



香 港 觀 鳥 會

THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

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通 訊 Bulletin 173 Autumn 秋季 1999



冠魚狗 (車八嶺)  
Crested Kingfisher (Che Ba Ling)

盧嘉孟  
Lo Kar Man

# 雀影集

## Photographing Birds VII:

飛鳥 Feiniu



蓑羽鶴 (新疆)  
Demoiselle Crane (Xinjiang)



河鳥 (新疆)  
White-throated Dipper (Xinjiang)



白背磯鶇 (新疆)  
Rock Thrush (Xinjiang)



藏雀 (青海)  
Roborovski's Rosefinch (Qinghai)

余日東  
Yu Yat Tung

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## *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)

## Finally . . .

by Mike Kilburn

Apologies to all members for the lateness and brevity of this issue of the Autumn bulletin. An unfortunate combination of overload at work and personal circumstances has resulted in the Bulletin being put on the back burner for the last few months. There appears no sign that the pressures of work will diminish in the near future, making the likelihood of future delays too high to be ignored.

As a result we are looking for a new editor. If you are a native English speaker with an interest in birds and birding in Hong Kong and China, and have the time (20 - 30 hrs per issue) to source, collate and edit articles (and probably write a good number), then please contact either Mike Kilburn on [mkilburn@hkstar.com](mailto:mkilburn@hkstar.com) or CY Lam at 2369 8138.

## New Editor for the Annual Report

Tai Sheung Lai has stepped down from the editorship of the Annual Report after holding the position for a year and working with Geoff Carey to bring the 1997 report to fruition. The Society is grateful to Mr Tai for his work in helping to maintain the excellent standard which birders worldwide expect from the Annual Report. The 1998 Report will be edited by Geoff

Carey and Carrie Ma, and then passed over to Mike Leven from 1999.

## Farewell to David Melville

By Mike Chalmers

Following his first arrival in Hong Kong over 25 years ago and after 15 years with WWF Hong Kong, David Melville left in November to live in New Zealand. Most of you will know him as the Executive Director of WWF-HK where his highly visible profile, booming voice and authoritative stance made him the highly respected public face of the organisation and ensured its status at the top of local conservation groups.

After graduating in UK in zoology, David first worked on bird strike studies for a proposed new London airport at Maplin in Essex.

When the Hong Kong Government created a post of Ornithologist in the Agriculture and Fisheries Department for bird strike studies at Kai Tak, David was an obvious choice and he began the first of two consecutive three year contracts in the mid 1970s. [*When he lectured on the subject to the editor, who was a primary school student at the time!*] The bird strike studies led him to study Black Kites, gulls and shorebirds in greater detail, and his ringing work established the foundation of the very active ringing programme which subsequently developed in Hong Kong in the mid 1980s. He also began the Deep Bay waterfowl counts in 1979, which have gone

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on to provide so much vital data for establishing Mai Po as a wetland of international importance.

He was not a conventional civil servant. His long hair tied back and his penchant for standing on the roofs of Government vehicles for wader counts separated him from most, and after his second contract ended he spent a period in Thailand and India working on bird conservation studies.

Around 1984, WWF Hong Kong was founded and decided to adopt the Mai Po as its flagship local project. A Reserve Manager was needed and again David was ideally suited. He turned his hand to all aspects of establishing the reserve and was even named as the Resident Engineer for the construction of the Education Centre. As WWF-HK grew, David grew with it, becoming the Conservation Officer, then Director of Conservation and lastly Executive Director.

Through most of his time in Hong Kong he has been a Committee Member of the Society, acting as liaison with WWF, serving on the Records Committee and as a learned scientific guru, especially on matters of taxonomy and references. His huge personal library has always been available for our use, and he has compiled local bibliographies for both the last and next checklists.

He has been a giant in local ornithology. His wisdom and scientific training have kept us on track and his determination has

made Mai Po and WWF-HK what they are today. At the same time he has established an international reputation for himself in bird strike, moult, wetlands and Asian birds, and has played an active role in international conservation. He will not be retiring in New Zealand to hang up his binoculars and put his word-processor away. Without the day to day demands of running a 50 strong organisation, he plans to catch up with the writing of about three years of accumulated papers.

On behalf of the Society we thank him sincerely for all he has done for us and for the immense contribution he has made to ornithology and habitat conservation in Hong Kong, and we wish him, Vicky and Julia a very happy, healthy and rewarding life in New Zealand.

## **Porcupine! - an Apology**

*by Mike Kilburn*

The lead feature article in the last issue of the bulletin - "Farmland birds in Hong Kong", by Mike Leven, first appeared in the December 1998, issue 18 of *Porcupine!* as a portion of a special feature entitled "Focus on Farmlands".

The editor carefully obtained permission from both the editor of *Porcupine!* and the author to reproduce the article, but then forgot to acknowledge the original source in the text. Apologies all round and another free plug for the only publication to cover every aspect of Hong Kong's biodiversity.

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You can receive Porcupine! free of charge by sending your mailing details to Eva Tam, Department of Ecology and Biodiversity, Hong Kong University, Tel: 2975 5632 Fax: 2517 6082.

## **Big Bird Race Moves to February**

The Big Bird Race 2000 is moving from the traditional mid-late April spot to 25-26 February. Although this will mean the competition no longer falls during Hong Kong's peak migration season and the range of species recorded is likely to be somewhat lower, there are good reasons for moving the race to this midwinter slot.

The most important aspect of the race is of course the fundraising. According to WWF less than one percent of funds raised is pledged in "dollars per bird seen", so the likelihood of a lower species count should not cause a serious dent in income from the event. The change in date means that now is the time to begin fundraising and sending out sponsorship letters.

In past years problems in selecting a date when holidays and tides combine so that both birds and birders were available meant the race was being held later and later in the spring, which limited the number of species and made for hot, humid and uncomfortable birding conditions. The cooler weather of February will be much more pleasant.

A midwinter race also provides the teams with new challenges, as the mix of birds in Hong Kong is very different - out go the

terns, cuckoos, most of the flycatchers, some warblers, and many of the waders, but the possibility of more gulls, ducks, thrushes, other warblers, raptors and the pelicans as well as the unexpected, means there will be plenty to look for.

Many local birders will also appreciate the freeing up of April so that they can enjoy the peak of the passerine and wader migration without the need for the desperate rush of the bird race. In addition, Mai Po will not close on one of the most popular weekends of the year for overseas visitors.

## **Nightbird 2000**

One of the findings to emerge during the preparation of the new Hong Kong checklist was that the status and distribution of nightbirds in Hong Kong was poorly known. To rectify this, the Society plans to survey a selection of sites at night to detect owls and nightjars and also cuckoos and crakes, starting January 2000.

If you are interested in taking part, please contact one of the people below. You must be prepared to cover a site regularly (probably monthly).

Richard Lewthwaite  
Yu Yat Tung

## **Philippine Birding Tours**

Oriental Adventures Inc and Tim Fisher, Philippines' most experienced birder and

tour leader, offer a variety of weekly (7-9 days) birding trips to specific parts of the Philippine islands in search of their numerous endemic birds. The tours, divided into the various regions to allow us to maximize our chances, are as follows:

1. Standard Luzon. Mt. Makiling; Quezon N.P., Angat Watershed; Mt. Polis.
2. Luzon Adventure: Sierra Madre Mountains, Aurora Province.
3. Mindanao Adventure: Katanglad Mts. & PICOP, Surigao.
4. Mindoro & Palawan ( St. Pauls and Balsahan )

5. Palawan Adventure: St. Pauls, Ursula Island and Mt Mataling.
6. Visayan Islands: Bohol, Negros and Cebu.

Other destinations can be arranged.

The tours will be organised and led by Tim Fisher. For full information, including detailed itineraries, checklists and prices, please contact us as follows:

Oriental Adventures Inc  
129, C.M. Recto St., BF Homes, Paranaque, M. Manila, Philippines.

Email: [fisher@qinet.net](mailto:fisher@qinet.net)

## Conservation News

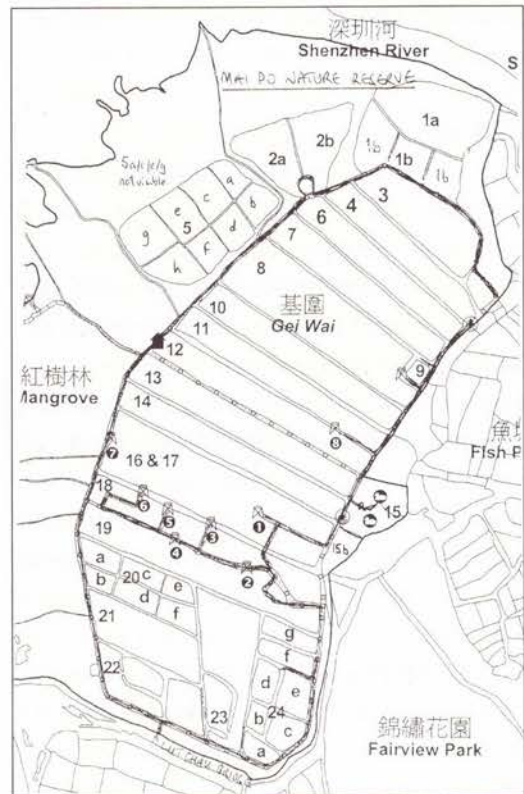
### Deep Bay Update

by *Lew Young*

#### Changes to gei wai management

This autumn, the recently completed '1999 - 2003 Mai Po Management Plan' will be presented to the Wetland Advisory Committee of the Agriculture and Fisheries Department for final endorsement. It is hoped that there will not be any major changes to the plan as it very much follows the objectives of the management plan for the larger Mai Po and Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site.

If the endorsement process goes smoothly, there will be changes to the way in which



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the reserve will be managed in the coming years. For example, the reserve will be managed as large, discreet blocks of habitat. For example, *gei wai* 8 (in front of the Tower Hide), 10 and 11 will be managed to conserve the reedbed habitat, *gei wai* 12, to 14 (by the Education Centre) managed to conserve the mangrove habitat, and much of the southern *gei wai* (from 20 to 24), managed as a 'freshwater habitat'. In addition, there will be much more careful control of the water levels on the 'scrape' areas in front of the Tower Hide and the hide by *gei wai* 11 where many waders are seen during the spring northward migration. A tighter programme of water level control will be achieved by taking these ponds out of commercial *gei wai* shrimp production. Instead, the water levels will be managed for roosting waterbirds. Demonstration *gei wai* shrimp farming will continue in *gei wai* 12 to 14.

### ***Fish stocking***

Due to the reports from fishermen in the past about wintering Cormorants taking fish from their ponds, an integrated plan to resolve the problem was agreed by the AFD, the local fishermen's association and WWF Hong Kong. Under this plan, WWF Hong Kong will buy trash fish (mainly Tilapia) from the local fishermen to stock in one of the Mai Po *gei wai*, so that this pond would then act as an alternative feeding area for these birds. In the past, *gei wai* 3 at the northern part of the reserve has been used for this work, but under the Mai Po Management Plan, this *gei wai* is part of a block of ponds to be managed for Black-faced Spoonbills, and not for Cormorants.

As a result, we will still buy trash fish from the fishermen this winter but will carry out a trial to stock the trash fish in *gei wai* 8 instead of *gei wai* 3. This is because past experience has shown that the sudden abundance of fish will attract many birds into that pond to feed, such as herons and egrets, and of course Cormorants. With the Tower Hide overlooking *gei wai* 8, the potentially large number of birds that could be attracted into this pond will be quite a sight for students and visitors to the reserve who use this hide during their tour of the reserve.

### ***Earth moving this winter***

Earth moving will continue this winter in *gei wai* 24a, at the southern end of the reserve. It is expected that the work will start in October and continue until February next year. The aim is to turn *gei wai* 24 into another block of rain-fed 'freshwater' ponds similar to *gei wai* 20 which was so good for waterfowl last winter.

### ***Field trials for aquatic plants***

Visitors to the southern part of Mai Po over the summer, may have seen a number of large netted cages set up by the side of *gei wai* 24b, with different plants growing inside. This is because of the International Wetland Park project at Tin Shui Wai. The Territory Development Department has set up a series of planting trials for freshwater plants to see which species are able to grow in the Deep Bay environment and thus, would be suitable for planting at the future wetland park.. The trials will continue until mid 2001.



## **AFD Hovercraft now in operation**

AFD's long awaited hovercraft has been delivered and is now in operation in the battle to reduce the human disturbance to the birds and other wildlife in Deep Bay from illegal mudskipper fishermen and bird trappers. Initial signs suggest that the hovercraft is giving pause for thought to illegal exploiters of the bay and will be an effective tool for AFD patrols. There is no doubt that the hovercraft will make patrol duties much safer for AFD's wardens, who formerly were restricted to using mud scooters.

The 6.6 m hovercraft is located at the police post at the southern end of the reserve. It has been deliberately chosen for its quietness and small, manoeuvrable size, in order to limit its impact on the Ramsar site.

Although an area of mangroves has been cut back to provide rapid access to the creek between Mai Po and Lut Chau, the overall benefit to the Ramsar site of more effective boundary enforcement makes this a small price to pay.

## **Long Valley**

Pressure on Long Valley has greatly increased following the gazettement of the Lok Ma Chau Spur line, which will drive a railway right across the marsh, while plans for nearby Kwu Tung new town and another road suggest that government has little awareness of the ecological significance of the site. This autumn the Society began its own counts of the site to supplement the already extensive data which demonstrates

the tremendous value of Long Valley for birds - over 200 species have been recorded here. Excavations for the river retraining scheme have dramatically shrunk the area available for wildlife on this excellent mosaic of wet and dry agriculture, fishponds and marshy grazing areas.

Despite the construction of the drainage channels, good numbers of scarce birds continue to be found here, including Painted Snipe, Hoopoe, Citrine Wagtail, Japanese Quail, and Woodcock on a single visit in early November, and Northern Lapwing, Ruddy Crake and Northern Skylark on another day later in the month.

The most recent meeting of the Conservation Committee has decided that the new threats to Long Valley are so strong, and that there is no other site with this habitat type which is so attractive to birds that this will become the Society's flagship conservation project for the foreseeable future.

## **Tin Shui Wai International Wetland Park**

The feasibility study for the International Wetland Park (IWP) has been completed by HKTA and submitted to Legco for approval. If approved, Government will allocate funds towards building the visitor centre and the core zone of the IWP.

Following meetings over several months, HKBWS, WWF and the Conservancy Association eventually persuaded HKTA to write in plans for increasing the total wetland

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area of the park; HKTA agreed to amend their study to show that the transformation of non-wetland areas to wetland areas is a medium range plan for the park. It is hoped these new areas will become a freshwater marsh and a scrape, increasing the habitat types in the park and increasing the attraction of the site for birds.

### **South West New Territories**

The Planning Department unveiled its intentions for South West NT, meaning Lantau and other outlying islands, at a public consultation session in September. This plan proudly designated South Lantau as a zone for leisure and tourism particularly of Hong Kong residents.

Despite promises made by government during the planning and construction of Chek Lap Kok Airport that South Lantau would be left largely untouched, the key move in the plans for southern Lantau are the construction of the North Lantau to Mui Wo link road (at an estimated cost of HK\$1.2 billion), the creation of a new town in the Tai Ho Valley, the creation of another new town with a “baseline population” of 17,000 people in the Mui Wo Valley and the construction of new roads along the south side of Lantau.

The Planning Department claimed that the new town at Mui Wo would act as a gateway to the area, apparently without considering that the principal attraction of South Lantau was the relatively rural environment in the villages, country parks and beaches. Can any

readers explain how a town of middle density housing for 17,000 built over a formerly beautiful agricultural valley will act as a representative gateway for a rural leisure area? - it completely defies logic!

The last bulletin has already raised the issue of the Mui Wo - N Lantau Link Road, but this meeting added to the feeling that the Transport Department has precious little justification for building the road except that they want to build one.

There was a very strong negative sentiment against all of the proposed major works in the plan from the great majority of those who offered comments.

Details of a highly successful Society visit to Tai Ho and Mui Wo in September were posted on the website. Highlights included several Dollarbirds over the farmland at Tai Ho, Yellow-rumped, Brown, Grey Streaked and Sooty Flycatchers in the Fung Shui woods in both valleys, Black-winged Stilts on a couple of fields at Mui Wo, Yellow Bittern, Banded Rail, Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler and over 100 roosting Night Herons and Egrets of various species in the marsh at Mui Wo. All these birds would face either total or partial removal of their habitat in this area under the current plans.

### **Mitigation in Action – Route 3**

This is a new section of Conservation News which will highlight instances where mitigation of major developments will be reviewed to highlight both positive and

negative cases. In this issue woefully weak mitigation measures at the Route 3 Au Tau intersection are introduced.

Route 3 refers particularly to the huge road interchange at Au Tau to the northwest of Yuen Long built by the Highways Department. The Reinstatement and Maintenance Plan for Fish Ponds at Au Tau has not been a success. Adding insult to the injury which deemed a mitigation area of 1.84 hectares sufficient for the permanent loss of almost 17 hectares of fishponds, the mitigation ponds, totalling 1.4 hectares were surveyed 7 times over a four month period and a total of just 26 birds of 11 species were recorded.

This sad figure comes of little surprise when one considers that the mitigating ponds are surrounded by the busy highways of the new intersection. Worse still, one pond has no coverage except gravel chips with high levels of zinc contamination - hardly ideal habitat for wetland birds. Planting bamboos inside the triangle of the intersection to replace the egretty lost at Tung Shing Lei was another nice touch. No egrets are currently breeding there.

### **Seabirds on Pedro Blanco**

Does anyone have any records of which seabirds are using the island of Pedro Blanco in waters East of Hong Kong as a breeding site? Photos of bird remains have been seen, but there are no concrete records of birds from that location. Please pass any

records to the Recorder, Geoff Carey at [gjc@netvigator.com](mailto:gjc@netvigator.com)

### **Joint Dunlin Migration Project**

In August 1999, Japanese and US government officials colour flagged 700 Dunlin on their breeding grounds at North Slope Alaska. The Japan-US Joint Dunlin Migration Project is a concrete step to monitor the decline in wintering Dunlin in Japan. This project aims at studying migratory paths by attaching colour flags to Dunlin in Alaska and to collect re-sighting information in wintering grounds in Japan, Korea, China and other areas.

There are a several subspecies or populations of Dunlin that winter in East Asia. A population that breeds in North Slope, *Calidris alpina arctica*, has been selected in the initial phase of the study. This population winters in Japan and other parts of East Asia. The birds are marked as follows:

Right tarsus: light blue ring/metal ring  
Left tibia: dark green flag

In September 1979, over 1,200 Dunlin were colour marked with picric acid at the Yukon Delta in Alaska. Over that winter there was a recovery in Kochi, Japan and a further 11 observations. There was also a sighting in Taiwan. Please forward any sightings to:

Minoru Kashiwagi  
Japan Wetlands Action Network  
Tel/Fax: (81) 42-583-6365  
E-mail: [TAE04312@niftyserve.or.jp](mailto:TAE04312@niftyserve.or.jp)

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## Colour-ringed Eastern Curlews

Eight Eastern Curlews, four adults and four juveniles, were banded this summer in the Arkhara River basin of the Arkharinskaya lowland in Siberia. Any sightings should be reported to Alexey Antonov by email at [hingan@amur.ru](mailto:hingan@amur.ru). The following ring combinations were used:

Left tarsus: metal ring,  
Right tibia: plastic band (red for adults,  
orange for juveniles)

*[Finding and noting colour-ringed birds adds a new dimension to searching through flocks of gulls and waders, particularly at high tide roosts and at the Mai Po boardwalk. In addition to sending the record to the appropriate researcher, members are requested to submit the record to HKBWS either via the Excel spreadsheet which is downloadable from the Society website, or on a standard record -ed.]*

### China Conservation News

#### **Black-faced Spoonbill Colony Discovered in China**

*by Simba Chan*

Exciting news to come from the ongoing satellite tracking of Black-faced Spoonbills

wintering in Hong Kong and Taiwan is the discovery of a new breeding ground and the first breeding record of the species in China. The breeding site is on Changshan Island, on the south-eastern coast of Liaoning Province.

In mid-June 1999, Prof. Ding Wenning of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) visited the island and found 3 pairs of Black-faced Spoonbills. Prof. Ding Wenning (who also discovered the large wintering flock of Siberian Cranes at Poyang Lake in 1980) and Dr. Ding Changqing of CAS returned to the island in mid-July and found one nest with 3 chicks. However, two other nests had been disturbed by egg collectors (fishermen who collect eggs for food) and the birds were incubating a second brood. The island is also significant as a breeding ground for Chinese Egrets.

Other information discovered during this year's successful satellite tracking is summarised as follows. Most of the birds (7 out of 12) returned to the western coast of the Demilitarized Zone of the Korean Peninsula.

It is a little surprising to find birds wintering in the two major wintering grounds (Mai Po Marshes and Inner Deep Bay in Hong Kong, Tsangwen Estuary in Taiwan) from the same breeding ground. Two birds captured in Hong Kong stayed at the northern edge of Yancheng Nature Reserve in Jiangsu Province PRC. We lost

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track of two other Hong Kong birds. One Taiwan bird (a young bird) is still in Taiwan.

## **White-eared Night Herons at Chebaling**

*From reports by J&J Holmes and Yu Yat Tung*

On 24 August 1999 Chinese language TV in Hong Kong carried a news item about the discovery of a live specimen of a White-eared Night Heron in Guangdong. Scenes were shown of the bird, apparently caught by a farmer, and handed over to officialdom. The location of the finding was not given, but the background looked like Che Ba Ling Nature Reserve in Northern Guangdong, perhaps best known as a site for Blyth's Kingfisher. The museum in Che Ba Ling has a stuffed specimen of this species, apparently taken in the reserve years ago.

The reserve was visited by Lee Kwok Shing, who confirmed the report but noted that the reserve staff had already released the White-eared Night Heron. They said the bird appeared healthy and flew off strongly when released.

Soon after another White-eared Night Heron was found nearby by reserve staff. Unfortunately this bird had an injured wing and is unlikely to be able to fly again. The bird is being kept in captivity and represents the second record of this

critically endangered species, which is one of the ultimate target birds for avid China listers.

## **Sclater's Monal Seen in Yunnan**

This spring two groups of Hong Kong-based birders visited the Gaoligongshan Mountains in western Yunnan in search of Slater's Monal in April and May 1999. Both groups saw the birds on Er Nao Zi Mountain between 3,400 and 3,600 metres. These are the first sightings by overseas birders in China in recent times, and included calling and displaying males in April and a female with chicks in May. The birds were present above the tree line in low bamboo thickets.

Slater's Monal is very poorly known in China, although preliminary research was carried out on the birds in the Gaoligongshan Mountains in 1998 by Shi Cao-chun of the Gaoligongshan Natural Reserve Bureau.

### **Hong Kong Birding**

**Recent Reports:  
July - September 1999**  
*by Richard Lewthwaite*

*Please note that these are unchecked records and not accepted records. Members are strongly encouraged to*

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*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.*

### **July**

In what is the quietest month of the year, the discovery of a Red-crested Pochard associating with Chinese and Burmese Spotbills at Mai Po from 11th caused some excitement, but in view of the date the bird was surely an escape.

On 13th, a Black-faced Spoonbill was at Mai Po, while 30 Black-naped, seven Bridled and six Roseate Terns around Tang Chau (Bush Reef, inner Tolo Harbour) were seen from the pier at Tung Tau Chau, at the end of the road from Plover Cove dam. A Black Baza was seen in circumstances suggesting nesting at Sha Lo Tung on 13th-14th.

Reports from Leadmine Pass on 17th included a female Hainan Blue Flycatcher feeding a fledgling, a Large Grass Warbler, four Rufous-necked Scimitar Babblers and a Rufous-capped Babbler. The two latter species were both regularly reported during the month in Tai Po Kau which they appear to be colonising from Shing Mun. Also at Leadmine Pass, the powers of mimicry of the Hwamei were evident with one individual including in his repertoire imitations of Crested Serpent Eagle, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Common Koel, Chestnut Bulbul and Yellow-cheeked Tit.

On 28th at Mai Po, two Asian Dowitchers were among 1000+ newly-arrived shorebirds and three Besras were present, while on 29th an unidentified cuckoo, very recently fledged, was seen in Tai Po Kau flying across the Red Walk pursued by a singing and alarming male Hainan Blue Flycatcher, and a Black Baza was at Mai Po village.

### **August**

At Mai Po, this was a very good month for Greater Sand Plovers, with 450 (an autumn high) on 3rd, and Asian Dowitchers, with two on 1st, four on 9th, eight on 14th and nineteen (also an autumn high) on 26th. Also reported at Mai Po were singles of the following species: Chestnut Bittern on 9th, Black-winged Kite on 14th, 19th (juvenile) and 31st, and Schrenck's Bittern, Purple Swamphen (juvenile) and Hoopoe on 28th.

Typhoon Sam scored a direct hit on Hong Kong bringing only, 20 terns from Cape d'Aguilar on 22nd, of which 17 were Bridled.

Elsewhere, three Black Bazas were at Nam Chung and an exceptionally early Red Turtle Dove at Shuen Wan on 3rd, followed by six Collared Finchbills (Cat E) at Hong Kong Park and the first Forest Wagtail of the autumn at Tai Po Kau on 22nd.

### **September**

A Siberian Blue Robin at Wo Tin, Lantau on 12th.

Two storms scored direct hits on Hong Kong in this month, neither bringing spectacular reports, again suggesting that typhoons have to make landfall to the west of Hong Kong to bring in seabirds.

Typhoon York, the first to arrive, was described as the most powerful storm to hit Hong Kong in 15 years. Its best birds were a Brown Booby and three Greater Crested Terns in southern waters and two further Greater Crested Terns from Cheung Chau during its approach on 14th-15th and 11 Black Bitterns (by far the highest recorded day-count), a Sooty Tern and a possible Arctic Tern at Cape d'Aguilar during its landfall on 16th. Only about 200 terns, mainly Bridled and Whiskered, were reported from Cape d'Aguilar and Cheung Chau. In its aftermath on 17th, there were over 450 Cattle Egrets at Tsung Kwan O reclamation, 133 Cattle Egrets and 16 Intermediate Egrets at Shuen Wan and a Black Bittern at Mai Po.

Tropical Storm Cam, which made landfall on 26th, was much weaker and brought reports of about 300 terns from Cape d'Aguilar and Cheung Chau, including 105 Bridled and 75 Aleutian.

Between the two storms, reports were received of 60 Pintail Snipe and an Oriental Cuckoo at Long Valley on 18th, an Oriental Plover at Chek Lap Kok on 21st, a Pied Harrier at Mai Po, a Grey-headed Lapwing at Long Valley and a Eurasian Collared Dove at Palm Springs on 23rd and a Purple Heron at Tai Long Wan and a

further six Grey-headed Lapwings at Kam Tin on 25th.

The series of Black Bittern reports in its best-ever autumn continued with singles trapped at Mai Po on 19th (retrap), 23rd, 24th and 25th.

The month closed with reports of an Eagle Owl near Tuen Mun on 29th and a fall of migrants at Po Toi on 30th which included eight Blue Rock Thrushes, 50 Black Drongos, four Black-naped Orioles, a Daurian Starling, an Ashy Minivet and a Chinese Goshawk.

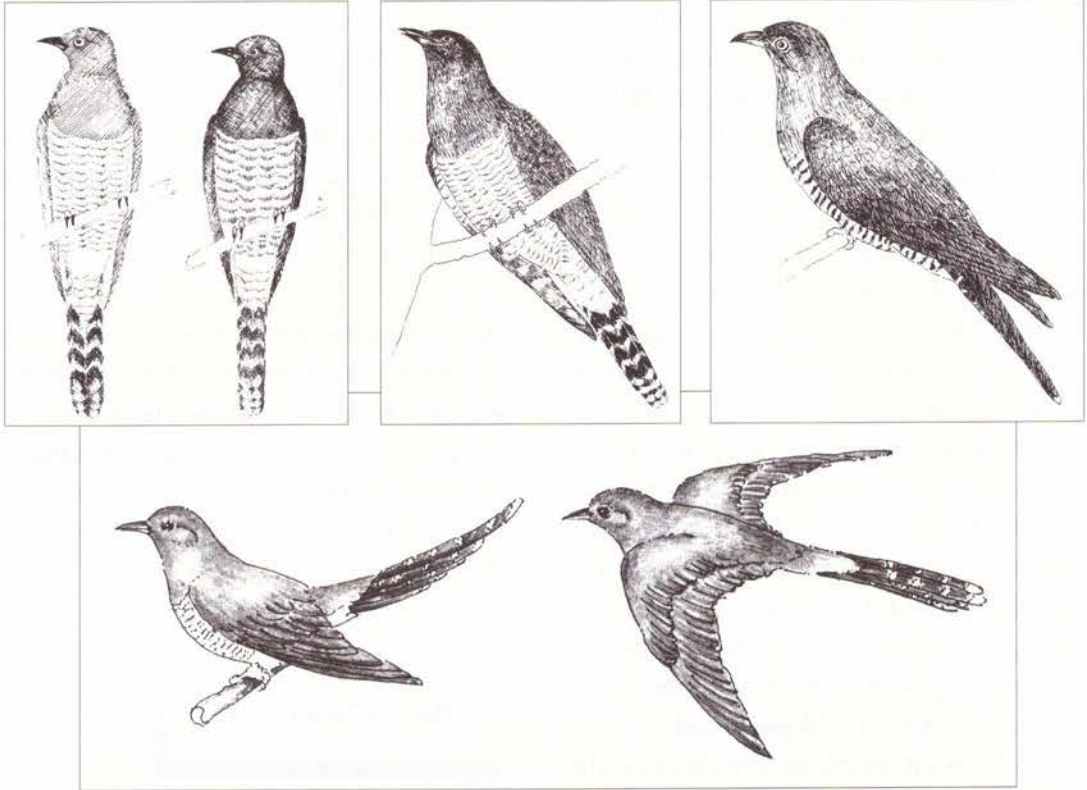
### Take a Closer Look

#### Common and Oriental Cuckoos

by *H F Cheung*  
Illustrated by *YY Lee*

Common Cuckoo and Oriental Cuckoo are difficult to separate in the field [*extremely difficult! -ed.*] There has been no acceptable record of Common Cuckoo in Hong Kong, although it was recorded at Ba Bao Shan in northern Guangdong in May earlier this year. In comparison, there are several Oriental Cuckoo records annually. Oriental Cuckoo is a migrant. The best months to see them are September-October and April-May.

Common and Oriental Cuckoo are very similar in size. In summer when Cuckoo



calls regularly on their breeding grounds, their separation is straightforward. However Oriental Cuckoo seldom calls in Hong Kong. So field separation of the two species relies on careful observation.

The commonly mentioned field marks are: (1) Oriental Cuckoo has wider dark bands on the breast. (2) For grey-phase birds, the wing colour of Oriental Cuckoo is darker than the rest of the body, whereas in Common Cuckoo the wings are similar in colour to that of the upperparts. The best field marks may be that the underwings of Oriental Cuckoo have a very clear white band in the centre, whereas the underwings of Common Cuckoo are less well marked.

## Photographing Birds VII

### Digital Video Camcorders - Part 2

by *feiniu*

Many birders with digital video camcorders (DV) consider them as good a tool for a birder as binoculars and a telescope. DV not only helps birders to 'watch' birds but also record what they have seen. There is no doubt that a DV makes it easier for birders to take photos much more easily, especially in low light, and at longer distances than traditional cameras. However, making things too



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powerful and too easy is not necessarily the best approach. Why ?

First, modern technology always reduces the need for instinctive human ability and leads people to rely on external devices other than their own eyes, sense, feeling and judgement, alienating people from nature. Although knowhow and equipment are important for taking good photos, what turns a good photo into a great one is when it is not simply a scientific record, but also a piece of art that communicates some sort of feeling common to all people.

Second, people and birds have no common language but they may share a certain kind of common feelings. The closer he approaches, the stronger the feeling of existence becomes. This is a kind of communication between birds and birders which might lead to greater understanding. You are no longer an 'onlooker'; what you do will affect the bird and what the bird does will affect you .

We should be aware that modern technology often eliminates the chance of this kind of close contact and even prevents people from understanding their instincts and the value of nature. Simply speaking, a DV is a good tool, but to what extent does it affect your approach to birds, birding and bird photography? You will only find the answer through wholehearted participation. Only your own feelings will make good photos.

## Features

### **Photospot: Roborovski's Rosefinch**

*by Yu Yat Tung*

Roborovski's (or Tibetan) Rosefinch is one of the most distinctive species of rosefinch. The wings are very long, reaching to the end of tail, the bill is in conical shape and it has very short legs.

The male has deep red head, reddish mantle, wings and uppertail, more pinkish underparts and a greyish bill. The female is less conspicuous, with mainly grey plumage tones. The head, mantle and upperwings are grey and finely streaked. The breast and belly are paler than the upperparts, but the breast also shows some fine streaking. In contrast to the male, the bill is a bright orange yellow.

The taxonomic position of this species is still unclear. Some authors suggest treating it as a member of the rosefinch family, with the scientific name *Carpodacus roborowskii*. However, others suggest this species belongs instead to different genus, giving it the scientific name *Kozlowia roborowskii*. It has also been considered to be closely related to the snowfinches (*Montifringilla*), mountain finches (*Leucosticte*) and buntings (*Emberizidae*).

This species is endemic to the Tibetan Plateau and can only be found in China.

Although the alternative name links the species to Tibet, this species has been recorded almost exclusively from Qinghai province in recent times. The type specimen of this species was collected on the Burhan Bodai Shan in 1883 during the expedition to the headwaters of the Yellow River [*by some of the greats of Western Chinese ornithology -ed.*] - General N.M. Przevalski, Lieutenant V.I. Roberovski and Lieutenant P.K. Kozlov.

In 1993, a flock of 15 (12 males and 3 females) were seen on the border of Qinghai and Tibet at the Tanggula Shan Pass at about 5,200 metres - the first observation of this species for over fifty years. Subsequently, a number of birders have seen this species in eastern Qinghai Province (Ba Yan Ka La Shan Pass, Er La Shan Pass and south of Wenquan) in the past few years at altitudes ranging from 4,500 to 4,800 metres.

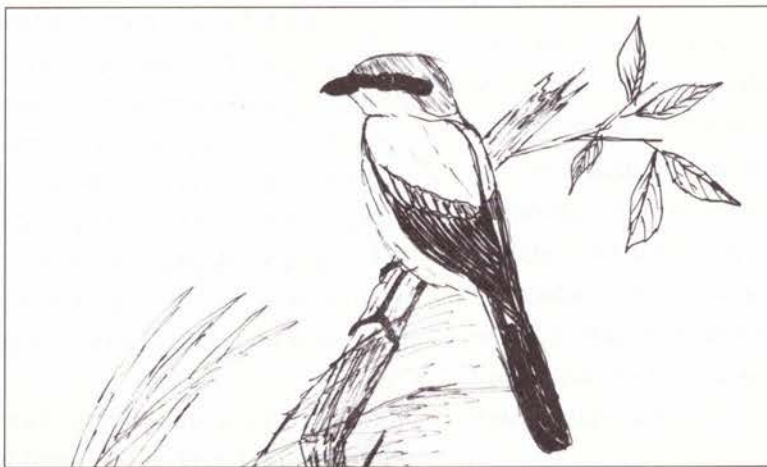
Much of the ecology, population and behaviour of Roberovski's Rosefinch remain unknown. It is categorised as a 'data deficient species' in *Birds to Watch 2: The World List of Threatened Birds*.

A group of 16 birdwatchers visited Qinghai province from 16 to 31 July 1999, seeing a total of six birds (five males and 1 female/immature) at Ba Yan Ka La Shan Pass on 21 July. A single female/immature was again seen in the same vicinity on 27 July. Finally three males and one female or immature were found at Er La Shan Pass on 28 July. These photographs were taken on 28 July.

The habitat at these passes was very similar, with peaks composed entirely of small rocks and an area of alpine grassland below the rocky area. It was wet, possibly with meltwater. The rosefinches were seen feeding on the grassy area and flew off both up and down the slope when approached too closely.

### Exciting Talent

This wonderful ink drawing of a Long-tailed Shrike. Shrike was drawn by Matthew Kwan. The editor would welcome pictures of a similarly high standard from other artists, particularly work which illustrates Hong



*Long-tailed Shrike*  
Matthew Kwan

Kong birds in their natural habitat as well as this drawing does.

## Overseas Reports

### Slow Boat to Hahajima

by *Jim Hackett*

The Ogasawara or Bonin Islands form the tip of a volcanic archipelago that arcs for about 1000km south of Tokyo Bay. Two of the islands (Chichijima and Hahajima) are served irregularly by a venerable freighter, the *Kyoshu Maru* no. 28. On March 1 1999 we are loading a motley cargo on Tokyo docks. This includes three light goods vehicles, pallets of bricks, big bags of cement, packaged food and beer, 150 drums of fuel, about 100 big cylinders of gas, and a large rock (for a garden?). The passenger manifest lists Hackett J and Hackett M. By 18:00 we are chugging out of the mouth of Tokyo Bay. Eleven souls in all, under the care of Captain Shigeki Tuda, bound for the Bonins over the waters of the Pacific.

We are invited to the bridge, and I am on station at dawn on March 2 to see the open sea. There is a swell which gave us a fitful night. I tick Streaked Shearwater - fine views, while Laysan and Black-Footed Albatrosses are frequent.

Towards noon I sense a course change. Captain Tuda explains that he reprogrammed his autopilot to bring me close to my isle of dreams - what a fantastic man! Suddenly, I

have a wrench in the gut. A blob on the horizon is - the fabled island of Torishima. The next hour will be critical and I go to red alert status. A half-hour creeps by and the island grows larger. It is 14.00.

The bird must have been on the water in the path of the ship. It is suddenly there. It flies down the port side, wheels, and comes right around. Below, there is the finest of black margins to the all-white underwings. Above, the head is suffused with orange and carries a big pink bill. The outer upperwings are black. And the diagnostic feature is there. The tertiaries are BLACK against a white innerwing. While the upperbody is white, the tailtip is black.

There are only about 600 in the world, and all but a few breed on Torishima in the northern winter (there are small numbers on the equally inaccessible Senkaku Is.). This is the Short-Tailed Albatross. I take a bearing - 085 to the northern tip of Torishima. Range is 6nm.

I have another adult, and a mostly dark immature (with white patches on the bases of the upperwings). On the return trip there are 3 more birds within the 6nm radius. I have an adult 20nm N of Torishima, and a single immature, though with white below, 45nm N

And a bonus. The gadfly petrels flitting over the waves, with fast banking in the swell, have clear M marks on the upperparts, appear all-white below, lack a noticeably dark cap, and have no white in

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the tail. Both coming and going I tick Pycroft's Petrel (3 birds in total) - presumably the first migrants from northern New Zealand.

Pre-dawn on March 3, I am on the bridge as the day lightens. There are islets to starboard and we are surrounded by hundreds of (light phase) Wedge-Tailed Shearwaters and Tristram's Storm-Petrels (a tick). The numbers gradually drop off as Chichijima looms.

We dock at 10.00 and the crew offloads cargo all day. We wander the island. There are not supposed to be any birds of note, but I find the resident race of the Common Buzzard interesting. It is leucistic. From below, the most obvious feature is the black belly-patch. While the wingtips are margined black, the dark carpals are missing. From above, the bird is light brown with white splotches. A split of the future?

At 06.30 on March 4 we are off on the 2.5 hour trip to Hahajima. The waters are rather birdless - I have a few more Wedge-tailed Shearwaters, 5 Sooty Terns, and the 2 common albatross species. There is a surprise - we have about 20 Humpback Whales, some of which blow near the ship. One powers its 10m bulk right out of the water beside us, corkscrews in the air, and thuds back into the sea. Fantastic.

We dock at Hahajima at 09.00 and I am told we have 2.5h on land. That should be enough.

I trot off up the street. Bloody white-eyes all over. Time is passing slowly. It is 10.30 and we have an hour to go.

I return, unsettled, to Maria, who is sitting on a seawall admiring the view. "Go up the street past the playground", she says, "it's birdy up there". I do so. More white-eyes. There is a Brown-Eared Bulbul also. And one other bird. I focus, get a bad view, but sag with relief. That's it. I scamper round the tree and catch another bird. Brilliant view as it feeds quietly for 10min. Yellow below, yellow above with grey cowl. Black frons and a neat black pattern on the face and ear-coverts. This is the endemic Bonin Islands Honeyeater, and the only bird of interest on Hahajima. We return to the Kyoshu Maru and go back to Chichijima.

March 5 is to be the crew's rest day on Chichijima. We hire a motorbike to explore the island. It is raining and the day is a bit of a trial. I drop Maria back at the dock where she is invited to work (laptop) in the company office (the ship is off for a few hours). She gets little done, what with constant chats, offers of coffee and soft drinks, photo viewing, and gifts of pencils and a tweeter with the "beguro" (the honeyeater, of which all the locals are very proud) pictured on the side.

I get very wet and am returning grumpily to the office at 14.00 or so when I walk into an event! The Ogasawara Maru (the fast ferry - see below) is leaving. A hundred or

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so people line the ship's side and half of Chichijima seems to have turned out for the farewell. And all along the dock, "Auld Lang Syne" pours from speakers. In the shed there are 20 or so tearful 12-year-old girls; it is explained that their "classmates" (an exchange program?) have just left for Tokyo. Phlegmatic teachers pat random backs. Things settle down slowly.

The return trip is routine, and we are soon back in Hong Kong.

## Coming Activities

Date	Leader	Activity / Gathering location	Time	Difficulty
5 December (Sun)	Chueng Ho Fai	Li Chi Wo 08:00 Tai Po Market KCR station (taxi station)	08:00/ 17:00	XXX
7 December (Tue)	Chueng Ho Fai	Indoor meeting: Buntings of HK 18:45 Hong Kong Observatory	18:45	X
11 December (Sat)	Ian Tyzzer	Mai Po * 13:00 Kowloon Tong KCR station (taxi station exit) or 14:00 Mai Po carpark	13:00/ 18:00	X
19 December (Sun)	Ho Man Fai	Shing Mun 08:00 Tsuen Wan MTR station (Heng Seng Bank)	08:00/ 12:00	XX
<b>2 0 0 0</b>				
2 January (Sun)	Stanley Ng	Lui Kung Tin (near Shek Kong) 09:00 Yuen Long Heng Heung Bakery	09:00/ 13:00	XX
9 January (Sun)	Cheung Ho Fai	Kowloon Hill catchment 08:00 Mei Fu MTR station (Heng Seng Bank)	08:00/ 12:00	XX
16 January (Sun)	Wong Chuen Yu	Tung Chung 09:00 Tung Chung MTR station (Heng Seng Bank)	09:00/ 13:00	XX
16 January (Sun)	Geoff Carey	Waterfowl count at Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site (only experienced birdwatchers)	Please contact leader	XXX
23 January	Forrest Fong	Tsim Bei Tsui 08:00 Tsuen Wan MTR station (Heng Seng Bank) or 09:00 Tsim Bei Tsui carpark	08:00/ 16:00	X
25 January (Tue)	Geoff Carey	Indoor meeting: Gulls in HK 18:45 Hong Kong observatory	18:45	X
30 January (Sun)	Cheung Ho Fai	Ng Tung Tsai 08:00 Tai Wo KCR station exit	08:00/ 14:00	XXX

13 February (Sun)	Henry Lui Karl Ng	Mai Po * 08:00 Kowloon Tong KCR station (taxi station exit) or 09:00 Mai Po carpark	08:00/ 15:00	X
13 February (Sun)	Geoff Carey	Waterfowl count at Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site	Please contact leader	XXX
February 20 (Sun)	Mr and Mrs T P Luk	Chinese New Year gathering 14:00 Hong Kong Observatory	14:00	X
February 26-26 (Fri/Sat)		WWF HK		Big Bird Race 2000

Cheung Ho Fai 2788 7882 (O), Iar Tyzzer 2834 0873 (H), Wong Chuen Yu 2602 0416 (H), Ho Man Fai 2487 7365 (H), Stanley Ng 2448 2609 (H), Geoff Carey 2608 1281 (H), Forrest Fong 2476 5444 (H), Henry Lui 9208 8525 (M), Karl Ng 2573 2625 (O), Mr & Mrs T P Luk 2571 1890 (H).

### Note

Priority is given to members of the Society. Please contact the leader several days before the meeting to confirm attendance, otherwise you may miss out on changes in timing. The X rating conveys the degree of difficulty in each outing in terms of seeing the birds; members are of course more than welcome to attend any event.

\* Members who use the Society coach to Mai Po must confirm their attendance by returning the booking slip with payment. Those using own transport please also notify Dr H F Cheung - this is important because the maximum number of members who can attend the outing is 50, as set by the AFD permit. Failure to do so may result in being refused access to the reserve

**From 2000 onwards, non-members joining Mai Po trips will have to pay the coach fare irrespective of whether they make use of the coach.**

Payment to the society may be made in two ways:

(1) Please return the attendance slip with a cheque in English made out to the "Hong Kong Bird Watching Society"

(2) Payment can also be made by depositing money into A/C no. 004-500-208152-838 of Hongkong Bank in favour of "Hong Kong Bird Watching Society", but please send the booking slip in as well to confirm you payment and attendance.

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

Tidal information

<http://www.info.gov.hk/hko/astron/pretide/epremap.htm>

## Activity Booking Slip

### Mai Po December 11 (Sun)

I wish to reserve \_\_\_\_\_ places on the coach.

\*  HK\$40 Members     HK\$60 Guests     HK\$20 Students

Name : \_\_\_\_\_ Contact No. : \_\_\_\_\_

Address : \_\_\_\_\_

Cheque for HK\$ \_\_\_\_\_ (In English. Payable to **Hong Kong Bird Watching Society**)

Date : \_\_\_\_\_ Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

*Note:*

*Because of the tight enrollment schedule, please send this application by fax to: 2518 8171 to confirm your attendance, and pay by CASH to the tour leader during the date of outing. For enquiry, please contact Miss Ada Chow, the Hon. Secretary at 2594 5098.*

Late applicants will also be accepted subject to the space available.

\* Please  as appropriate



### Mai Po December 11 (Sun)

I wish to reserve \_\_\_\_\_ places on the coach.

\*  HK\$40 Members     HK\$60 Guests     HK\$20 Students

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灰喉山椒鳥 (大埔潛)  
Grey-throated Minivet (Tai Po Kau)

蔡啟堯夫婦  
Mr. and Mrs. Choi



紅脇藍尾鶇 (米埔)  
Red-flanked Bluetail (Mai Po)

壞蛋 1 號



黑枕燕鷗 (香港東面水域)  
Black-naped Tern (Eastern Waters of Hong Kong)

吳掌輝  
Stanley Ng