, Orange-headed Thrush and Plain Flowerpecker on 6th and a Himalayan Swiftlet on 13th.

Elsewhere, two Oriental Plovers were at Chek Lap Kok on 2nd, single Brown Thrushes at Nam Chung on 2nd and Kowloon Park on 12th, Chestnut Bulbuls at Dong Ping Chau on 4th, Barred Buttonquail and Siberian Blue Robin there on 11th and a Bay Woodpecker at Shing Mun on 15th.

The Big Bird Race on 16th-17th produced 217 species, including Little Whimbrel, Asian Dowitcher, Long-billed Dowitcher, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank, Saunders's Gull and Blue-tailed Bee-eater at Mai Po, Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoos at four sites (!), Mountain Bush Warbler and Russet Bush Warbler at Tai Mo Shan and Citrine Wagtail at Long Valley. In the final part of the month, a Styan's Grasshopper Warbler was singing in the Mai Po mangroves on 19th-21st, and a Grey Nightjar was found injured at Tuen Mun on 20th. 11 Black Bazas flew over Tai Po Kau on 21st. Single White-throated and White-vented Needletails were at KFBG and an Oriental Cuckoo at Mai Po. The next day, 18 Blue-tailed Bee-eaters were seen near Mai Po and a Eurasian Collared Dove flew over the Mai Po fishponds on 29th.

An astounding total of 23 Slaty-legged Crakes were heard from the roadside between Nam Chung and Tai Mei Tuk on 19th. 10 were also heard in the Sha Lo Tung-Ping Shan Chai-Hok Tau area on 26th and one at Chau Tau on 24th. Grey Nightjars were recorded from several localities, including Sha Lo Tung and Ping Shan Chai, during this period.

On 30th, as Typhoon Leo approached, there were reports of 21 Aleutian Terns, two

Roseate Terns and five other terns, as well as a Long-tailed Skua near Cheung Chau, and 20 Aleutians, 195 Chinese Goshawks and seven Grey-streaked Flycatchers near Green Island.

May

The passage of Typhoon Leo during 1st-2nd, only the second typhoon in many years to come near Hong Kong in May, resulted in the greatest offshore movement ever recorded. Over 8,000 birds of 38 species were reported at Cape d'Aguilar, Cheung Chau and Ap Lei Chau, including potential first records of Short-tailed Shearwater and Arctic Skua and record counts of Brown Booby, Streaked Shearwater, Long-tailed Skua, Greater Crested, Common, Aleutian and Little Terns. Its aftermath also produced significant reports during 3rd-9th, including a potential first Drongo Cuckoo, and record counts of Oriental Cuckoo, Pechora Pipit, Yellow Wagtail, Grey-streaked Flycatcher and Brown Shrike.

Highlights during Leo included six Streaked and two Short-tailed Shearwaters and three Brown Boobies at Cape d'Aguilar on 2nd, up to two Swinhoe's Egrets at Tai Tam and Cheung Chau, a Purple Heron at Cape d'Aguilar, a Black-shouldered Kite at Cheung Chau and a Chinese Goshawk at Cape d'Aguilar. These were the only migratory raptors reported during the sea-watches, though up to 20 of the latter species were at Mai Po on 1st-2nd.

Of nine shorebirds, most numerous was Red-necked Phalarope, with totals of 1194 and 245 at Cape d'Aguilar on the two days.

Almost 250 skuas were reported, including 24 Arcticics at Cape d'Aguilar, three at Cheung Chau and one at Ap Lei Chau, 16 Poms at Cape d'Aguilar, and 93 and 39 Long-tails at Cape d'Aguilar on 1st-2nd, and one at Cheung Chau on 2nd.

Eleven tern species were reported, including record numbers of Little (400), Common (2100), both at Cape d'Aguilar on 2nd, Great Crested (24) and Aleutian Terns (618 and 895 at Cape d'Aguilar on 1st-2nd, 101 at Cheung Chau on 1st and 100 at Ap Lei Chau on 2nd). Also of interest were five Roseates at Cheung Chau on 1st. The only gull was a single Black-tailed at Cape d'Aguilar on 2nd.

Four species of swift appeared on 2nd, including 23 White-throated and five White-vented Needletails at Cape d'Aguilar and Cheung Chau, respectively.

During its passage, Leo brought reports of up to eight Pechora Pipits at Cape d'Aguilar and a Citrine Wagtail at Cheung Chau on 2nd, where there were also 3200 Yellow Wagtails, easily the highest count away from Deep Bay and for two days the Hong Kong high count.

In Leo's aftermath, 4000 Yellow Wagtails, mainly *simillima* but also including some *taivana*, were counted going to roost in Ponds 8 and 11 at Mai Po on 4th. The latter were accompanied by unprecedented numbers of Pechora Pipits - 100 on 4th, with 40 still there on 8th. The previous highest count was just nine!

There were also 202 Asian Dowitchers at Mai Po and a late Mugimaki Flycatcher and nine

Arctic Warblers at Cheung Chau on 3rd, 10 Chinese Goshawks and 20 White-throated Needletails on the Peak on 4th, up to 300 Broad-billed Sandpipers at Mai Po on 6th, up to 19 Blue-tailed Bee-eaters near Mai Po on 6th-7th, and 250 Sand Martins, a very late Narcissus and 40 Grey-streaked Flycatchers there on 8th. The previous highest count of the latter was 12. Subsequently, five Oriental Cuckoos, a Drongo Cuckoo and 54 Brown Shrikes were reported from Po Toi island on 9th.

By mid-month, Leo-related sightings had died out. Other reports included a Little Whimbrel at Mai Po on 12th-15th, two Baillon's Crakes at Long Valley on 13th, single Black Bitterns at Mai Po on 14th and Mui Wo on 15th. Watercocks were at Lok Ma Chau on 15th and Mai Po on 29th, with Pheasant-tailed Jacana there also on 29th.

Single Brown Hawk Owls found injured at Causeway Bay on 14th and Happy Valley on 29th were taken into care at KFBG.

The month ended with a Slaty-legged Crane heard at Beacon Hill on the edge of urban Kowloon on 27th, a Schrenck's Bittern at Sha Lo Tung on 29th and a potential first in the form of two Mountain Tailorbirds heard singing, but not seen, at Tai Mo Shan on 30th.

June

By contrast, this was a very quiet month, the most interesting reports received being a Pheasant-tailed Jacana at Mai Po during 10th-13th, two cormorants at Shek Wu Chau and a Great Frigatebird near Basalt Island on the latter date, 13 House Crows at Kowloon Tsai on 19th and a very late Japanese Quail at Mai Po on 28th.

Take A Closer Look: Large Dark Terns

by H F Cheung

Illustrated by Y Y Lee

The larger terns that can be seen in Hong Kong include Bridled Tern, Sooty Tern and Aleutian Tern. They are commonest in areas with rocky cliffs and deep water such as the Lamma Channels and Sai Kung.



Bridled Tern breeds in the Sai Kung area. The exit of Tolo Harbour, north of Tap Mun Island is a good place to see them. Bridled Tern is large, dark brown above and white below. The underwings are white except for the dark tip and trailing edge. It has very long wings. In flight it often hold its wings bent, giving it a slim look with a wavy outline on the wing. Because of this, birdwatchers describe its shape as "sexy". Bridled Tern stays further out at sea than other breeding terns in Hong Kong. In juvenile plumage the upperparts are less well marked. The underparts and the neck are mostly white.

Sooty Tern is a vagrant to Hong Kong, with only a handful of accepted records over the years. Superficially it resembles Bridled Tern. On closer examination it is about 20% larger. Adults are sooty black on the



upperparts. On comparison it is darker than Bridled Tern, especially on the back and rump. With good views, you should note that the white forehead of Sooty Tern is about twice as large as Bridled Tern. Furthermore, the white does not extend as a supercilium above and behind the eye as it does on Bridled Tern.

In juvenile plumage the upperparts, the breast and lower belly are all black. The underwings are black except for a wide white band across the centre. Only the lower belly and undertail coverts are white. The name "Sooty" is more aptly applied to the juveniles.



Aleutian Tern is a regular passage migrant. It is much paler than Sooty or Bridled Tern, being grey rather than brown or black. Its large size, the white rump, and also the thick

dark trailing edge on the white underwings quickly identify it as Aleutian Tern. However care should be taken with the local race of Common Terns in autumn as they often show a white rump and tail.

The other large tern, the Great Crested Tern, is much less common and much heavier in flight. Aleutian Tern was not recorded in HK until 1992. Since then it has been noted regularly. In August-September, up to several hundred can be seen in HK, where many of them moult. Spring passage has also been noted in recent years, although the number is not as high.

Photographing Birds VI: Can DV Cameras Take Good Still Photos of Birds?

by Fei Niu

How to choose your first DV

Most birders want to take birds photos while they are birding, particularly when they find a new species, and a photo is better than thousand words. The problem, however is that a traditional camera is too heavy, inconvenient and requires too much skill, making it hard to decide between birding and photography. Is there a solution? The possible solution is DV or the mini-digital video camcorder (which is different to the digital camera).

The key advantage of DV is the powerful zoom. Most DV camcorders have a 12x zoom lens, which approximates to a regular 400mm lens, but its size and weight are much smaller and lighter. DV can also be used to take video and still pictures. Most

DV lenses have F1.6 or F1.2 aperture - large enough for video and still pictures in low light situations such as on the forest floor.

The image quality of DV is also very good. Video can reach over 500 lines, close to commercial broadcasting quality. DV can also produce still images with 720 x 576 pixels. Using a computer you can print (size similar to 3R picture) with satisfactory sharpness and color reproduction. (If you want better still image quality, you should choose a DV with the function called Progressive Scan).

Tips for choosing a DV:

1. 3CCD (CCD means Charge Coupled Device, usually 3 is better than 1).
2. 12x or above optical zoom lens (Optical not digital! ignore the digital zoom number).
3. Optical Image Stabilizer is better than Digital Image Stabilizer.
4. Easy manual control design (manual focus and exposure are vital in outdoor environments).
5. Progressive Scan for still images.
6. DV in/out (i-Link).

Features

Farmland Birds in Hong Kong

by Mike Leven

What is agricultural land?

Whilst the bird communities, in Hong Kong, of such habitats as wetlands, forest and shrublands are relatively amenable to

definition; it is less straight-forward to define the bird community of agricultural land. In Hong Kong, historically, agricultural land has formed as a patchwork within a largely anthropogenic landscape, all possible products of which were directly utilised by man. Thus, a definition of the bird community of farmland must be integrated into a framework which establishes which of the components of this landscape are defined as agricultural land. Government land use categorisations or traditional usage of land result in, respectively, too narrow or too broad a definition of just what constitutes agriculture and the unique history of land ownership and land use in Hong Kong renders comparisons with international usage of terms largely meaningless.

Accordingly, whilst recognising that the following definition is reductionist, the bird community of agricultural land has been defined as the populations of birds which utilise areas where a human community is engaged in production of terrestrial crops or animals. Thus, it includes areas which are temporarily or permanently not used for this purpose but which are an integral part of areas where production is taking place, such as fallow fields, or ponds and channels associated with irrigation works. Excluded are areas where agriculture has been permanently abandoned, fung shui woods and areas where production is based on an aquatic system such as fishponds and *gei-wai*.

Within this framework, there are major differences between the bird communities found in areas where water is permanently utilised for irrigation (here termed wetland

agriculture) and areas where there is no surface water for at least a part of the year (dryland agriculture).

Dryland agriculture

At least from an ornithological perspective, dryland agriculture is characterised by a patchwork of vegetable and flower crops, orchards and tree nurseries. Interspersed with active agricultural areas are houses and fallow fields, the latter either covered with broad-leaved herbs or perennial grasses or woody shrubs, depending upon the period of abandonment.

The bird community of these areas is characterised by generalists, most of which are also found in areas of wetland agriculture, the urban fringe and on landfill or open storage sites. Thus, the most conspicuous resident species are Spotted Dove, Hong Kongs three species of *Pycnonotus* bulbul, Oriental Magpie Robin, Yellow-bellied Prinia, Common Tailorbird, Masked Laughingthrush, Long-tailed Shrike, Black Drongo, Black-collared Starling and Crested Mynah. Of these species, dryland agriculture is perhaps most important for Long-tailed Shrike and Black-collared Starling, though both these species are equally, if not more, common in wetland agricultural areas.

One species of summer visitor, the Plaintive Cuckoo is, however, primarily restricted to this habitat. This cuckoo is a brood-parasite on the Common Tailorbird, but unlike that species does not occur in shrubland or forest. Amongst the non-breeding visitors, a number of passerines favour this habitat and for several of these it is important. Of the

Turdidae, the Daurian Redstart and the Common Stonechat are conspicuous. Both these species also utilise upland areas of grassland with shrubs, and the Common Stonechat is found in lowland grassland areas, but their numbers are at least as great in dry farmland as elsewhere. Dry farmland also provides habitat for a number of granivores of which the greatest numbers, both of species and birds, are buntings. The Black-faced Bunting is probably the most abundant and is certainly the most widespread of these, but dry agricultural areas are relatively more important for Chestnut-eared Buntings, Little Buntings and Yellow-breasted Buntings. Whilst the latter two species occur, especially as passage migrants, in other open habitats (including wetland agricultural areas), the Chestnut-eared Bunting, is now largely restricted to dryland agricultural areas and is much rarer in Hong Kong than it was during the 1930s to 1950s. This may have been a species which made use of rice fields in Hong Kong as it did in Guangdong, but the reason for the decline in Hong Kong is unknown. Yellow-breasted Buntings have also declined significantly in Hong Kong in the last 30 years and it is strongly suspected that this is a consequence of increased trapping for food in China.

Three other granivorous passerines, all of which have declined in Hong Kong in the last 30 years, are also particularly associated with dryland agriculture. The Common Rosefinch, has never been common in Hong Kong, but is now rare; whilst the Crested Bunting was formerly a common breeding species in the uplands and wintered in lower

elevation agricultural areas nearby. The reasons for the decline in numbers of both these species are unclear and may differ, since the Crested Bunting appears always to have been resident in Hong Kong, whilst the rosefinch is a winter visitor. Finally, the Yellow-billed Grosbeak is a winter visitor associated with areas of orchards, which has declined greatly since around 1980. It seems likely that this decline is a consequence of an increase in exports from China to Europe and North America for the cage bird trade. Dryland agriculture is, in general, less important for non-passerine species; but it is the main habitat utilised by Black-winged Kite which is a recent, and still very rare colonist. It is also an important habitat for Japanese Quail, a scarce winter visitor and the unrelated, but superficially similar Yellow-legged Buttonquail and Barred Buttonquail probably also utilise it to a significant extent but their status in Hong Kong remains obscure.

Wetland agriculture

Wetland agriculture in Hong Kong, though formerly dominated by rice production, is now largely associated with the production of vegetable crops, notably Water Spinach and Watercress. Both these crops are cultivated in flooded or at least damp fields and the resulting management regime produces a series of wetland microhabitats ranging from flooded ditches and reservoirs and fields covered with shallow water to marshy fields with emergent herbaceous vegetation. Furthermore, the patchwork of land ownership and management regimes results in areas of wet grassland and temporarily abandoned herb-filled fields and,

at least at Long Valley, damp fields are retained for the pasturing of domestic Water Buffalos, providing yet another microhabitat.

With a few exceptions, discussed above, wetland agricultural areas generally support those species which are found in dryland agricultural areas; together with others which elsewhere occur in brackish or salt water wetlands. However, it is the use of this habitat by species which are freshwater specialists which requires special attention. Most ardeids in Hong Kong utilise areas of wetland agriculture to some extent, but it is particularly important for the breeding populations of Cattle Egrets, perhaps especially where Water Buffalo are present, and migrant populations of the Cinnamon Bittern and the globally threatened Schrencks Bittern. The Cinnamon Bittern formerly bred in Hong Kong, being a summer visitor to rice paddies in the Deep Bay area, but now appears to be solely a passage migrant; though it still breeds in rice paddies in Guangdong.

The most celebrated bird species of wetland agriculture in Hong Kong is, however, the Greater Painted-snipe which has now been demonstrated to depend entirely on such areas for its continued survival as a breeding species in Hong Kong. Only two populations are now known; at Long Valley and at Kam Tin, though as a consequence of recent developments, the Kam Tin population is now associated with abandoned rather than cultivated agricultural land.

Closely associated with the Greater Painted-snipe in terms of habitat preferences, though showing wider tolerances, are the three species

of "true" snipe occurring in Hong Kong: the Common Snipe, the Pintail Snipe and the Swinhoes Snipe. The last two of these show a particular preference for agricultural areas over other wetland habitat types. Two other species which formerly bred in Hong Kong, but which are now only present as scarce passage migrants, the Watercock and the Pheasant-tailed Jacana are also now most often found in wetland agricultural areas. Unfortunately, neither species finds them suitable for breeding.

Whilst it is the larger wading birds which have attracted most attention as being dependant upon wetland agriculture, this is also the principal habitat for a series of open country passerines. The Richards Pipit, Red-throated Pipit and the Yellow Wagtail are found especially in fields of Watercress, whilst the Bluethroat and the Zitting Cisticola occur in the damp grassland. Other warbler species, notably Luscinia and Acrocephalus spp. also utilise this habitat extensively, though these also occur around fishponds and in reedbeds.

A number of species of starling reach high densities in areas of wetland agriculture, most notably the White-shouldered Starling and the White-cheeked Starling. The first of these species was formerly a common breeding bird in Hong Kong, occurring even in urban areas, but is now scarce and some populations, at least, are dependant upon agricultural areas for their survival.

Agricultural land within the land use matrix

It is becoming increasingly apparent that comparatively little is known concerning the way in which species move between habitats

in Hong Kong; and one oversight has been the way in which agricultural land is used by birds during a part of their life cycle. The requirement to conserve not only egrettries but also egrets feeding areas is now widely recognised but for some other species, understanding of the use of agricultural land is in its infancy. To take just one example, few ducks are found at Long Valley during daytime but several hundred dabbling ducks were recently observed flying there to feed at dusk. Such nocturnal use of farmland by *Anas* spp. is widely known from elsewhere in the world but, if this is a regular pattern, may require a re-evaluation of the conservation management strategy for these species.

The importance of agricultural land for birds

To put this discussion in perspective; from the days of Vaughan and Jones (1913), Herklots (1953) and to the present, birdwatchers in Hong Kong have recognised that agricultural land in Hong Kong has a characteristic bird community and that some species are more readily found in such areas than elsewhere. However, other than the anecdotal approach adopted by Herklots (1951), this habitat has largely been neglected in the published literature. Thus, it is only in the late 1990s, with the realisation that the last few areas of wetland agriculture are under threat, that any attempts have been made to quantify the importance of the bird community of agricultural land. However, whilst some agricultural areas, notably Long Valley, have been the subject of (unpublished) studies, the author is unaware of any previous attempt to bring together published and unpublished observations in

order to provide an overview of the importance of agricultural land in a Hong Kong context.

Faced with such a blank canvas, this synthesis hardly represents the final word on the definition of the bird community of farmland in Hong Kong. However, whilst the details remain to be resolved, the available evidence strongly suggests that agricultural land provides an important habitat for a number of species of birds in Hong Kong and that, in contrast to current thinking in some quarters, the protection of agricultural land is an important conservation priority.

Appendix 1 Provisional priorities for conservation of farmland birds

Appendix 2 details a list of 84 species for which agricultural land is considered to support a significant portion of the population present in Hong Kong. Some of these are common and widespread generalists, but for 32 of these species agricultural land is probably the major habitat type now utilised in the SAR. This may seem to be a rather small proportion of Hong Kongs avifauna, but it includes a high proportion of its threatened species including three lost breeding birds: (Cinnamon Bittern, Watercock and Pheasant-tailed Jacana); three severely threatened breeding species (Greater Painted-snipe, Grey-capped Greenfinch and Crested Bunting); and three wintering species of which the population of which has declined significantly in recent years (Common Rosefinch, Yellow-billed Grosbeak and Chestnut-eared Bunting).

In addition, agricultural land constitutes the principal habitat utilised in Hong Kong by two species included in Collar et al. (1994),

Schrencks Bittern and Grey-headed Lapwing (Near-threatened globally); as well as being an important habitat for two further species, Red-billed Starling (Near-threatened) and Japanese Yellow Bunting (Vulnerable).

Appendix 2 Farmland species in Hong Kong
Birds are very mobile organisms, both as individuals and species. A full list of birds recorded in farmland in Hong Kong would not, therefore, be helpful in defining the ornithological importance of farmland. The following list, therefore, excludes species for which farmland is a minor component of the habitats occupied, aerial species (such as swifts and raptors) unless they are considered to selectively forage over farmland and species which are of accidental occurrence in Hong Kong (defined as fewer than c.20 records).

Species for which farmland is considered to be the major habitat type utilised in Hong Kong are shown in bold. Seasonal patterns of occurrence are as follows: R (resident), SV (summer visitor), WV (winter visitor) and PM (passage migrant). These codes refer to occurrence in farmland, rather than in Hong Kong. Species names and systematic order follow Carey et al. (in prep). Species indicated with an asterisk (*) are included in Collar et al. (1994).

Appendix 2 Farmland species in Hong Kong

	Dryland Agriculture	Wetland Agriculture
*Schrenck's Bittern		PM
Cinnamon Bittern		PM
Cattle Egret		R
Chinese Pond Heron		R
Black-winged Kite	R	R
Common Kestrel	WV	WV
Eurasian Hobby	SV/PM	SV/PM
Japanese Quail	WV	
Yellow-legged Buttonquail	PM	PM
Barred Buttonquail	PM	PM
Ruddy-breasted Crake		WV
White-breasted Waterhen	R	
Watercock		PM
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	PM	
Greater Painted-snipe		R/PM
Oriental Pratincole		PM
Little Ringed Plover		R
*Grey-headed Lapwing		WV
Northern Lapwing		WV
Common Snipe		WV
Pintail Snipe		WV
Swinhoe's Snipe		PM
Wood Sandpiper		PM/WV
Red Turtle Dove	WV	
Spotted Dove	R	
Plaintive Cuckoo	SV	
Common Koel	R/SV	
Greater Coucal	R	
White-throated Kingfisher	SV	WV
Eurasian Hoopoe	WV	
Barn Swallow	SV	
Richard's Pipit	WV	WV
Olive-backed Pipit	WV	WV

Red-throated Pipit	WV	WV	Crested Myna	R	R
Buff-bellied Pipit		WV	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	R	
Yellow Wagtail		PM/WV	White-rumped Munia	R	
Grey Wagtail		WV	Scaly-breasted Munia	R	R
White Wagtail	WV	R/WV	Grey-capped Greenfinch	R	
Red-whiskered Bulbul	R		Common Rosefinch	WV	
Chinese Bulbul	R	R	Yellow-billed Grosbeak	WV	
Sooty-headed Bulbul	R		Black-faced Bunting	WV/PM	WV/PM
Siberian Rubythroat	WV	WV	*Japanese Yellow Bunting		PM
Bluethroat	WV		Chestnut-eared Bunting	WV	WV
Daurian Redstart	WV		Little Bunting	WV/PM	PM
Common Stonechat	WV	WV	Yellow-breasted Bunting	PM	PM
Oriental Magpie Robin	R		Crested Bunting	WV	
Common Blackbird	WV				
Japanese Bush Warbler	WV	WV			
Zitting Cisticola	WV/PM	WV/PM			
Plain Prinia	R				
Yellow-bellied Prinia	R	R			
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler		PM			
Lanceolated Warbler		PM			
Black-browed Reed Warbler		PM			
Oriental Reed Warbler		PM			
Common Tailorbird	R				
Dusky Warbler	WV	WV			
Asian Brown Flycatcher	PM/WV				
Masked Laughingthrush	R				
Great Tit	R				
Japanese White-eye	R				
Brown Shrike	PM	PM			
Long-tailed Shrike	R	R			
Black Drongo	SV	SV			
Common Magpie	R				
*Red-billed Starling		WV			
Purple-backed Starling		PM			
White-shouldered Starling	SV	PM/SV			
Common Starling	WV				
White-cheeked Starling	WV	WV			
Black-collared Starling	R	R			

Front-line Workers at Deep Bay by Carrie Ma

Disturbance to birds and wildlife by illegal fishermen who cross the border to the Deep Bay mudflats is no longer news. These fishermen catch mudskippers and set up nets to catch birds. This has become one of the most controversial issues raised by HKBWS and conservationists. Government departments, notably AFD and the Police Force have come under close scrutiny, but it is proving difficult to prevent these fishermen's activities in Deep Bay Ramsar site.

Last December the writer conducted a two-hour interview with Mr T L Lam and Mr P M Chan, AFD wardens at Mai Po. As front-line workers they face dangerous conditions and pressures in doing their jobs. This article is intended to highlight some of these issues and increase members understanding of the role played by AFDs frontline wardens.

“Territories” on the mudflat

Active fishing has been going on the Deep Bay mudflats since the 1980s. Various territories are occupied by fishermen at Futian for fishing and catching birds. Fishermen from other parts of Guangdong, particularly from Xinhua work near Mai Po and Tsim Bei Tsui. To avoid competition over territories, they also leave their fishing-boats there.

Fishing at Deep Bay follows seasonal patterns. From November to April of the Lunar Calendar, is the “Duck Period” - the peak time for catching ducks. The “Mudskipper Period” runs from March to June and September is the crab season. In the past, there were active trade of this harvest from Deep Bay between local and Chinese fishermen. However, in recently most of these products are sold in China.

Obstacles to work execution

“Conditions have changed since the declaration of the Ramsar Site,” said Mr Lam. Their work has become more complicated, and they face more pressure and greater responsibility. To limit disturbance caused by these fishermen at Deep Bay, they make regular patrols to search for illegal activities and to chase the fishermen out of SAR territory. Sometimes they confiscate their tools (such as fishing nets and mud skateboards). Once an illegal fishermen is caught, their ID card is confiscated and the case becomes a matter for the Police.

Several simple huts discovered in the mangroves are used to store tools. The huts are often difficult to find as they can be covered by the mangroves. Helicopters are used to locate them.

“When we carry out patrols and chase the fishermen, people don’t understand our difficulties and the dangerous situations we face,” noted Mr Chan. “We sometimes face large numbers of fishermen. If we find one or two during patrol, to arrest or chase them is quite easy. However, we were once surprised to be surrounded and threatened by a gang of fishermen. Once they said that they would shoot us. In the face of such dangerous situations our only sensible way forward is not to arrest or chase the fishermen, but to “compromise” or to “be careful”.

Mr Chan still has lingering fears for his safety following this unforgettable experience. Now, each time they carry out patrols they inform the Police. “We have been surrounded by mangrove forest and unable to find an exit. Our colleagues fear for our safety - sometimes there are snakes hiding inside hides, huts and fishing nets.

The work of this sixteen-strong team is not only confined to the Ramsar wetland. They also have to carry out patrols in the Sai Kung area, at Starling Inlet, Ma Tso Lung and other areas. During migration seasons, their manpower allocations become tighter under the increased workload.

Conflicts between fishermen and bird-watchers

Apart from field patrols, they are responsible for protecting fishermen’s property from outside interference and protecting wildlife. As a front-line worker, they apparently become the middle-person between conservationists and fishermen. A few years ago, fishing nets were hung over the

fishponds of Ma Tso Lung to discourage foraging egrets and cormorants, which led to conflicts between fishermen and birders. Similar conflicts still happen, but it seems more fishermen have some knowledge of conservation and the frequency of such conflicts has decreased markedly. On the other hand, we also feel some sympathy for these fishermen because they have to support their families. Our work is to meet fishermen and the greatest challenge is to mediate disputes, Mr Lam said.

Possible solutions

Mr Lam mentioned that with limited manpower, they hope to co-operate with executive departments of the Marine Police to control and avoid disturbance to wildlife caused by illegal fishermen. AFD has ordered a hovercraft. It is hoped that this will lead to more efficient patrols. Besides, it is important to maintain a constant exchange of information between the Hong Kong and China Governments. Mr Lam noted the tight security at the border fence during the period of reunification of Hong Kong to China, when there were no reports of illegal fishermen. This suggested that such cooperation is indeed possible, and that similar measures and implementation is a necessity. He also believes Marine Police should strengthen their work on prosecution to stop the activity of fishermen in the Deep Bay area.

Mr Chan added, bird watchers should pay more attention to the illegal fishermen's activity. It would help greatly if bird watchers could inform them directly if they note any suspected illegal fishermen within

Mai Po or the Ramsar site reserve at 2471 4411 or by fax 2482 9894.

Looking Forward

It seems clear that to control or to eradicate the fishermen's activities in the Deep Bay area is not an easy task within a short time. The safety of front-line workers is a key concern along with increasing co-operation and information exchange between government departments on both sides of the border. We hope birders continue to offer help by informing the AFD information and location of suspected illegal fishermen.

“One More Bottle”

by Bad Egg #1

Because of the bad economic situation in recent years, I have been exiled to work in Cheung Chau to earn my living. For many people, it's really harsh to go to and from Cheung Chau every day. Luckily I regard myself as a naturalist and I treat going to and from Cheung Chau as a bird watching activity. One afternoon in April, I got a reward. My colleague said that a strange bird was found. I checked with bird book instantly. I found it was the Indian Cuckoo, which was always heard only with shouts "one more bottle". It seemed that the bird had crashed into a window and had fainted near my office.

I put this "drunk" in a basket together with a bowl of water and a bowl of worms. I did not have a camera on hand. Luckily there was a video camera in my office. Although the quality of the video camera was not very good, I was able to take some pictures.

Maybe I was too excited in moving the basket to film the bird. The cuckoo refused to tolerate me and flew onto a climbing plant on the wall outside my office. However, the cuckoo was not yet fully alert, and I grasped



the chance to continue filming. Tens of minutes later, the cuckoo woke up finally and flew away. It left behind it an excited birder, a untouched bowl of water and an uneaten bowl of worms.



Wildlife Liaison Officers

[This article first appeared in the April 99 issue of UK magazine Bird Watching. Perhaps the strategies suggested here could be tried in Hong Kong. Obvious areas to benefit from a designated wildlife liaison officer would be the districts around the Deep Bay Ramsar site, monitoring the wild bird and traditional medicine trades. Other suggestions or opinions would be welcomed - ed.]

Unfortunately wildlife crime does not have a high priority, but why should it be considered less important than crimes which take up so much police time? Most police officers spend their time on routine matters. These are obviously important but so is our wildlife and the conservation of the countryside.

However, a growing awareness of the importance of wildlife conservation has led to the existence of Wildlife Liaison Officers. The WLOs are police officers responsible for the investigation of wildlife crime. There are now about 600 in the UK, so there is certainly one at a police station near you.

Some officers volunteer for the role, some inherit it, and some have it thrust upon them. WLO's range in rank from Constables to senior officers such as Chief Superintendent Steve Parnwell of the Cambridgeshire Constabulary. His interest in wildlife began as a boy and he has been a WLO for some years, carrying the role with him as he moved up the ladder.

Steve believes that senior rank helps when it comes to deciding whether or not to prosecute a certain crime. "Some wildlife

investigations are resource intensive and I can assess the importance and say 'go ahead', whereas a WLO of lower rank would not be able to do this."

Steve admits that wildlife crime doesn't always have the high priority it deserves. "The illegal trade in endangered species internationally is big, big business, second only to drugs, and the evidence suggests some drug dealers are also involved in the smuggling of endangered species. It should be taken seriously."

But Steve's involvement isn't only with high profile crime. He's taken the initiative to disseminate information to farmers landowners, building and maintenance contractors about such matters as managing hedgerows and other habitats at the appropriate season - and the penalties that may result from disturbing birds and other protected wildlife.

The role of the WLO is not just to pursue lawbreakers but to inform people who may inadvertently cause harm through ignorance of the law and to encourage good management techniques which allow farming businesses and wildlife to flourish side by side.

As Steve says: "The natural world is precariously balanced. If we tip the wrong way its anybody's guess what the consequences could be on the whole ecosystem. We could say what's the score on the loss of one Blackbird's nest? Probably not great but if you multiply that up, the consequences may be serious. So we need always to consider the bigger picture."

The proactive approach which Steve supports ensures that Cambridgeshire leads the way in wildlife liaison. The proximity of RSPB headquarters with its investigation officers is an added advantage enabling the two bodies to work closely together.

But WLOs deal with all kinds of crime, not just bird related. Badger baiting, illegal hare coursing, poaching snaring, smuggling of endangered species and the use of protected animals in traditional medicines all come within their remit.

So make use of your Wildlife Liaison Officers and contact them about local wildlife issues or activities in your locality. By asking their help and advice you will show how important birds and wildlife are to you.

Silver Oriole Victim of Bird Trade *by Yu Yat Tung and Ying Hak King*

Silver Oriole breeds only in China in central Sichuan, southern Guizhou, northern Guangxi and northern Guangdong. It winters in Cambodia and southern Thailand. In May 1998 at least eight and in May 1999 at least five were reported from Babaoshan, Guangdong. This species is very rare throughout its breeding and wintering grounds. It is listed as vulnerable by Collar *et al* and endangered in China. The major threat seems to be deforestation within its breeding grounds.

Sadly, two immature Silver Orioles were found in Mong Kok Bird Market in early June, showing that bird collecting also

threatens this species. We do not encourage buying endangered species because it is likely to encourage the hunting of these birds. However, we bought them and took them to Kadoorie Farm for care, where the birds are in good condition.

Although the two birds are now safe, the problem is still unsolved. Current laws and regulations still allow the wildlife trade to threaten endangered species. Presently AFD controls and monitors all the trade in CITES species. However many endangered species, including Silver Oriole, are not yet included in the CITES list. How can these species be protected effectively? However, CITES only controls overseas trade; domestic trade is unrestricted. It is currently unclear whether trade between Hong Kong and mainland China constitutes domestic trade or illegal international trade.

Another problem is the total numbers of birds caught totally for the bird trade. Common sense suggests that this number must be very significant. Silver Oriole is not a target species for traders and is a by-catch species, for which the mortality rate is likely to be higher because hunters take less care of them.

We noted that some other species such as Chestnut Thrush Grey-throated Babbler and Golden Bush Robin were also sold in the same bird shop. This suggests all these birds come from the same shipment, presumably from southern Sichuan. The high variety of the birds caught indicates the bird population there has been heavily exploited, and it seemed to us that bird trade in Hong Kong causes a serious threat to avifauna conservation in that region.

Keeping cage birds has a long history China. However, we strongly disagree on catching wild birds for keeping in cage. Some birds such as Budgerigar are raised for the bird trade so the wild population is spared. Hong Kong's lack of strict bird trade laws regulations allows endangered species to be caught and sold in the market. Could HKBWS take a more active role on this issue? A simple survey of the bird market is suggested. One objective would be to count the endangered species being sold. The result could provide valuable information to update the list of protected species.

We would like to thank Dr. Cheung Ho-fai for generous financial support of the whole action.

Overseas Reports

Honshu and the Izu Islands, Japan 11-22 June 1999

Rob, Cerian and Cam Morris

To escape the hot, wet, birdless days of summer in Hong Kong, to have a family holiday and to see some Japanese endemic and east Asian birds, we took a 10 day trip to central Japan. It was to be a leisurely trip - not trying to do too much travelling (i.e. we didn't try to fit a trip to Hokkaido in as well) but to see everything well at the places we visited. I used Mark Brazil's "A Birdwatchers Guide to Japan" to arrange everything and it worked fine.

We flew up to Tokyo on the Friday evening and efficiently transferred from Narita to Haneda airports (everything in Japan is efficient every booking made, hotels, car hire, ferries and flights all went perfectly) for an overnight stay. The next morning we took the 8am flight to the Izu Islands for a couple of nights. We flew to Miyake Jima a beautiful volcanic island, 40mins (flying time) south of Tokyo. You can get a ferry but it goes overnight so there is little point, as you can't see any sea birds - it's too dark!

Miyake Jima 12th - 14th June 1999

We settled in to our Pension (Pension Oshidori), had lunch and Cam had his executive nap (travelling at 2 can be tough). I watched a pair of Blue Rock Thrush that were breeding in the garden, Japanese Bush Warbler and distant views of Streaked Shearwater (we were at least 1km from the coast!).

That afternoon we took a walk around the beautiful lake surrounded by native broad-leaved woodland called Tairoike. On the way, the gardens and agricultural areas held Japanese White-eye, Lesser Cuckoo (very common), Varied Tit (Izu Is. subs is very large with a chestnut cheek), Siberian Meadow Bunting, Cattle Egret and Bull-headed Shrike.

Around the lake I started to pick up the specialties (both this afternoon and on the following mornings) Izu Island Thrush was very common and Ijima's Leaf Warbler sang from every other tree. The former are like a cross between Brown and Black-breasted Thrushes and the latter are like a Pale-legged / Eastern-Crowned hybrid with no wing bars. The supporting cast included Japanese Robin

and Japanese Wood Pigeon, both easy, more Lesser Cuckoo, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Great and Varied Tits, Oriental Greenfinch and Chinese Bamboo Partridge. Pacific Swifts were overhead, and an occasional Osprey came down to the lake to feed.

The next morning I was at the lake at 4am, as it got light, in the hope of finding the rare and elusive Japanese Night Heron. I found Japanese Night Herons (as in Black-crowned), Yellow Bittern and Striated Heron but not the hoped-for Japanese Night Heron. I later found out that a birder who had been here for 20 years had only seen them 5 times.

About 6am I moved on to the close-by Toga Jinja Peninsula to look for a Hong Kong mist-net specialty - Styan's Grasshopper Warbler. The habitat was heathy scrub with scattered pines. I saw a large warbler sitting on top of a small pine tree. My first Styan's! Views could not have been better. At least 3 others sang in close proximity, all from the tops of small pines. Being an inquisitive ecologist I decided to try a quick play back experiment (I had a set of the excellent Japanese Bird CDs on tape with me). First I played Middendorf's to the nearby bird. It stopped singing momentarily and then started again; a reaction but not much. Next I played the song of Styan's the bird stopped singing and walked slowly into the tree, re-emerging about 2m from me in low scrub. I played the tape again and the bird called in alarm, I a metallic Dusky Warbler like call. The bird started singing again 2-3 minutes later. Not wanting to disturb the birds further I left it at that satisfied that a) they were Styan's (which of course they should be in this area) and b) that the Styan's/Middendorf's splitting/lumping

arguments (they have different songs, different habitat requirements and marginally different biometrics and colour) were in favour of separation! I then watched 100,000s of Streaked Shearwater off the peninsula, the odd Black-tailed Gull, Japanese Wood Pigeon feeding in the open scrub and more Lesser Cuckoos.

The next day Cerian and Cam flew back to Tokyo to go to Disney World while I took the 2pm boat, which arrives in Tokyo at 8pm. Brazil says look out for Albatrosses, which I did - but to no avail! My other dip was Japanese Murrelet (again a tricky species), but I had nothing to grumble about with great views of Streaked Shearwater, a Short-tailed Shearwater and c.10 Tristram's Petrels. As I came in towards Tokyo I had superb views of Mt Fuji.

Karuizawa 15-20 June 1999

We over-nighted in Tokyo and left the next morning. By lunchtime were in the central Japanese mountains in the superb Karuizawa area. Luxury accommodation and food - with a nature reserve 5 minutes walk from the door and hot springs for an afternoon soak (but not much for kids other than Pooh Sticks).

I concentrated on the local woodland and mostly birded between 4am and 9am, when I returned for breakfast. I saw all the key woodland birds in this time. The best birds were as follows: superb views of male Copper (very tricky in summer) and Green Pheasants (quite different from Ring-necked with which it was formerly lumped): an adult Ural Owl being mobbed by Jays in broad daylight, Japanese Grosbeaks were common whilst Japanese Yellow Bunting was scarce, with just one singing male seen at the same place every

day. Japanese Green Woodpecker was quite easy; I found an active nest and saw two males having a territorial dispute.

Other birds included numerous Narcissus Flycatchers, Ashy Minivet, Siberian, Grey and Brown Thrushes, Siberian Blue Robin, Varied Tit (a white cheeked race) Great-spotted and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Blue and White Flycatchers, Brown Dipper, Asian House Martin, Black-faced (the yellow race) and Siberian Meadow Buntings, Japanese and Short-tailed Bush warblers, Common, Lesser and Oriental Cuckoos. My first Narcissus Flycatcher was a male perched under the porch of the Hotel's Church. Until I realised how common they were, I thought this might be a message from above!

The other area I birded on was some nearby agricultural land with a lot of abandoned paddies (10 minutes drive away). Small numbers of Chestnut-cheeked Starlings were nesting in the local village, along with the ubiquitous Grey Starling. The marshland held many Chestnut-eared Bunting, Siberian Stonechat, Oriental and Black-browed Reed Warblers, (Japanese) Skylark and Black-backed Wagtails. The key bird of this area for me, however, was Latham's Snipe. I struggled to see them by walking round and round paddies and then found one sat on a telegraph wire from which it kept flying up and displaying. I also saw another Green Pheasant here out of woodland on a recently sown field (but at 4.30am!).

So Karuizawa produced nearly everything I wanted to see. I didn't see Japanese Green Pigeon (apparently scarce here) or Grey

Bunting (which occurs near Nagano but is very scarce this far south in summer). I also missed Japanese Wagtail (and was pleased I'd seen several before in SE South Korea).

Mount Fuji 21 June 1999

Forget the picture post cards of this Japanese landmark - on the day we visited all we could see was clouds - and ones producing rain. We only spent the day here and moved on back to Tokyo the next day. Due to the weather, I left Cerian and Cam shopping in Gotemba and drove up to the 5th Station on the southern side. We also visited Children's World and the Mount Fuji Safari Park so better for kids here.

The weather was terrible and as I drove up at 3pm and my hopes of the last mainland endemic, Japanese Accentor, were declining and I figured on a 25% chance. Maybe they'd be hopping around the car park at the tree-line. However, as my altimeter hit 2000m, my hopes raised as I cleared the cloud. There was still high cloud covering the summit but it wasn't raining at the treeline; I upped my chances to 50/50! I immediately started picking up Red-flanked Bluetails and Olive-backed Pipits. I then heard a thin wispy call with a slight trill to it. Sounds like a Prunella, I thought and I climbed into the dwarf pines above the car park. Within 5 minutes I was watching a pair of Japanese Accentors (UK birders: they are the most Dunnock-like of all the Asian accentors). The male sat atop a pine and sang his heart out as the evening sun appeared. It may look like a Dunnock but it was nice to see the last mainland endemic in its natural alpine habitat. I later found more, along with Arctic Warblers, Sooty Flycatchers, Brown Thrushes and more Red-flanked Bluetails lower down. We then headed

for Tokyo for an overnight stay at the Narita Holiday Inn (the birding was nearly over!).

Tonegawa and adjacent marshes

22nd June 1999

Before we flew home I popped out to Tonegawa marsh. I arrived at 4am and spent a couple of hours watching Japanese Marsh Warblers which were common and Japanese Reed Buntings. The Japanese Marsh Warblers looked quite different from the Poyang Hu birds I'd seen in November last year, however it was difficult to compare them directly as their behavior was so different. The Poyang Hu birds were wintering in long grass and only occasionally sat up on top (apart from the morning it was drizzling). The Japanese birds sat on top of reeds and made circular song flights. It was nice to see summer plumaged Japanese Reed Buntings, having seen wintering ones in South Korea and at Poyang Hu. I also kept an eye out for Schrenk's Bittern, but there was no sign of this rare breeding species.

The trip was a great success and I would encourage anyone to go for a summer holiday. The Japanese are very friendly and helpful, the food and accommodation is second to none and the birding is great and relatively easy. It's so nice to have cool, clean air in the summer months. The driving was also very easy (we didn't even get lost in Tokyo thanks to Cerian's navigation skills). The only negative thing I would say is that it is quite expensive which is OK as long as you're expecting it (\$60 for a beer!!! it's as bad as Hong Kong). The other thing I would add is go before the 20th of June. After this date it can rain a lot the last half of June and July is quite wet and we were lucky to have just one wet day.

Future Meetings

Please contact the leader several days before the meeting to confirm attendance, otherwise you may miss out on changes in timing. The X ratings convey the degree of difficulty in each outing in terms of seeing the birds; it can be very frustrating for beginners to start with a forest outing to Tai Po Kau, where birds are hard to find and can be very shy. However, all members are of course more than welcome to attend any Society event.

DATE	LEADER	VENUE	TIME/RATING
31 August Tuesday	Cheung Ho Fai	Indoor meeting: Starlings, Egrets, Herons and Bitterns, HK Observatory	18:45 X
5 September Sunday	Ying Hak King	Poi Toi, Aberdeen Ferry Pier	07:50 X
11 September Saturday	Mike Leven	Long Valley, Sheung Shui KCR taxi stand	15:00 X
12 September Sunday	Geoff Carey	Waterfowl count experienced birders only	XXX
18 September Saturday	Mike Kilburn	Tai Ho River, Lantau, Lai King MTR station	08:00 XX
26 September Sunday	Ada Chow, Karl Ng	Mai Po, 08:00 at Kowloon Tong KCR, 09:00 at Mai Po carpark	08:00 X
3 October Sunday	Ho Man Fai	Dong Ping Chau, University KCR exit	08:30 XX
5 October Tuesday	Cheung Ho Fai	Indoor meeting: Migratory birds in HK, HK Observatory	18:45 X
10 October Sunday	Geoff Carey	Waterfowl count experienced birders only	XX
17 October Sunday	Henry Lui	Tai Po Kau, Tai Po Kau carpark	08:00 XXX
23 October Saturday	Li Wai Ki	Tsim Bei Tsui + village dinner, 14:30 Kowloon Tong, 15:30 carpark TBT police station	14:30 X
31 October Sunday	Cheung Ho Fai	Shing Mun to Tai Po, Tsuen Wan MTR Hang Seng Bank	08:00 XXX

2 November Tuesday	Cheung Ho Fai	Indoor meeting: Chats and Thrushes, HK Observatory	18:45 X
7 November Sunday	Ng Cheung Fai, Robin Fung	Mai Po, 08:00 at Kowloon Tong KCR, 09:00 at Mai Po carpark	8:00 X
13 November Saturday	Carrie Ma	Bird Market tour, MTR Prince Edward Hang Seng Bank	15:00 X
21 November Sunday	Yam Wing Yiu	Ho Pui, Tai Lam Chung, Tai Tong, Yuen Long Heng Heung Bakery	8:30 XXX
28 November Sunday	Shirley Lam	Kadoorie Farm, Tai Wo KCR exit	8:30 XX

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

* Members using the coach must confirm attendance by returning the booking slip with payment. Those using own transport please notify Cheung Ho Fai - the maximum number for a Mai Po meeting is 50, as set by the AFD permit. Failure may result in being refused access to the reserve. Bus cost is HK\$40 for members and HK\$60 for non-members.

Minibus HK\$100 deposit. Exact cost to be shared by all participants

Payment to the society may be made in two ways:

- By cheque in English made out to the "Hong Kong Bird Watching Society"
- Payment can also be made by Electronic Transfer to Account No 004-500-208152-838 Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank in favour of "The Hong Kong Bird Watching 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 and contact Cheung Ho Fai if they are unable to attend.

Latest tide table for Tsim Bei Tsui is available at the Hong Kong Observatory website
<http://www.info.gov.hk/hko/astron/tidetbtc.htm>

Telephone numbers: Geoff Carey ; Cheung Ho Fai ; Carrie Ma
; Yam Wing Yiu (contact Cheung Ho Fai); Shirley Lan ; Ng
Cheung Fai ; Li Wai Ki ; Ying Hak King ; Karl
Ng ; Mike Leven ; Herny Lui or phone a
Committee Member.



灰頭麥雞 (錦田)
Grey-headed Lapwing (Kam Tin)

黃亞萍·孔思義
J. & J. Holmes



黑領椋鳥 (九龍公園)
Black-necked Starling (Kowloon Park)

壞蛋1號



紅領綠鸚鵡 (香港動植物公園)
Rose-ringed Parakeet (Zoological & Botanical Gardens)

壞蛋1號