



THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

香港觀鳥會

Bulletin 通訊 178

Winter 2000
冬季





圖例一：隱藏的黃斑葦鶉
要正確調焦在黃斑葦鶉的眼睛上，如用自動系統很容易會受四週的水草干擾而出錯

Pic.1. A concealed Yellow Bittern
The surrounding grass can confuse the autofocus system making it impossible to focus correctly on the eye of the bird



圖例二：前後分佈的磯鶉
一群前後分佈在木框上的磯鶉，自動系統不會幫你選擇你所要的一隻

Pic.2 A group of Common Sandpiper standing separately
Auto-focus cannot know on which bird you wish to focus. It cannot automatically focus on the right one for you



圖例三：飛翔中的鸕鶿
300mm鏡頭，1/250秒，角距很窄，鸕鶿經過畫面的時間十分短，用了預先調焦的方法，再在鸕鶿在畫面適當的位置時急速完成餘下的對焦動作。這方法可縮短轉動鏡筒的距離，但要拍攝者自己預先厘定距離

Pic.3 A flying Cormorant
300 mm lens, 1/250. The cormorant flies across the picture frame in just less than a second. Here it is best to use the manual pre-focus method



圖例四：飛行中張口鳴叫的夜鷹
入夜之前一刻，殘餘光線不足以令自動對焦系統起作用，紅外線也難準確投射，固純依靠輪廓及預先調焦來拍攝，也即是只能在一個預設的距離內拍攝

Pic.4 A flying Savanna Nightjar
Extremely low light conditions. Use manual pre-focus method by catching the silhouette of the nightjar

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Society News

Renew your support for the Society

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 2001 are now due. Please return your subscription together with the renewal form contained in this issue as soon as possible (Cheque payment are preferable).

If you wish to take a more active role in running the society and feel you have skills which could be of use, please contact Carrie Ma at 2377 4387. We particularly need assistance in the following areas:

- bulletin (contributors, typists, translators)
- promotion and publicity
- education
- website (information update)

Submission of bird records for the year 2000

Members are requested to submit bird records for 2000 to the Recorder before the end of January for review by the Records Committee. As recent experience in the Long Valley campaign has shown, bird records can play an important part in influencing planning and conservation decisions and policies. Please, therefore, make every effort to submit all records.

Bird watching for beginners

Starting mid-January and lasting for three weeks, HKBWS will organise bird watching classes for beginners. There will be three evening lectures (17, 24, 31 January) and three outings on Sundays (21, 28 January and 4 February to Kowloon Park, Long Valley and Tsim Bei Tsui/Mai Po respectively). The fees are \$350 for non-members and \$200 for members. This includes the bus fare for the outings. For information, please call Carrie at

2377 4387 during office hours or Ada at [REDACTED] in the evening. To register for the classes, please send in an application form and cheque. Spaces are limited. Please register early.

New Bulletin Editor

As from next issue, the Society will have a new bulletin Editor, Lawrence Johnstone. Lawrence is a member of the Conservation Committee and has been deeply involved in the Long Valley campaign since the beginning of the year. He will collect and edit articles for the Society's bulletin. Members who have English language articles for the bulletin are encouraged to contact Lawrence on [REDACTED] (office) or by e-mail at L.johnstone@ifm.org.hk. For Chinese language articles, please contact Henry Lui at [REDACTED].

We would like to thank Mike Kilburn for the great contribution he has made as Editor of the Bulletin since he took over Peter Hopkin's job in March 1997. The changes Mike has made in the style and content of the bulletin have made it into a quality publication of which the Society can be justly proud. We also thank John Holmes for his help in editorial and translation work.

New location of indoor meetings

Lawrence Johnstone has kindly agreed to allow the Society to use Room 604 Wilson House, 19-27 Wyndham Street, Central when it is not otherwise occupied. Any changes from this venue will be notified.

Big Bird Race

The next Big Bird Race will be held on 2nd to 3rd March in 2001.

HKBWS Projects

(1) Quality Education Fund Project

With the support of Quality Education Fund, we have carried out a project which promotes bird watching in secondary schools for half a year. Now, there are five schools which have established bird watching clubs:

- Hong Kong Tang King Po College
- Fanling Renish Church Secondary School
- Baptist Wing Lung College
- Buddhist Tai Hung College
- Q.E.S.O.S.A. Secondary School

Different schools have their own environments and styles which demanded a differentiated approach to the implementation of the project in individual schools. We are using a "tailor-made" approach to plan and fit their needs. In November and December, we have organized talks on the usage of binoculars for some of the schools, and it was very well received.

In addition, we have organized talks and field study trips for 17 schools and have reached 2,700 students. Our activities have also been the target of the press, there are reports on Sept 27 (Hong Kong Economic Times), November 24 (Ming Pao) and on December (Hong Kong I-Mail School section). We have received a number of enquiries from secondary and primary schools about opportunities for future participation.



On December 15 and 16, we organized the "Mai Po Overnight" for students of Hong Kong Tang King Po College. This enabled them to experience overnight at a nature reserve and bird watching in the early morning. The activity attracted QEF's crew to take films for their programme.

(2) Waterfowl Count at the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site Waterfowl Count Training

Training and Counts



A training session for potential counters was held on November 5, 2000. This is a training course carried out by the Society for potential counters and interested birdwatchers on essential skills for monitoring the number of waterbirds present in Deep Bay areas.

Coming dates of waterfowl counts:

January 14, 2001

February 11, 2001

March 11, 2001

Experienced or trained counters who are interested in to joining can contact the recorder at recorder@hkbws.org.hk.

Education and publicity

- A website on "Waterfowl Monitoring at Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site" has been constructed and linked to the HKBWS website at www.hkbws.org.hk/waterbird/index.html. Apart from the introduction to the importance of waterfowl counts in Hong Kong, the contents of the website also include reports and summaries of waterfowl count activities.
- A leaflet on waterfowl count will be produced in January in order to encourage more members who would like to contribute to bird and habitat protection, to join the waterfowl count activities.
- The Agriculture Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) is producing a series of exhibition boards for education purposes and for the World Wetland Day. Our Society has been invited to supply material relating to waterfowl monitoring for the exhibition board production.

(3) Country Park visitor center

From September to October, the Society has developed activity material for six visitor centers of country parks run by AFCD and organized guide-tour for visitors.

(4) Tai Po Kau Bird Watching

This November, the Society has provided four sections of a bird watching course and education material for secondary school teachers. A leaflet will also be produced for the programme.

(5) The Hong Kong 2001 Stamp Exhibition

The Society will participate in the Hong Kong 2001 Stamp Exhibition. We will have an exhibition booth introducing birds and their environment in Hong Kong. Members interested in helping in the preparation work can contact Carrie Ma at 2377 4387 or Robin Fung at 2362 1620.

(6) The world wetland day

In order to celebrate the world wetland day, the

Agriculture, Fishery and Conservation Department is organising a bird watching competition on 17 February for secondary school students. The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society has agreed to help as trainer and referee. We need volunteers to help us with this. Will anyone who is interested in helping out please contact Carrie Ma and Cheung Ho Fai.

(7) Golden Award Holders' Association Hong Kong

In order to promote bird watching among the youth, the Society is organizing a bird watching course for GAHA, which is a sub-section of Hong Kong Award For Young People, from November 2000 to April 2001. This also provides a further chance for potential award holders to improve their skills.

Acknowledgements

Flower Bird Insect & Fish Show



The 14th North District (2000) Flower Bird Insect & Fish Show was held on December 22-27. Our Society

had an exhibition booth introducing the Quality Education Fund Project which promotes bird watching as an extra-curricular project in Secondary School. We would like to express our thanks to the following people and organizations for their contribution:

Sponsor:

Quality Education Fund

Birding friends:

Robin Fung, Cheung Ho Fai, Chan Ka Chuen, Chan Yung, Louis Cheung, Chu Chui Ping, Ada Chow, Lau Kwong Yuen, Li Wai Ki, Lo Kar Man, Mr. and Mrs. T. P. Luk, Henry Lui, Samson So, Carrie Ma, Captain Wong, Wong Chap Cheong, Yu Yat Tung, Winnie Yung, Ying Hak King, Yam Wing Yiu.

Schools - Bird Watching Clubs:

Hong Kong Tang King Po College, Fanling Rehnish Church Secondary School, Q.E.S.O.S.A. Secondary School and Baptist Wing Lung College.

Talk on "How to use Binoculars"



The Society has organized a series of four talks for bird watching clubs in the QEF project. We thank Mr. Leo Chan of Swarovski

H.K. Ltd for his precious time and provision of education material.

Natural KuanDu: A Dream Park



The 2000 Taipei Birdwatching Fair namely "Natural KanDu: A Dream Park" organized by the Wild Bird Society of Taipei

was held on October 28-29. Yu Yat Tung and Carrie Ma have attended the fair for the Society. Representatives of 12 countries took part in the fair including the Flyway Network. Exhibitions and booths were set up showing the public the importance of protection of KuanDu wetland. These enhance the public's understanding of the Nature Park which opens in July 2001. We thank WBST for partly sponsoring our flight to Taipei. We also wish every success to the conservation work of the KuanDu Nature Park..

Conservation News

Stop Press

Long Valley - a Victory!

October 17, the Director of the Environmental Protection Department has rejected the Environmental Impact Assessment of KCRC regarding its Sheung Shui - Lok Ma Chau spurline which threatened to destroy the habitat of rare migratory birds. KCR has started an appeal against DEP's decision. Mike Kilburn and Ng Cho Nam have been invited by EPD as expert witnesses for this case.

In the 18 December issue of TIME, the DEP's decision to reject the spur line development was chosen as one of the five best pieces of

environmental news in the world this year.

Fellow members of Hong Kong Bird Watching Society as well as conservation groups in the "alliance" should be proud of our efforts which have led to the creation of this positive image for Hong Kong. It has been an incredible achievement.

Our Society also thanks all those who spent time and effort in the campaign. Further information about the campaign can be found in the latest "Save Long Valley II" bulletin.

Hong Kong Conservation News

by Mike Kilburn

Further dumping at Kam Tin

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, KRC is once again showing its true colours at Kam Tin. They are dumping earth excavated from the West Rail construction site on the buffalo fields, which for the last few years have provided the only reliable site for Grey-headed Lapwing in Hong Kong.

Complaints to EPD about this have revealed that the buffalo fields and nearby fishponds are private land (although like all land in Hong Kong are actually leased from the government), and that EPD has no power to prevent the dumping under the Waste Disposal Ordinance, provided the landowner has no objections.

What this shows is that KCR, who are fully aware of the dumping, simply could not care less about Hong Kong's natural heritage, especially when

it gets in the way of one of its projects. It is completely understandable that many in Hong Kong have grave concerns about permitting such an irresponsible developer to behave in the same way at Long Valley.

Tai Ho Road rejected by EPD

Plans by the Highways Department to run a road through the Tai Ho Valley and some of the most sensitive areas of the Mui Wo Valley, (including the marsh, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest) has been rejected by the Environmental Protection Department. This is good news both for birds and for the fish populations of the Tai Ho Valley, which is the most important catchment in Hong Kong for fish diversity.

The justification for the project is to improve road safety and access for South Lantau residents. Highways Department is currently exploring other options including a possible widening of the Tung Chung Road. This is seen as the most

acceptable option as the development of tunnels is likely to open the door for full-scale development of South Lantau, which is opposed by all green groups.

Shuen Wan Marsh struggling to recover

Last Year the Bulletin reported on the illegal filling and subsequent prosecution and reversal of the filling of Shuen Wan Marsh by local villagers. The Planning Department played a proactive role in causing the marsh to be cleared again. Unfortunately it appears that bird numbers have not yet fully recovered, possibly due to the fact that flooding of the marsh is now far less regular than it once was, with only very heavy rain or exceptional tides inundating the affected part.

In addition Richard Lewthwaite, who covers the marsh on a regular basis, believes that numbers of fish-eating birds have been well down on previous years - notably Cormorants, herons and egrets. It is not clear why this is, but it is possible that the road straightening project has had some impact.

Of concern are further development pressures on the site, including a sewage pumping station by the marsh's main outflow to the sea, and a proposal from Wheelock to develop some of the areas surrounding the marsh for low density housing. However, part of the plan is to turn the main wetland areas of the marsh into a reserve, which will receive funding for long term management. According to the developer's intentions, it will eventually become part of the Wetland Conservation Trust (although this Trust, which also affects Nam Sang Wai, Fung Lok Wai, San Tin, and possibly Long Valley) is still not confirmed. Unlike KCR over the Spur Line,

a proposal for ongoing funding and management has been included in the proposal, making the developer's concern for the environment rather more credible.

New Development Planned for San Tin

Sun Hung Kei is currently in the preliminary planning stages for a major new housing development at San Tin on land which is currently designated as part of the Deep Bay Wetland Conservation Area (the buffer Zone for the Mai Po/Deep Bay Ramsar site).

The developers have taken a similar approach as at Fung Lok Wai, whereby the developer has bought a large area of fishponds and plans to use around 5% of the total site area for development, while turning the remainder of the site into a nature reserve.

This being Hong Kong, the initial plans for San Tin comprise a development of 53 blocks of up to 20 floors! There is no doubt that the impact from a development of this scale and the arrival of several tens of thousands of people will fundamentally change the character for the area.

However the developer has also shown some creativity in proposing to restore what is currently a container yard so as to locate all the housing in a single location, thus limiting disturbance to the site, which is at the northeastern corner of the Deep Bay area.

Having begun discussions with the Society and other green groups well in advance, the developer has the possibility to amend their plans to take ecological factors into consideration well in advance.

Mai Po Update

by Lew Young

Black-faced Spoonbill surveys

Studies on the Black-faced Spoonbill wintering in Deep Bay over the past few years has shown that birds roosting at Mai Po will travel to Pak Nai and Futian Nature Reserve (Shenzhen) to feed. There is also a small population of up to 20 Spoonbills that winters in Macau but we do not know if those birds mix with those in Deep Bay or not. As a result, AFCD and WWF HK will be carrying out surveys every two weeks of the Black-faced Spoonbills around the coast of Deep Bay (from Mai Po to Pak Nai and including Futian), and in Macau. We will especially be looking out for colour marked birds. If anyone sees a coloured marked bird, please check the colour combinations on the legs and then inform Dr. S.T. Tsim (AFCD, sttsim@netvigator.com), Yu Yat-tung (ytyu@hkstar.com) or Lew Young (lyoung@wwf.org.hk). Many thanks!

Earthmoving works this winter

During the course of this winter 2000/2001, there will be a number of earthmoving projects going on within Mai Po. One of these will be in Pond 16B, which is the small pond at the back of the scrape. This pond is generally quite shallow and as a result, it has become overgrown with grasses, particularly Buffalo grass (*Paspalum conjugatum*), which is of little use for wildlife. The earthmoving work will involve deepening the pond by some 10cm and then reflooding it with rainwater.

Earthmoving will also be carried out at the sluice gate half of Pond 23 to remove the Buffalo grass and to deepen the pond. This pond will also be

reflooded using rainwater to try and convert the pond into a freshwater pond.

Mini-tower Hide

Anyone who has been to Pond #20 last year may have seen a mini-tower hide at the back of the pond made from scaffolding and green tarpaulin. This aim of this hide is to give a view of the ducks at the back of Pond #20. This hide is open to the public and be reached from the concrete footpath between gei wai # 18 and 19. As the hide is quite small, we would suggest not having more than 2 people in there at any one time.

China Conservation News

by Cheung Ho Fai

Chinese Crested Tern

The very rare Chinese Crested Tern has been recorded in the Island of Majou in the Taiwan Strait in the month May to August. Several pairs were seen sharing the breeding colony with Great Crested Tern on a small remote island. Breeding was apparently successful. Chinese Crested Tern has not been confidently recorded for over twenty years. This latest discovery represents one of the major breakthroughs in the conservation of endangered bird species in the Oriental region.

Kunming Ornithological Congress, Yunnan

Cheung Ho Fai, Yu Yat Tung, Ying Hak King and Paul Lau joined the Kunming Ornithological Congress this August. The China Ornithological Society also held its general meeting in Kunming this August. CY Lam was elected a committee member. We congratulate him on that.

Breeding site of Red-footed Bobby

There was report of a breeding site of Red-footed Booby on an island in Paracel Islands in the

Hainan Province area. Estimates of up to 10000 pairs were found.

New breeding Site of Black-faced Spoonbill

This summer, Black-faced Spoonbill was found breeding on the small island outside Liaoning province for the second year. Several pairs were present, together with numerous breeding Chinese Egrets. This year also saw a seemingly continuous increase in the number of Black-faced Spoonbill in the wintering ground. The latest count was close to 800.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper

message from Christoph Zockler

This summer, we managed to catch and ring 8 ad. and 6 young Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmaeus*) in the breeding area in Chukotka (Russia) with a light green flag.

Now, specially Hongkong birders or those of you looking in Korea or other places most likely to encounter Spoon-billed sandpipers, please look out for light green flags.

The actual situation is according to our (E.E. Syroechkovski, P. Tomkovich and others) surveys very serious and much worse than expected. many areas, earlier known as breeding sites were completely deserted.

More detailed information will be published soon

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Hong Kong Birding

Recent Reports:

February - May 2000

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.

June

Apart from a Baillon's Crake found dead near Mai Po on 2nd and two Whiskered and three White-winged Terns near Tap Mun on 17th, there were few reports of migrants in a generally quiet month.

On 9th single Black Bazas were at Tai Po Kau village and Hang Tau. Bridled, Roseate and Black-naped Terns were seen near Tap Mun on 17th. On 28th, there were a total of nine Painted Snipes at Kam Tin and Long Valley. The latter site also held a Peregrine, a Hobby and a Common Sandpiper.

Preliminary results from the Nightbird Survey this month included Slaty-legged Crakes calling at four sites, Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo at Wo Hop Shek, the Oriental Scops Owl in the same area in Tai Po Kau, Grey Nightjars at four sites in the Eastern New Territories, and up to seven Savanna Nightjars at Kau Si Chau.

July

In a month when very few reports were received, highlights were an Oriental Pratincole at Long Valley on 8th, 330 Bridled, 80 Black-naped, five Roseate and two White-winged Terns in Tap Mun/Shek Ngau Chau waters on 22nd, a Blue Rock Thrush and two Upland Pipits at Tai Mo Shan on 23rd, four Painted Snipes and a Hobby at Long Valley on 27th, and on the same day a Common Kestrel at Chek Lap Kok (potentially the earliest ever autumn date by about six weeks).

Though reports from the Nightbird Survey indicated generally very low levels of vocal activity in this month, there were still two Slaty-legged Crakes calling at Plover Cove on 14th.

August

Early autumn migrant waterbirds included up to two Pintail Snipe at Ho Pui and Kam Tin on 2nd and 3rd, up to nine Asian Dowitchers at Mai Po during 4th-12th and again on 26th, a Chestnut Bittern at Yau Mei San and a Ruff at Mai Po on 19th, a Long-toed Stint and 25 Pintail Snipe at Long Valley on 23rd, and 120 Red-necked Phalaropes off Lamma on 30th. A Wigeon and a Shoveler at Mai Po on 27th were unusually early.

Birds logged during boat trips included 50 Bridled, two Aleutian, one Common and one Black-naped Tern near Sek Ngau Chau on 26th and 30 Aleutian, two Common and 21 Black-naped Terns in the East Lamma Channel on 30th. A dark-rumped petrel was also seen during the latter trip.

Six Asian Paradise Flycatchers were reported during the month, the earliest being at Tai Po Kau on 6th. Other migrant passerines reported were Grey and Yellow Wagtails at Long Valley

from 19th, a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler at Mai Po on 27th, a Brown Shrike at Wu Kau Tang on 29th, and a Forest Wagtail near Tai Po Kau on the same day.

The most interesting reports of the month's Nightbird Survey were from Kau Si Chau where an Eagle Owl and a minimum of 12 Savanna Nightjars were seen on 25th.

September

One of the best Septembers in recent years opened with two Long-toed Stint, 10 Swinhoe's and 50 Pintail Snipe, three Red-rumped Swallows (potentially the earliest ever autumn date) and a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler at Long Valley on 1st. The next day 300 Red-necked Phalaropes were at Cape d'Aguilar and single Forest Wagtails at Clearwater Bay, Aberdeen CP and Mount Nicolson.

Following the arrival of the first surge of the northeast monsoon of the autumn, migrants noted at Kap Lung on 9th included a Fairy Pitta (potentially the first since 1994), seven Asian Paradise Flycatchers (a new high count), three Japanese Paradise and three Yellow-rumped Flycatchers. Also seen there were 10 Pale-legged Leaf Warblers, five Arctic and one Eastern Crowned Warbler. The same day at High Junk Peak, Clearwater Bay CP, a buttonquail sp and two exceptionally early Bright-capped Cisticolas were found.

In what proved to be a very good month for *Phylloscopus* warblers and flycatchers, especially productive sites were Kadoorie Farm, Kap Lung Forest Trail and the nearby Twisk Nature Trail. The three most frequently encountered flycatchers, each with over 20 reports in the

month, were Asian Brown, Yellow-rumped and Asian Paradise Flycatchers. There were also reports of at least eight Sooty, six Japanese Paradise, two Hainan Blues, two Black-naped Monarchs, one Red-throated, one Ferruginous (rare autumn record in Tai Po Kau on 30th) and one Brown-chested Flycatcher (potential 2nd ever record on the Brown Walk in Tai Po Kau on 27th). Among the *Phylloscopus* warblers, Arctic and Pale-legged Leaf were by far the most frequently reported, followed by Yellow-browed and Dusky (both from 16th); at least 10 Eastern Crowned and one Greenish were also reported.

Forest Wagtails were also much commoner than usual with more than 15 reported during the month, including three on the forest road leading up to Leadmine Pass on 17th.

Among other interesting reports were a Collared Dove at Mai Po on 8th, a Grey Bushchat at Mount

Austin on 14th and three Chinese Goshawks at Kadoorie Farm on 16th (potentially the earliest ever autumn date). Also on this date, a Black Baza was seen at Mong Tseng, two Eagle Owls at Chau Tau, and a total of 17 White-breasted Kingfishers at Tsim Bei Tsui and Nam Sang Wai, highly suggestive of passage. Other non-passerines in this period included an Oriental Cuckoo and three Dollarbirds at Pak Nai, a Pied Harrier at Mai Po and a Schrenck's Bittern at Long Valley on 17th, a Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Mai Po on 19th and a Grey Nightjar at High Junk Peak (Clearwater Bay) on 24th.

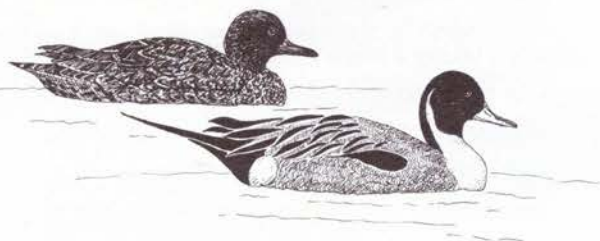
The month ended with at least three Oriental Plovers at Chek Lap Kok on 28th, a Barred Buttonquail and buttonquail sp at Long Valley on 29th, and two Black Bulbuls at Leadmine Pass, a Japanese Sparrowhawk (potentially earliest record), and another Grey Nightjar at High Junk Peak, all on 30th.

Take a Closer Look - Ducks

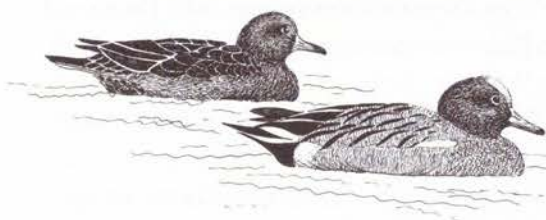
by H F Cheung

Illustrated by YY Lee

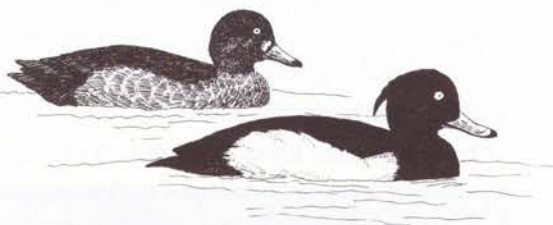
In winter, large number of ducks occur in Deep Bay. The most common ones are Eurasian Wigeon, Pintail, and Shoveler. Tufted Duck is also relatively common. Female ducks are usually quite difficult to separate. Very often, females are associated with the males (so look for the males to identify the females). If one knows the shape of the males well enough, then separating the females becomes easier.



Pintail is among the largest ducks. Its head is brown and significantly darker than that of Eurasian Wigeon. There is a thin white line along the back of the neck. The very long and thin 'tail' is also very distinctive on males. The female has a very plain head, slender neck and relatively thin bill.



Eurasian Wigeon is the smallest of the three. Its round head and short bill is quite distinctive, and this is the basic feather in identifying the female. When the light is good, the golden yellow forehead on the bright chestnut head is diagnostic for the male. In flight, the male shows a large white shoulder patch. Eurasian Wigeon and American Wigeon are known to produce hybrids, which show varying amounts of green on the face.



Tufted Duck is also relatively common in Mai Po. This is an example of a diving duck, which dives completely under water during feeding. Tufted Duck has a bill with a black bill tip. This kind of bill is also shared by other diving ducks. To identify the Tufted Duck the loose tuft hanging from the nape is the best field mark.

Photographing Birds X

Focus

by feiniu

When taking a picture we need to measure the light before making the exposure. We should focus on the object and try to put everything well within the picture frame . Light measuring , exposure and focus can be done with the help of technology and camera manufacturers have put much effort into the development of automatic control systems. Photographic composition, however, is a different matter because it is not purely technical. It is related to our perception of the world we live in and to individual aesthetic sense and subjective judgement rather than an objective or scientific matters .

Now let me say something about focus . Most modern cameras are automatic in both in exposure and focus . However, even the most sophisticated cameras can have problems. The problems can be divided into accuracy and speed of focus. Even the lower range models of many modern cameras can focus very well in general photographic situations. In certain fields or in critical situations, however, I believe that manual control is still the most reliable and effective method. This is because most automatic focus systems rely on light contrast to determine distance. In the natural environment, light sources are very complicated and variable in nature. Automatic systems can always be fooled. Also, automatic systems will not necessarily focus on the point that you want to be sharp. If there is enough light automatic systems can give you a small aperture to obtain more depth of field but low light conditions will make automatic systems useless to you.

How about speed? Modern cameras are equipped with powerful micro-motors to turn the lens barrel very quickly so that you can catch moving objects. However, powerful motors cannot see. Their power relies on the effectiveness of distance measurement done by an optical device. This is similar to human hand and eye cooperation. If you cannot even see the object clearly, then the speed of your hand is irrelevant. When using automatic focus systems, we have all had experience that the lens barrel moving forwards and backwards (hunting) while trying to focus. By the time the lens barrel has stopped moving, the bird has already moved outside your composition, changed position or flown away !

So what implications do all these points have for photographing wild birds? The first is never to rely on automatic focus systems only. The second is believe in your own eyes and brain!

Hints for you to improve manual focus ability :

- 1) keep your eyes in good condition ,
- 2) do more hand/eye cooperation exercises
- 3) learn and practice how to judge distance correctly
- 4) fully understand the strength and weaknesses of your own camera gear
- 5) study the moving behaviour of the objects you want to take picture

I hope the above hints will help you to get good pictures. Next time we'll talk about photographic composition.

[Ed.-See example pictures at the inside front cover]

Features

Why Chinese Love Game? - A real-life experience of being poor

by Ma Ming

I awoke at two in the night with an indistinct feeling of hunger.

We couldn't imagine that we were in the Takla Maken Desert in Xinjiang to open an investigation on the living conditions of Biddulph's Ground Jay (*Podoces biddulphi*) and Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) in the first spring of this millennium. There was neither light nor candlelight. So, on this sleepless night, I wrote my general feelings down in the moonlight.

Our team had been here for four days already. In these few days, the food provided by the canteen was either sliced potato or shredded yellow radish, and nothing else. But, we couldn't improve our living conditions by ourselves in the middle of nowhere.

I asked the chef for the reason why there were no meat dishes in the canteen. He answered that the local workers didn't want to eat meat. In fact, the local workers couldn't afford to eat meat since their monthly salary was incredibly low. The daily living expense of a worker was just 3-6 dollars

(less than US\$1). For this reason, although they lost much energy on their work, all of them were on a 'vegetarian diet'.

The following was the daily diet of a worker:
Breakfast: preserved vegetables, steamed buns, paste made of cereal (total cost: \$1.5)
Lunch: dry provisions (total cost: \$1)
Dinner: fried vegetables or noodle soup, rice, steamed buns, etc. (total cost: \$2-3)

Their hunger couldn't be satisfied even they ate 4-5 buns at dinner (each was 100 g in weight).

Such kind of "vegetarian life" never took place for my past twenty years! I was thinking of "game" at that moment since eating these "free" animals could satisfy one's hunger. The survey we did in other places in China proved that it was a fact.



I lived in a company near the reservoir at the upper part of Akosu from April 11 to 13. The local workers collected the eggs of wild birds, such as the eggs of Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*), Common Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) and Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*) (see the picture), as their food. There was embryo inside some eggs and these “hairy eggs” were the favorite of the people in Southern China. The workers collected hundreds of wild bird eggs each time and some of these eggs will be preserved in salt as their food reserve.

The fishermen with nets collected the dead bodies of birds in water to satisfy their hunger while the dead bodies of wild animals on the roadside were the food source for the road maintenance workers. Some people killed the geeses traveling between the North and the South by mixing the seed with poison... Why? It was because many local people couldn't get their wage for several months and the life of those workers from the South was extremely harsh. All of them needed the basic supplement of protein for their survival. They should have right to live, whether or no.

On April 15, I met two workers in the grazing area of Akchi. They made dumplings with the fat inside sheep's tail (because of their greed). However, most of

the urban inhabitants are not willing to eat such kind of “fat” food now.

The meat price is especially low this year (pork: \$6-8/kg, mutton: \$10-12/kg, egg: \$3-5/kg), but the workers still can't afford such low prices. Their monthly salary is about \$300-\$700 only (they need to send some money to their family and save money for their trip back home). Besides, the agents and the bosses (new capitalists and landowners?) always “oppress” these workers. As a result, they are not able to get the total amount of their salary. For the above reasons, these workers are forced to eat wild animals. In some places, the workers eat / sell the sick pigs and the dead bodies of pigs in secrecy. In Western China, the workers are scattered and out of control. They neither have social protection nor social responsibility. Some important issues for their country, such as “family planning”, are “none of their business”. So, the majority in society will not feel sympathy for these workers.

On April 18, I hurried to Xiaotang (located on the South bank of the Tarim River) from Kuche. The workers planted cotton on the riverside and they built many dams to collect water. Therefore, the spring deluge was almost used up by them. (But why there was nobody there to stop them?) They lived in sparsely populated forest area and burnt firewood for heat. Game was their main food source. “Unpopular” species of animals such as Northern Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*), Crow

and Common Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) also became the target of these “huntmen”. Although some species of animals were protected by the law (for example: Northern Eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*), Biddulph’s Ground Jay (*Podoces biddulphi*), Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*) and Red Deer (*Cervus elaphus*), many of them were hunted by the workers. In winter, various species of game were sold on the roadside. Many people were “forced” to break the law in order to make a living.

“A beast is inferior to a bird” — it is a traditional Chinese thinking. Few years ago, I spent more than two months to make a survey of the bird-catching industry of Shanghai, the most civilized and prosperous city in China. The result of this survey was shocking (please refer to the Bird Society’s Anthology 1998 for details). The rich people, including some officers, spent a lot of money on eating “game” in order to show off their wealth and high social status (power). Game eating was “beautified” by these people and became a “culture” in China. At the same time, the poor caught or sold wild animals in order to make a living and to follow the “culture”. As a result, the majority of migratory birds “disappeared” near the coastal area of Eastern China.

“Which kind of wild birds is delicious? Are they expensive? ...” Many people (even some government officials) asked me such questions since I am a bird specialist in their mind ...(Do they really care about the

birds?)

By and large, the main reasons why Chinese people like to eat “game” (including wild birds) are poverty and naivety. To fight against this “game-eating culture”, money and education are crucial.

(The currency mentioned above is Renminbi)

Notes:

1. The wild bird eggs collected by the workers near the reservoir at the upper part of Tarim River on April 12, 2000 (about 200 eggs of Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) and Common Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)).

These birds caught by the people were from foreign countries such as Australia and New Zealand. (location: Nanhui , Shanghai in 1998)

The Environmentally Friendly Code of Birdwatching

by Stanley Ng

Every activity, including birdwatching, has its own code. Anybody who is interested in watching birds should follow the code shown below.

1. Please keep quiet when watching birds in order not to cause any disturbance to them.
2. Don’t chase or otherwise disturb the

birds. This particularly applies to migratory birds as these require rest and food to prepare themselves for long sea crossings.

3. Put on suitable clothes and footwear. Dress in dull colours such as dark green and black instead of bright colours.
4. Stay away from birds which are building nests or feeding young. If disturbed the parents may give up the nest.
5. Do not damage the roosting area and living habitat of the birds when building hides to watch the birds at a closer distance.
6. Do not stand up suddenly in your hide or make unnecessary movements, as this may cause the birds to move away.
7. Do not release introduced bird species to the wild because this could affect the ecology of the endemic birds.
8. Do not pick up any wild fruit or plants in the wild and keep the environment clean.
9. Please make sure you have brought enough water and food with you if you plan to go birdwatching for the whole day. It is best to put your food in a plastic lunch box instead of plastic bags

since this will avoid making unnecessary noise.

10. Whenever you go birdwatching in popular areas such as Mai Po Nature Reserve with young children, ask the children not to shout or run around as such behaviour will cause disturbance to other birdwatchers and may scare away the birds.
11. Experienced birdwatchers should assist and help beginners whenever possible. This will lead to increased enjoyment of birdwatching for both beginner and expert.

The natural environment is a great classroom in which the birds can act as teaching materials. Birds are an important indicator of the state of the environment and are a guidepost for humans in what is happening in the environment around them.

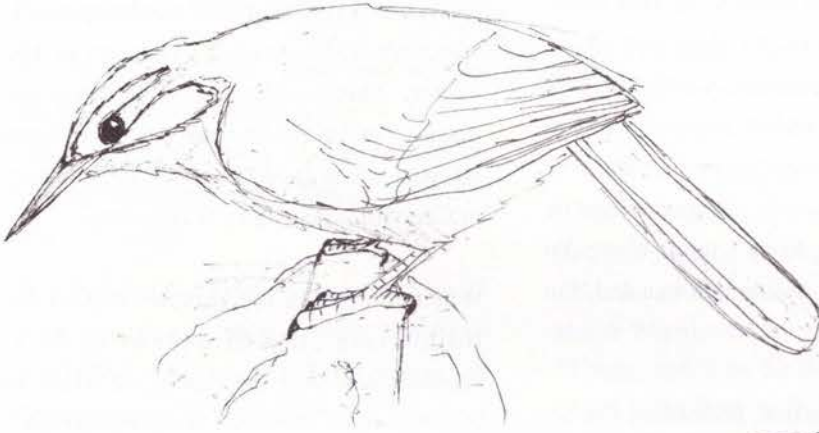
When you go birdwatching next time, please try to follow this code. Birdwatching will be more fun if you do so.

Happy birding!
Good luck!

Picture Gallery

Lets take a closer look at Matthew Kwan's picture.

Do you know how old he is? (See answer at the bottom of this page)



White-cheeked Laughing Thrush



Rufous-necked Scimitar Babbler



Black Bittern

(Matthew is one of the youngest birders at 10 years old, with brilliant drawing and sketching skills)

Baihualing, Yunnan, August 2000

by Cheung Ho Fai

This summer, Yu Yat Tung, Ying Hak King, Paul Lau and I went to the Mainland China and Taiwan Ornithological Conference in Kunming, Yunnan. After that we went to Baihualing in Gaoligongshan Nature Reserve to do a summer bird survey. We were joint by Lo Wai Yan, Chiang Ming Liang, Wang Yu Ming, Kwan Tze Hoi, Matthew Kwan and Han Lianxian.

According to Han Lianxian, Baihualing has not been well surveyed in summer because it usually rains badly in summer. Previously I had been to Baihualing twice, both in mid winter. Paul Leader et al had visited Baihualing once in May. So altogether we had some rough idea of the bird species over there.

While we were in Baihualing it did rain daily. Fortunately we still had fairly long hours for bird watching. In general, birds seem to be more active on dryer days. Leeches are present in abundance on the very wet forest floor. In comparison, mosquitos seem to be a minor concern.

We took the evening flight from Kunming to Baoshan on 18th August. We spent the morning driving to Baihualing on 19th. From 20 to 22 we birded all day long. On 23rd we drove back to Baoshan in the late morning, and flew back to Kunming that evening. On 24th we birded in Xishan for most of the day and then took the evening flight back to Hong Kong. The following is a table showing the

number of species we saw everyday.

So on a good day in August, the number of species seen in Baihualing can be up to 80. In comparison this number can be up to 100 in winter. This is quite high for a forest site in August. In Tai Po Kau one can expect around 30 species in a good day in winter, or about 60 in Chebaling, Northern Guangdong.

When comparing the summer and winter in Baihualing, the bird density is also significantly lower in summer. In winter there are long hours when one is surrounded by bird waves of more than 100 birds. In summer, bird waves of more than 30 birds were rare. Most of the time one has a loose flock of only a few birds. The fact that the bird density in summer is considerably less has also been spell out by Han Lianxian. I guess this must be one reason (apart from the weather) that few surveys had been done in summer. Although the bird density was low, the number of interesting birds was not low at all. Here is a brief survey of the interesting birds that we recorded.

1. Wedge-billed Wren Babbler: 5 were seen on 20 Aug. To our knowledge this is the second record in China. The first record was a trapped record by Han Lianxian in Dulunjiang. Since Babblers don't migrate significantly, this species is probably a very rare resident in China.
2. White-gorgetted Flycatcher: One of the very few records in China. At least 3 were seen for more than one day. These include at least 1 juvenile. This is the 1st record in

- Baihualing and the first confirmed breeding record of this species in China. Former records of this species are from the Nankang area (SW Yunnan).
3. Fire-tailed Myzornis: 1 male was seen on the high pass of Gaoligongshan on 22 Aug. This pushed the range of this species on Gaoligongshan southward by at least 200 km.
 4. White-tailed Nuthatch: 3 were seen on 22 Aug. Although this species has been recorded on the Western slope of Gaoligongshan before, this is the first time on the Eastern slope.
 5. Yellow-throated Fulvetta: Up to 20 were seen daily at Baifalin. This species seems to be fairly common locally. Globally it is listed as a near threatened species.

6. Golden-spectacled Warbler (Valentini): Up to 11 were seen daily at Baihualing. Most of the Golden-spectacled Warbler present at this site seemed to be of this species.
7. Ruby-cheeked Sunbird: The distribution had been extended 50km north (Han Lianxian per. comm.)

Other than the above, uncommon records at Baifalin include 5 Golden-breasted Fulvetta (Himalayan subspecies) on 22 Aug., 1 Striated Marsh Warbler on 23 Aug., 1 Tiger Shrike on 19 Aug. and 2 on 20 Aug. The Tiger Shrike record is the first for Baihualing (and possibly the first for Gaoligongshan!)

Below is a table showing the number of species daily. Based on the high number of species, one can see that Baihualing is indeed a worthwhile place to go bird watching.

Date	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Daily tick	9	71	66	49	81	44	36
Trip tick	9	63	34	13	18	13	10
Cumulative tick	9	72	106	119	137	150	160

This winter, several of us will go to Baihualing again, then we will go south to the Burma-China border for birds. If you are keen on Yunnan birds, you are welcome to join us.

"FOR SALE; Canon EF (autofocus) 600 f4L lens with case \$52,000.- Canon EF (autofocus)400 f5.6 lens with case \$6,000.- Both lenses are about 18months old and in excellent condition. The reason for sale is that I'm now using the image stabilised versions. Gitzo 1222 tripod with Manfrotto 268 quick release ballhead \$2900 or will sell separately. Both in excellent condition/little used. Contact Martin Hale tel 27195526 e-mail mhale@netnavigator.com"

Society Events

Notes

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 AFCD 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 the fee into the A/C no. 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.

** New location for indoor meeting:

Room 604 Wilson House, 19-27 Wyndham Street, Central, Hong Kong unless otherwise stated

On all outdoor meetings 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>

Date	Leader	Activity / Gathering location	Time	Difficulty
14 January (Sun)	Cheung Ho Fai [REDACTED]	Shum Chung 8:15 meet at Ma Liu Shui Pier	8:30 ~12:00	X
14 January (Sun)	Geoff Carey [REDACTED]	Waterfowl Monitoring at Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site (for experienced counters only)	Please contact leader	
15 January (Mon)	Geoff Carey (HKBWS Waterfowl Iant Cordinaror) Doug Watkins (Wetlands International)	Public Lecture: Waterfowl Monitoring in Hong Kong : Method, results and global perspective Venue: Rm 922, Hong Kong Sout Centre	7:00 ~8:45	
26 January (Fri)	Lo Kar Man [REDACTED]	Lunar New year party: Report of Foreign Trips 16:00 Hong Kong Observatory	16:00 ~20:00	X
3 February (Sat)	AFCD HKBWS	World Wetland Day - Bird watch training I for secondary school students		

Date	Leader	Activity / Gathering location	Time	Difficulty
4 February (Sun)	Mike Leven [REDACTED]	Ng Tung Choi 9:00 meet at Karoorie Farm Entrance	9:00 ~13:00	XXX
7 February (Wed)	Cheung Ho Fai [REDACTED]	Indoor meeting**: Bird watching class 1 (Member HKD200, Non-member HKD350)	18:45 ~20:15	X
10 February (Sat)	AFCD HKBWS	World Wetland Day - Bird watch training II for secondary school students		
11 February (Sun)	Geoff Carey [REDACTED]	Waterfowl Monitoring at Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site (for experienced counters only)		Please contact leader
11 February (Sun)	Cheung Ho Fai, [REDACTED] TP Luk [REDACTED]	Kowloon Park 9:00 meet at Tsim Sha Tsui MTR exit A, Kowloon Park entrance	9:00 ~12:00	X
14 February (Wed)	Cheung Ho Fai [REDACTED]	Indoor meeting**: Bird watching class 2	18:45 ~20:15	X
17 February (Sat)	AFCD HKBWS	World Wetland Day - Secondary School Student's Bird Race		
17-18 February (Sat/Sun)	Cheung Ho Fai [REDACTED] Beta Yip [REDACTED]	Mai Po overnight* (option for non-overnight) 14:00 Kowloon Tong KCR exit (near Taxi station), 15:00 Mai Po car park, bus return on 19:00, next day leave Mai Po at 9:30		XX
18 February (Sun)	Cheung Ho Fai [REDACTED]	Long Valley 9:45 meet at Sheung Shui KCR station	10:00 ~13:00	X
2-3 March (Sat/Sun)	WWFHK [REDACTED]	Big Bird Race		
4 March (Sun)	Ying Ha King [REDACTED]	Kadoorie Farm 9:00 meet at Kadoorie Farm entrance	9:00 ~13:00	XX
7 March (Wed)	Paul Leader [REDACTED]	Indoor meeting**: Bird of Heilonjiang	18:45 ~20:15	X
11 March (Sun)	Geoff Carey [REDACTED]	Waterfowl Monitoring at Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site (for experienced counters only)		Please contact leader
18 March (Sun)	Mike Turnbull [REDACTED]	Ho Chung 9:00 meet at car park at the end of road, contact leader	9:00 ~13:00	XX
18 March (Sun)	Captain Wong [REDACTED]	Woodland Breeding Bird Survey	8:00 ~12:00	XXX
25 March (Sun)	J and J Holmes	Mai Po* 8:00 Kowloon Tong KCR exit (near Taxi station), 9:00 Mai Po car park, bus return on 15:00, back to Kowloon Tong at 16:00	9:00 ~15:00	X



戴勝 (米埔)
Eurasian Hoopoe (Mai Po)

Bob Thompson



蟻鴛 (米埔)
Wryneck (Mai Po)

盧嘉孟
Lo Kar Man



水雉 (錦田)
Pheasant-tailed Jacana (Kam Tin)

張浩輝
Cheung Ho Fai