



# The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Limited

(Approved Charitable Institution of a Public Character)

# Bulletin 207

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Publisher: The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Limited

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**Front cover:** White-tailed Tropicbird - Pippen Ho

**Design:** Harvest (HK) Production Co.

**Printing:** Y & K Printing Co.

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Boat Trips to our outer waters have become very popular in recent years. Thanks are due to the many photographers who braved sunburn, seasickness and salt spray on their gear to bring us the seabird photos in this bulletin.

Our “50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary” items continue with Clive Viney’s history of the Society, as reflected in his collection of old Bulletins, which carries on here with Part 3.

We are grateful to the former Commander of British Forces, **HK, Sir John Chapple, who** shares his memories of the New Territories, Mai Po and conservation issues from the 1950s to the 1980s.

And **CY LAM,** - former Chairman and now Honorary HKBWS President — wraps things up with his perspective on the growth of our organisation and birdwatching in Hong Kong over the past thirty years.

### ***Notification of Change of Address*** .....

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Limited  
has relocated to the following address:

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## 1. Big Bird Race 2008 and gei wai 21

Each year, WWF needs about \$5 million to carry out the habitat management and conservation work at Mai Po and approximately 20% of this amount comes from the annual Big Bird Race fundraising events. The BBR that was held on 11–12 April this year, managed to raise HK\$1.4 million from the hard work of the many team members.

This year, the funds raised will go towards removing the mud that has built up in gei wai 21 at the southern side of Mai Po and to convert the pond into another high-tide roosting site for waterbirds. This new pond will complement the 'scrape' (gei wai 16/17) so that when essential earthmoving works need to be carried out on the 'scrape', there will be another pond that the birds can use instead at high tide.

The earthmoving works in gei wai 21 will start in July 2008 and will continue until the end of October 2008. In the summer of 2009, next year, the work will continue again to build small islands in the pond similar to those on the 'scrape'.

## 2. De-silting works in gei wai 12

This summer, we will also be de-silting the channels in gei wai 12 as many, especially the cross-channels, are badly blocked by reeds so reducing the water flow in the pond.

## 3. Maintenance of the [Waterfowl Collection] (Pond 15a)

As many ducks use the Waterfowl Collection each winter, the water inside can get quite nutrient rich by early spring when the ducks migrate back north. As a result, that water has to be drained from the pond and replaced by clean rain water over the summer and autumn. That management also appears to be benefiting the Black-winged Stilts that are breeding on the islands in the Collection, by providing shallow water areas where the adults and chicks can feed when the ponds are drained down.

After the Black-winged Stilt chicks have fledged this summer, we intend to strengthen the bund of Pond 15a (left-hand pond as you go into the Collection), by using a backhoe and bulldozer to add soil to the side of the bund. This is because there are many leaks in the bund facing the commercial fishponds and these need to be repaired.

## 4. Results from the buffalo study in Pond 24c

The results of an 18-month ECF funded buffalo study at Mai Po were released in April 2008 and the report can be found on the WWF website ([www.wwf.org.hk/eng/maipo/random/reports.php](http://www.wwf.org.hk/eng/maipo/random/reports.php)). They showed that one buffalo in a 1.8 hectare freshwater pond had a positive effect on bird abundance and density, as well as being able to control vegetation, as compared with a non-managed area. The general findings showed similarity between manual cutting and grazing methods, which is of interest because grazing in the long-term (5 years +) requires less management effort and costs. Based on the study's findings, buffalo grazing will continue at Mai Po with further research work.

## 5. Nest boxes at Mai Po

In early May, two bird nest boxes were set up at the Mai Po car park, including a three-chambered box and a medium-hole, front opening box. They were set up on trees next to the Visitor Center (by the staff bicycle shed).

The three chambered box was designed for Eurasian Tree Sparrow, within a week after the installation of the box; they have been observed carrying nesting material into it.

The medium-hole front opening box was targeting White-shouldered Starling. In the past two summers, they were observed nesting in the electricity boxes around the car park and this nest box would probably be a better alternative for them.

More nest boxes are proposed to be set up around the car park and at the Education Centre in spring 2009. We are hoping that the installation of these nest boxes would encourage more birds to breed around the reserve.



# 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

## *The Bulletin 50 Years On (Part III)* □ Clive Viney



### Verity Picken

Under Verity's direction, the Society's publications took on a new dynamism. In her first Bulletin members were encouraged to join international protests against environmentally damaging developments - the proposed US military base on Mijake-jima in the Izu Islands of southern Japan and the mining of diatomite deposits in the internationally important Lake Myvatn in Iceland. The 1986 Big Bird Race money was in and the winners, Ken Searle's Professionals, had raised an astonishing HK\$116,000, which was almost matched by Verity's Ladies team total of HK\$111,000. To unprecedented amusement, my WWF/HK team employed a helicopter and still couldn't win. Birding trips into China occurred more regularly and these fascinating journeys were written up and published in the Bulletins.

The new style Bulletin looked crisp and precise. In line with this development members were asked to submit designs for a new Society logo. (David Bakewell's design was the one adopted-Ed.) There were seven new hides at Mai Po and instructions were published for their proper use and access to the new boardwalk through the mangroves was explained.

A founder member, Frank Walker, kindly sent records and photographs for the Society archives - these included notes on his Long-billed Plover that had just been demoted to the notorious Category F. On 23rd October 1986, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh returned to Mai Po under much more ceremonial circumstances to open the Wildlife Education Centre. Nevertheless he arrived in the wake of a very poor press following his slitty-eyed comment in China.

Bulletin No. 122 (December 1986) recorded with great sadness the death of Sir Edward Youde in office and noted the tremendous contribution he had made in promoting the Mai Po project and the cause of conservation in Hong Kong. To underline the point, Sir John Chapple recalled the days when Mike Webster and Fred Hechtel stood virtually alone against an indifferent bureaucracy.

Outing reports were reaching their zenith with no fewer than 14 in Bulletin No. 124 (June 1987). The Tai Long Wan trip celebrated its tenth anniversary with champagne on the Tolo Harbour Ferry. Tung Lung Chau was a new outing venue but trips to this delightful and easily accessible island soon became a memory. An important aspect of these reports is their historical importance. For example, early Lantau reports gave a glimpse of pre-Chek Lap Kok Airport days when the island truly was a rural idyll. The wit of Peter Stevens and Stewart Smith was appearing for the first time and even CY added to the fun. John Burton's 1989 Tai Mei Tuk report must have been incomprehensible to anyone outside of the gweilo element of the Royal Hong Kong Police. These outing reports told as much about the leader as the birds and places visited. Perhaps the most famous was a hilarious account of the Chairman's legendary jaunt in the Lam Tsuen Valley when more beer cans than birds were counted (over 100).

The Society had accumulated several thousand dollars in donations and was looking for a worthy project to support. To say the Chairman's 1987 AGM address, reported word for word in the Bulletin was casual would

be an understatement. Some quietly expressed the view that the time was ripe for the Society to adopt a more vigorous role.

Like it or not, bird ringing had become a feature of the Mai Po reserve and ringing reports by David Melville featured regularly in *Bulletins*. Melville also kept members up-to-date with Mai Po news and reported on the disgraceful trade in wildlife through Hong Kong. Book reviews included Cooper's tongue-in-cheek comments on the new edition of Viney & Phillipps that must have totally confused the Chinese readership.

British Birds style short notes on bird behaviour began to appear - Mimicking by Orange-bellied Leafbirds was one of the first. Richard Corlett of the Department of Botany at HKU wrote *Birds and Plants: Plants and Birds* and invited members to a talk about fruit-eating animals and birds and fruit dispersal.

A welcome annual event was the curry lunch at the Officers' Mess at the Police Tactical Unit in Fanling. These were family occasions in autumn sunshine that followed an outing in the area and before the advent of breathalysers.

Big Bird Race 1988 was won by the Stonechats with an incredible 164 species - on this remarkable day the overall total was 237 species and over a million dollars was raised for Mai Po.

With a wider membership, more and more members were travelling abroad to see birds and the *Bulletin* was the perfect place to relate these travellers tales. For example, Stewart Smith was lucky enough to win the Big Bird Race 1987 prize for sponsors, which was a trip to Nepal and he wrote this up in mouth-watering detail. Like the local outing reports and accounts of visits to China, these bound into a single volume would make enthralling reading for some but would hardly make the South China Morning Post bestseller list.

### ***Widening the net***

The *Bulletin* was still a bit of a lads' mag but changes were afoot.

Local awareness of Hong Kong's birds was stirring. For instance, CY reported that students from Tang King Po School bravely joined his outing to Tai Po Kau - on reflection, perhaps not the best venue to get children excited about birds. A special programme for beginners with introductory talks in Cantonese was inaugurated. Two systems - one Society!

A mini-bird race for schoolchildren was held at Mai Po and to encourage wider participation, coaches now served some of the Society outings

An element of ornithology (as against birding and birdwatching) was entering the *Bulletin*. Members were invited to provide expertise and join a WWF sponsored survey in Xishangbanna in southwest Yunnan. Mai Po had exchanged ringed Oriental Reed Warblers with Dejima in Japan but that wetland was under severe threat and members were asked to protest. A three-year project to study egrets and herons was underway by Lew Young and he solicited help. A summer survey of the breeding birds at Tai Po Kau was commenced and this was to spawn a workable colony-wide survey. Martin Williams wrote about autumn migration at Beidaihe and the Society sent representatives to the annual ICPB meetings.

But there was still room for those that just cherished birds for their own sake. Father Coghlan of Wah Yan College wrote about the joys of birdwatching within a five-minute walk of Nathan Road. One correspondent wrote of the day he recorded 14 raptor species and another of the midsummer's day that he saw 20 wader species at Mai Po.

### ***Storm in a teacup***

In *Bulletin* No. 135 (March 1990), Mike Chalmers laid down complex rules for local listing and published what he believed were the Hong Kong records for the Highest Day List (Stonechats 164), Highest Year List (307 Lewthwaite in 1989), Highest Hong Kong List (351 Chalmers and Kennerley), Highest Ringing List (129 Melville) and Highest Number of Firsts (12 Melville). I always wanted to believe that there was a scientific rationale for birdwatching and never felt comfortable with the concept of birding as a sport. The Americans have no qualms about this and treat birding like golf with published league tables and comprehensive rules on what counts for a tick and what doesn't. Once steam engines vanished off the British landscape, some young men unashamedly turned their collecting urges towards birds. Lists of birds replaced lists of engine numbers. What particularly galled me was the unreasonable suspicion that birds were ringed at Mai Po by an elite to primarily further their lists rather than for genuine scientific purposes.



I mulled it over and decided to put pen to paper - acid dripped from my nib. In the history of the Bulletin there has been only one Letter to the Editor and it was my response to Chalmers in Bulletin No. 136 (June 1990). My letter, albeit dated All Fools Day provoked an unimaginable storm and even when I left Hong Kong six years later there were those that were still smarting. Even poor Verity was criticised for publishing the letter. Freedom of speech? In fairness, there were those that laughed and one prominent British diplomat told me that he thought my reply witty and that it had hit the spot.

In Bulletin No. 137 (September 1990), members comments and views were summed up by Verity in The Last Word in Listing. Perhaps the most poignant comment was contained in her last paragraph:

"Finally, a number of members considered it curious that pollution in Deep Bay failed to generate the same response as a letter about listing."

### ***Out with the old, in with the new***

Bulletin No. 138 (December 1990) had an international flavour. The well-known British television broadcaster and birdwatcher, Tony Soper, passed through Hong Kong on SS Canberra and found time to give members an illustrated talk entitled Oceans of Birds. The Spring Migration Birdwatchers' Festival in Eliat, Israel and a tour of Yugoslavia's special reserves were both promoted. Paul Leader, a recently arrived UK birder of note, wrote about his participation in the Selangor 1990 International Bird Race. Perhaps the first drawing to appear in a Bulletin was a crude representation of a mystery killer bird that took up residence on a naval ship sailing to Hong Kong out of Singapore. On a local note, Stewart Smith promoted patch birding and in an effort to encourage others wrote comprehensively about his studies in the Mount Davis area.

Liz Leven took over editorship of the Bulletin and this was reflected in a new snazzy columned format. Contributions were asked for on a floppy disk - the computer age had reached HKBWS. But the computer did provide Hong Kong with several new species: Purple Gallisude, Think-billed Warbler, White-browed Shrink Babbler, Chestnut-floated White-eye, Siber-eared Thesia, Green Jag, Slaty-bashed Gull and White-vested Mynah!

In with the new and out with the old - a farewell dinner was arranged for Mike Webster who had made such a tremendous contribution to the Society. The teams of two old hands Cooper and Viney tied for first place in

the Big Bird Race 1991 but again Searle's Professionals raised most of the money by a long way.

Bulletin No 141 (September 1991) was greatly enhanced by Jeremy Pearse's striking line drawings of three tern species, Peregrine Falcon, White-naped Crane, Grey Wagtail and an Asian Paradise Flycatcher - a Bulletin landmark. Later Bulletins contained more of these treats.

At the 1992 AGM, Lam Chui Ying was elected as editor of the Chinese Bulletin. CY was now a co-author with Viney & Phillipps and working hard to produce a Chinese edition of the local field guide.

Bulletin No. 145 (September 1992) announced the unprecedented arrival of Aleutian Terns in Hong Kong waters. Also included was the discovery of Hong Kong's newest birding hot spot - Tin Shui Wai Pond - and a detailed map showed just how to get there. In the following Bulletin, Mike Chalmers advised that a new breeding survey and winter count would be undertaken and Geoff Carey wrote the depressing Saunders Gull - Heading for Extinction? More than ever the Bulletin was becoming the vehicle to publish reports of trips overseas and especially into China. A Bird Hotline in English and Chinese was now available.

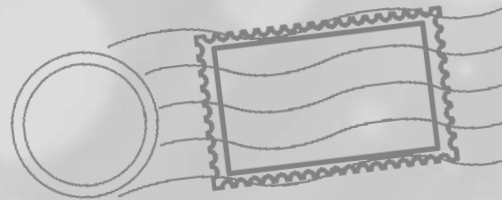
Perhaps Hong Kong's greatest unsung hero was Mary Ketterer. Without Mary's tireless efforts and cajoling of officials and even royalty for the previous ten years there would not have been a Mai Po Nature Reserve for birdwatchers to enjoy. She worked day and night and travelled the world without a penny taken in salary or expenses to achieve her ambition of saving and using what was best of our countryside for the people of Hong Kong. Mary was the Honorary Director of WWF/HK and at the very least deserved a gong - some of us thought she should have been made a Dame - unfortunately she upset one too many bureaucratic peacocks. Although not a member of the Society, she deserved far more than the cold announcement of her departure on page 2 of Bulletin No. 147 (March 1993).

Gavin Cooper stood down as Chairman at the 1993 AGM and Richard Stott was elected to take his place. Hong Kong was in transition and approaching change and Richard was to steer the Society towards that change. Lam Chui Ying was elected Vice Chairman and Ng Cho-nam filled the new post of Conservation Officer.

***to be continued*** □



# Letter from Field Marshal Sir John Chapple



I read with great interest the articles in Bulletin 204 (Summer 2007) which I received the other day. It was an honour to be mentioned by Clive Viney and by Brian Wilson. Their articles were fascinating and brought back so many happy memories. I have written something on my own recollections of conservation matters between the late 1950s and early 1980s. They are based on some notes I wrote for the Ministry of Defence some years ago.

I was fortunate to serve on and off five times in Hong Kong, each tour was for two or two and a half years. The first time was in 1959 and the last ended in 1982. On the first four tours we lived in the New Territories (I had never spent a night on the Island until 1980). The first camp was called Norwegian Farm, just by San Tin, overlooking the northern part of Mai Po and the border. Most of what follows concentrates on this area. I was very fortunate to be in Hong Kong each time the protection, preservation, conservation or management of this area took a step forward.

The New Territories of Hong Kong in the late 1950's were very rural. The old villages were distinct entities, surrounded by paddy fields. There were very few trees and almost no pig farms or fishponds. Urban sprawl had not then started. San Tin, Mai Po and the Deep Bay Marshes were wild places. The "kei wais" (tidal prawn ponds) were fully operative. There was plenty of reed bed and mud flat but not much mangrove. This seemingly wild area was of course artificial in that it was much influenced by man, particularly the man-made prawn ponds. However it was also much abused by man. Shooting, trapping and netting was uncontrolled and widespread. The birds which used this area were harried constantly. Nevertheless it was a special area for birds. There were a few members of the Army stationed in the New Territories who cherished this area, and who badgered the local District Officers to do something about the illegal slaughter of birds. Almost no one in Hong Kong was interested – indeed very few had ever heard of Mai Po. Fortunately the District Officers were both sympathetic and helpful.

Amongst those present in the 1959-1960 period was Maxwell Macfarlane, who was one of the early HBWS members, and who was stationed with the Royal Artillery at Shek Kong; and Brian Webster of the Royal Fusiliers who was in the Brigade Headquarters there.

It was quite difficult to walk around the marshes in those days. The keiwais, which were 'owned' by communities across the border were not easily accessible.

The story moves on through the 1960s when enormous changes took place in agriculture;- with much of the marsh drained for fish ponds, and much filled in for housing or for pig and chicken farming. The fishponds were quite deep and had little attraction for waders.

Unrestricted building encroached all round the area. In addition there was a great increase during the decade in the flow of refugees across the land border; and in the late 1960s the Cultural Revolution spilled over into Hong Kong. This led to a new border fence and road being built and in the Army being given responsibility for border security. Eventually and at great cost to the Government, the border fence was extended right along the outside of the prawn ponds and inside the Mangrove and mud flats. To some concerned environmentalists this was thought to herald the final destruction of the Mai Po Marsh. In fact it created the opportunity for something much more positive. Military control meant control over access; military patrols seeking out illegal immigrants (which was the new re-classification of refugees) meant a constant oversight over the whole area and this in turn helped to end illegal trapping inside the fence; better controlled road access allowed for useful environmental studies and also made easier the construction of board walks and hides. The building of the fence required the building of a road alongside. This was built along the outer edge of the old keiwais and the sluices of each one were saved and repaired – many had fallen into disuse. The road and fence also had an ecological effect on the mangrove outside the fence – but that's another story.



It was during this time in the early 1970s that Peter Scott came out to visit and the Governor (Sir Murray Maclehoose) and I took him out to the Shek Shan mound at Mai Po. Peter Scott said that the only wildfowl species that he had not seen in the wild was the Falcatid Duck. I have no idea why he'd never seen a wild one, but anyway a nice male presented itself below the mound! Another valued ally on board – and some valuable reports and support from Slimbridge.

During this same period of the 1960s and 1970s, the conservation status of various areas of Hong Kong was gradually upgraded (reserves, protected areas etc.). The pressure of a few dedicated people, mostly HKBWS members, greatly helped to achieve this. The most difficult thing to persuade Government to do was to assert control over changes of land usage.

Then, on the last of my five tours around 1980, a further substantial boost was given when the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Hong Kong was founded as a new chapter. The normal WWF convention is that a proportion of any money raised has to be spent locally. Then there was only one worthwhile project in view which was Mai Po. It has to be admitted that very few of the worthy citizens who joined and supported WWF Hong Kong had heard of Mai Po, but that did not matter. An outline plan, based on reports written by experts from Slimbridge and elsewhere, was already to hand – just waiting for funding and Government commitment. It came not a moment too soon because work had also begun on finding a site for the new airport and the Deep Bay area was one of the leading contenders.

The rest is well known. Each year more pieces of land have been bought or brought in; the carrying capacity of this small area has been greatly increased by proper land management; a visitor centre, hides, walks, plantings have all made this a very special reserve; and finally the area achieved Ramsar status just before the handover in 1997.

This was never military land. Much of the work was done by a few

dedicated officials and amateurs with generous support from a large number of people. I take pleasure in the fact that I was here at some of the key moments, as Adjutant in the 1950s, then Company commander in the 1960s, Commanding Officer and Brigade Commander in the 1970s and finally as Commander British Forces and therefore a member of the Executive Council in the 1980s. In the latter role I was able to put in a word or two on behalf of Mai Po. My civilian colleague and ally throughout these decades was Sir David Akers – Jones, initially as District Officer and latterly as the Secretary for the New Territories, also an EXCO Member. He was a great ally and supporter inside Government.

When I first saw this area 50 years ago, not one local Hong Kong child had heard the word “environment” or “conservation” and none had ever visited a nature reserve – for the simple reason that there were none.

In case this all sounds as though I had a leading role in these events, this is not so. It does however illustrate that time scales in conservation are long, both to allow for change of outlook and for the management of habitats to attain the desired balance.

There are further lessons to be drawn from this story. The good military virtue of maintaining the aim is evident. Also that it is possible to accommodate security requirements with good land management practice. Indeed it is usually possible, as it was at Mai Po, to turn these security or defence efforts to advantage. Quite apart from anything else, the defence budget was able to subsume some of the costs. We can always help to influence Governments, business and communities both by our example and by our enthusiasm.

John Chapple  
January 24, 2008

(Field Marshal Sir John Chapple GCB CBE DL)

# 30 years with the HKBWS —C Y Lam



*I was aimlessly going over old HKBWS material at home when I ran into the notes I took when I attended my first bird-watching course at the end of 1976. It brought back many happy memories. My HKBWS membership started in 1977, which was 30 years ago at the time of writing. It is incredible that a hobby could have lasted for so long and made so much impact on me.*

That first lesson took place on 27 September 1976 at the HKU Extramural Department (now known as the School for Professional and Continuing Studies "SPACE"). It was a course on "Birds of Hong Kong" taught by Mike Webster, then the chairman of the Society. I learnt for the first time that there were some 360 bird species in Hong Kong, mostly winter visitors. I was particularly happy and surprised to learn that bird migration was very much influenced by weather and that the radar of the Hong Kong Observatory (where I worked) was utilized to study birds flying direct from Borneo to Hong Kong. So my job was related to birds.

In those days, comprehensive bird guides in colour did not exist. Mike's lectures were based on slides donated to HKBWS by bird-watchers. During the classes, students like me had to take notes at high speed and make quick sketches occasionally (see fig. 1). When we went to the field, birds were identified based on such material and of course also by persistently asking questions. It was a skill very difficult to pick up; progress was also slow.

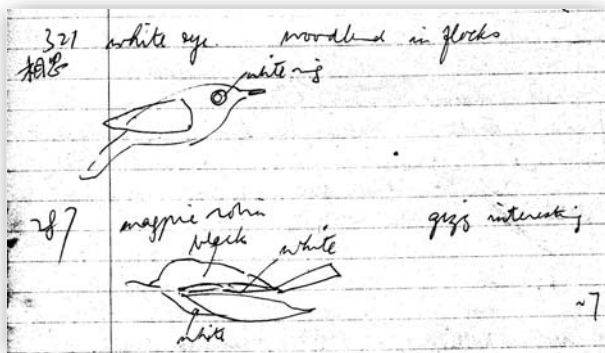


Fig. 1 My manuscript notes at the 1976 bird-watching course

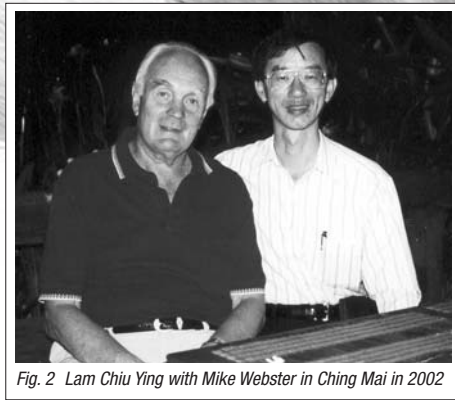


Fig. 2 Lam Chiu Ying with Mike Webster in Ching Mai in 2002

The course consisted of ten lectures. The last lecture, in which Mike discussed the issue of conservation as it relates to birds, was my first introduction to this complex subject. At that time, the critical issue was the invasion of the planned Fairview Park into the Mai Po marshes. The HKBWS voiced strong opposition; Mike got to see the Governor. The planned "development" was reduced by half and the Mai Po marshes become a restricted-access area. The HKBWS proposed that it be turned into a conservation area and a wetland park. The "conservation area" was later managed by WWF which was established with the strong support of bird-watchers (see below). The "wetland park" idea had to wait much longer until the AFCD established the Wetland Park at Tin Shui Wai in recent years.

I should mention that Mike is a long-time conservationist in Hong Kong. He was a founding member of the Conservancy Association and served as its chairman in the late 1970s. He cared much about the environment and was keen to engage the local Chinese population in protecting the environment and in preserving heritage. He moved to northern Thailand after retirement. I was very happy to see him active and energetic when I visited him in 2002 (fig. 2).

After the course and having seen real birds in the wild, I was mesmerized. Mike was glad to see a local picking up this western hobby and so would notify me whenever he went bird-watching in the New Territories. If it was a trip to Mai Po or Tsim Bei Tsui, I would have to wake up at 3:30 a.m. and join the car at the Kowloon exit of the cross-harbour tunnel at 4:30 a.m. It was not exactly an easy task. Furthermore, my

son was barely one at that time and his young father was crazy enough to disappear into the dark on Sunday mornings. Looking back, I really have to thank my wife for being so tolerant and supportive.

Mike taught me bird-watching; I took up his challenge and attempted organizing activities, including a birding camp, to introduce bird-watching to friends and colleagues. Unfortunately, it was a time when Hong Kong was just at its economic take-off. The priority in life for most people was the improvement of livelihood. Bird-watching does not feed nor quench thirst; so my efforts showed little impact. My evolving career and my young family also demanded increasing attention. Thus after a while, I faded out and left it to another birder Albert Cheung to take lead in the promotion of bird-watching among the Chinese-speaking population. He continued organizing Chinese-speaking outings and in the early 1980s, started sending out Society bulletins in Chinese. His work was the starting point of the Chinese membership of the HKBWS.

A decade came and went. The newly established WWF was looking for funds to buy the fish ponds and geiwais in Mai Po. The first Big Bird Race in 1984, a private competition between two teams of senior expatriate birders, made some 40,000 dollars for WWF. In 1985, WWF decided to turn it into a large-scale public fund-raising event. Albert Cheung took up the challenge and captained the "Locals" team, with Lui Kin Pong, Fong Chun Man and myself as members. Because of this, I had to practise together with the team. When the race results were announced, the gap between us and the other teams was quite noticeable. While fund-raising was the major objective, that we could not identify birds as well as others was an undeniable fact. We were motivated to do better with bird identification.

In the mid 1980s, bird guides in colour with good bird descriptions became common. New models of binoculars emerged. Serious bird-watchers started carrying telescopes around. As China mainland became more open, experienced bird-watchers starting going in to look for birds not easy to find in Hong Kong. Apart from the "weapon race", it was also a race to get ahead in terms of bird identification. This new atmosphere and the motivation (or indeed stress) provided by the Big Bird Race pushed me into doing more field outings, with a hope to strengthen my birding capability.

The Big Bird Race was widely reported in the press and collected a total donation of 460,000 dollars. The money was used to buy geiwais and fish ponds. We were happy that we helped secure a safe home for the waterbirds. For more than a decade, I was part of the Big Bird Race and the Locals team gradually improved, with the race species record climbing from the initial 80 to around 140-150. According to incomplete records on hand, other members of the Locals team in its early years included Dr Anthony Tse, Teresa Ho, Jeffrey Lee, Lee Wai Kee, Wong Chap Cheung, Chan Ming Ming and Fung Po Kei. Several of them have served the Society for many years up to now (see fig. 3). The donation money collected by the Big Bird Race surpassed 1 million dollars in 1989, WWF became the owner of more and more geiwais. So the ownership of geiwais at Mai Po by WWF was the results of the hard labour of bird-watchers over the decades. Thus the relationship between WWF and HKBWS has always been very close. One more thing which few would realize: the two floating hides at the end of the board-walk were proposed by HKBWS and built with donations from bird-watchers



Fig. 3 Locals Team 1991. From the left: Wong Chap Cheung, Lee Wai Kee, Lam Chiu Ying, Chan Ming Ming

and money from outside sources secured by bird-watchers. Furthermore, senior bird-watcher Mike Chalmers provided the engineering expertise to plan and execute the projects.

Towards the end of the 1980s, the social development of Hong Kong has developed to a point where getting fed was no longer an issue. People started looking for opportunities to enjoy their well-earned leisure time. Schools started inviting me to give talks on bird-watching. I proposed to WWF that it should organize some membership activities. They accepted the idea and let me give occasional talks on bird-watching in Cantonese at the newly acquired office at Tramway Path. Some ten people would be there if I talked about Mai Po or Tai Po Kau. But once when I talked about birds in the urban area, only one person came. I gave the talk nevertheless and the two of us had a good laugh about this experience when we met again many years later. In 1989 or 1990, I ran the first WWF bird-watching course in Cantonese, with lectures and field outings. The bird slides I used came from HKBWS; the handouts very much made use of the material in the book "Birds of Hong Kong" by Clive Viney and Karen Phillipps with their kind permission. I was not a particular capable bird-watcher myself but was good enough to help beginners. I was truly pleased to see students finding joy in seeing the birds and picking it up as a life-long hobby. I was genuinely glad that I carried the torch passed to me by Mike Webster and managed to spread the bird-watching message to the public. Some students joined the HKBWS after the courses; Chinese-speaking members gradually increased in number. I stopped running the course later when capable young bird-watchers joined WWF as staff and took over the task.

Within HKBWS, I took over the editorship of the Chinese version of the Society bulletin in 1986 and decided in 1987 to make it a complete equivalent of the bulletin in English (before that time, it was a list of bilingual outings with some brief notes). I carried on until 1993 when Chan Ming Ming took over. My focus then shifted to the running of bird-watching activities. In the past, it was assumed that members either had their own cars or could travel in other members' cars. I thought that, to popularize bird-watching, we must cater for the car-less. Thus I introduced the concept of coach trips starting from Kowloon Tong. Also I set the start time rather late (by the standard of keen bird-watchers) so that anyone beginning to get interested would be sufficiently motivated to come, without having to wake up at 3:30 a.m. like me in my young days.

In order to let the Chinese-speaking population have access to a good reference book, I accepted the invitation of Clive Viney to translate the bird book which was being fully revised and also re-named "Birds of Hong Kong and South China". Because I had a full-time job, it took some two years and the Chinese edition was published in 1994 (fig. 4). With this ready, I ran the first HKBWS bird-watching course for beginners in

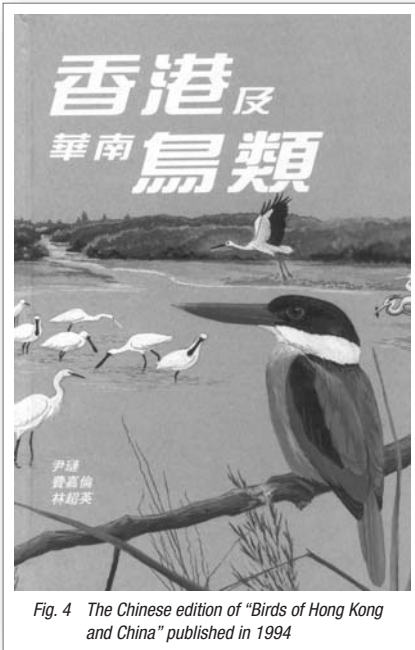


Fig. 4 The Chinese edition of "Birds of Hong Kong and China" published in 1994

1995. In 1996, for the first time, I led a group of beginners to watch birds outside Hong Kong, having several wonderful days in the Wuyi Mountains in Fujian. It was so enjoyable that people called for a repeat and I did it again in 1998, this time going to Yunnan. From then onwards, more and more Chinese-speaking bird-watchers organized their own trips into China mainland and overseas.

Regarding bird-watching trips, my own experience started with Kenya in 1989 and Poyang Lake in 1990. I visited Guizhou and Yunnan several times in 1991-1995. Apart from bird-watching, I gained some appreciation of the relationship between the natural habitat and the livelihood of people, which was at the same time harmony and conflict. In 1994, Cheung Ho Fai and I joined Clive in his Sichuan trip and learnt from his party the practice of checking the daily bird records every evening. This we introduced to the Chinese-speaking trips we led later. That was how the tradition crossed the language border into the Chinese-speaking world.

Hong Kong returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. In the same year, the number of Chinese-speaking members of HKBWS surpassed that of expatriates for the first time. I also became the first Chinese-speaking chairman of the Society. Superficially these phenomena happened by coincidence. But it was really due to the kind effort of Mike Webster and the Society chairmen after him, who quietly but persistently worked to engage the local population. Several other societies founded by expatriates and similar in nature to HKBWS existed in Hong Kong. But HKBWS is the rare case where the amalgamation with the mainstream

HKBWS is the rare case where the amalgamation with the mainstream society of Hong Kong took place. I gratefully thank the senior members of the Society for their foresight and efforts.

After becoming chairman, I recognized that, apart from running bird-watching activities, we had to be more active in order to prevent further attrition of the habitats for birds. Thus, the HKBWS took the initiative of providing inputs with an emphasis on conservation when the government issued consultation documents on the regional development of the New Territories. I was greatly helped by Ng Cho Nam and Mike Kilburn in these aspects. In 1998, the freshwater marsh at Shuen Wan was filled illegally. The HKBWS spoke out on the matter and eventually secured the action of the Planning Department to force the land owner to remove the soil and return the marsh to its original state. This was another HKBWS victory after the Mai Po campaign. I learnt first-hand through this action the complexity of conservation. It required NGOs like us to exercise objectivity, to maintain a sense of balance and also to persevere, in the face of intricate interactions among vested interests and the corridors of power. It was not easy at all.

An even more severe challenge emerged in 1999. Kowloon-Canton Railway gazetted their plan to build the "Spur Line" right across the heart of Long Valley. The Society presented its formal opposition in December, which marked the start of a two-year campaign to save Long Valley. The campaign ended with the railway going underground. The details are given in Society bulletins No. 174 and 177. At that time, we had virtually no chance of winning since we were fighting the railway company which was rich and powerful. We were also labeled as "a tiny group of bird-watchers". But bird-watchers did whatever they could: some wrote letters, some offered ideas, some helped linking up with fellow NGOs and the media, some took legal actions, etc. Together with the support of BirdLife International in the form of expert input, we gradually built up a major upwelling of public opinion in our favour, on the basis of reasoning, passion and law. On 16 October, the Director of Environmental Protection rejected the environmental impact assessment report of the railway company, which duly became the focus of press reporting (fig. 5). I still remember vividly how birders called one another on that day to spread the good news. We created a miracle. At year end, this



Fig. 5 Cartoon in South China Morning Post in 2000, showing train stopped by bird power (copyright: HKBWS)

incident was elected by the magazine "Time" as one of the five pieces of "good news for the environment" in the world. The railway tried in vain to turn the decision around by legal action. The railway which threatened to destroy the habitat in Long Valley never materialized. In my view, the Long Valley campaign marked a turning point in the history of conservation in Hong Kong, creating much more public awareness which would bear on future projects. HKBWS was at the centre of the campaign and demonstrated its immense energy. Thirty years ago, that energy showed itself at Mai Po. Now it is Long Valley. Bird-watchers could be justifiably proud of what they have done.

The Long Valley campaign succeeded due in no small part to the hard work of Carrie Ma, the Society's first full-time staff. The operation of the HKBWS had always relied on volunteers. But as the membership grew and as conservation work became complex, that old model could not work. The Annual General Meeting in early 2000 decided to rent an office and to employ a staff member. Carrie reported to duty in May. Her first assignment was to organize a joint press conference with other green groups, offering proposed solutions to the Long Valley railway problem. Carrie was a super-worker, often sending out e-mail messages after midnight. Her zeal pushed all of us to work harder. With a full-time staff, a number of changes took place. From 2000 onwards, the AFCD sponsored the Society's annual waterfowl survey. Other projects were organized; a few examples are listed below. Starting 2000, the Quality Education Fund supported programmes to introduce bird-watching to students in secondary and primary schools. Funding was secured to promote bird-watching among senior citizens under the "Learning from Nature" programme from 2001 onwards. A project in 2003 allowed all Hong Kong people to vote for "my most favourite bird".

Within a few years, the annual budget of the Society grew from some 100,000 dollars to more than a million. The new circumstances demanded a more rigorous approach to its operations. I consulted the Executive Committee and secured their agreement to take actions to transform the Society into a non-profit limited company and to secure tax exemption by getting recognized as a charitable organization. This was eventually formally adopted by the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Society in 2002. From this point onwards, the Society's administration and finance conforms to the legal framework of the Company Ordinance (fig. 6).

Other memorable events in 2002 included: the formation of the Crested Bulbul Club (the organization for senior citizens serving as bird guides), the publication of "Avifauna of Hong Kong" and the transfer of bird records before 1970 to the History Museum.

Between 2000 and 2004, I ran several bird-watching courses at the "SPACE". Like Mike Webster, I taught bird-watching in my capacity as chairman of the HKBWS. It was like a story returning to the beginning. I was hoping that maybe 20 to 30 years later, a student or two would pick up the thread and continue the cycle again.

By 2004, I had been chairman for seven years. I stood down following the unwritten tradition of the Society. I was grateful to Cheung Ho Fai who was boldly taking over this rather heavy burden. The HKBWS I handed over to him was no longer the simple interest group of the past. It had a complex organization structure: Board of Directors, Executive Committee, Membership Affairs Committee, Education and Publicity Committee,

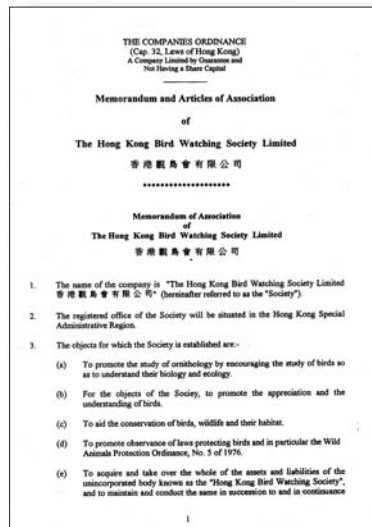


Fig. 6 Cover page of the "Limited Company" document of the HKBWS

Membership Affairs Committee, Education and Publicity Committee, Records Committee, Conservation Committee, Crested Bulbul Club, HKBWS China Conservation Fund Committee, species-specific research groups, representative in UK, office, staff, website, IT team, etc. Being the chairman is very much like working as the modern-day Chief Executive Officer.

Not being the chairman doesn't mean leaving the Society. In the name of HKBWS, Cheung Ho Fai and I encourage bird-watchers in China mainland to publish their bird records. With the collaboration of the China Ornithological Society, the bilingual "China Bird Report 2003" was published in 2004. It was a very exciting moment to receive the book – it marked a new era in which a means would become available to centralize Chinese bird records, no matter whether the birder is a local or a visiting foreigner. It is pleasing to note that the "China Bird Report" expanded and evolved rapidly in the following years. By the way, this reminds me of my only regret during my chairmanship, that is, the late publication of Hong Kong's own annual bird reports. But everybody is so busy in Hong Kong.

In the last couple of years (2005-2007), I nominally served as the chairman of the Steering Committee of the committee overseeing the China Programme jointly sponsored by HKBWS and BirdLife International. The objective of the programme is to give support to the growth of bird-watching societies in China mainland. Cheung Ho Fai was the key person giving a strong push to the programme. Further details are given in issue no. 205 of the Society bulletin. At the end of 2007, I left even this nominal post and kept only the title "Honorary President" as my cherished memory of the long years with HKBWS.

In thirty years, I learnt and then taught bird-watching. From a lonely bird-watcher, I became part of the Society. From purely appreciating the beauty of birds, I moved to fight for the preservation of their habitats. While starting in Hong Kong, I ended up promoting bird-watching in China mainland. It was just one step after another on a long walk, without thinking or calculation. I persevered with the long journey, sustained by the wish to share the joy of bird-watching with as many people as possible. Such is the wonder of bird-watching.

It was never my intention at the beginning of 2006 to try for a big year as I was due to leave Hong Kong sometime during the year. However I did decide that I would try and see some of the more difficult birds that occur regularly in Hong Kong. It was only in mid January when I found out that I would be staying in Hong Kong until at least the autumn that I thought, well, maybe I should try and see how many birds it was possible to see up until that date. Asking around it appeared that Richard Lewthwaite currently held the record for the most birds seen in a single calendar year, with a very impressive total of 328 achieved in 1995. Looking at the latest Hong Kong list and grouping the birds into certainties, possibilities and outside chances I calculated that it was possible to surpass the current record but it would take a lot of effort and require a certain amount of luck. Most importantly, it would require me to stay in Hong Kong until the end of the year. The effort was no problem, the other two requirements were more problematical, but why not try? Little did I know what I was letting myself in for.

## January

The long-staying Thick-billed Green Pigeon and Greater White-fronted Goose provided the first rarities of the year. Lam Tsuen valley provided a number of other good species including Yellow-bellied Tit and Hume's Warbler, but a Brown-headed Gull at Nam Sang Wai eluded me despite a number of visits. My only Himalayan Swiftlet and Asian House Martin of the year were seen flying together over a gei wai at Lut Chau. A twitch to Mai Po to look for a Water Pipit proved very fruitful and, although I missed the Pipit, I did manage to see a Baikal Teal and, best of all, a Relict Gull. However, my luck was not to last as Mai Po was closed the following day due to a Bird Flu scare. I nearly gave up, as I could not see how I could get anywhere near Richard's total with Mai Po being closed. By the end of the month I had managed to see 181 species. Not a bad start.

## February

My first of many visits to Po Toi came early in this month, as a number of commoner winter visitors were to be seen there. However, it was not until later in the month that the island produced the first of many great birds: a Chinese Song Thrush. On the crossing to Po Toi a Black tailed Gull was seen from the boat and with Mai Po still closed this was a bonus. An early morning pre-work visit to Kowloon Catchwater yielded a Forest Wagtail. I was out of the country for a week in the middle of the month, during which time a Siskin was seen at Tai Po Kau. Despite an extensive search for it on my return I could not find it and I feared that I had missed it. With Mai Po being closed Tsim Bei Tsui became the place to go, to try to catch up with some of the Deep Bay specialities. It was a poor alternative to Mai Po and the Boardwalk, but it did produce a Black-necked Grebe. However none of the big gulls, or the wintering Long-tailed Duck (on the Shenzhen side of Deep Bay) strayed to the Hong Kong side. It was, however, a good month for owls, with a Brown Fish Owl at Tai Tam and Asian Barred Owllet and Collared Scops Owl in the same feng shui wood in Lam Tsuen Valley. I was surprised to only add 19 new species to the list during the month.

## March

A visit to Tai Po Kau early in the month produced the Siskin feeding in trees on the access road; where had it been the previous two weeks? March was the month of the Big Bird Race and access to TBT jetty during the Race allowed me to add a number of waders to the list, including Long-billed Dowitcher, which I thought I might miss due to the continued closure of Mai Po. The following day a visit to Kadoorie Farm produced the wintering Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush and whilst watching it I received a call about an Oriental Plover at Kam Tin. It proved elusive at first, but eventually showed well. A Brown Bush Warbler heard at Sha La Tong during the Big

Bird Race was seen the following day, as was an Eagle Owl. I also made the first of many pelagic boat trips during the month, adding a number of seabirds to the list including two species of jaeger and Streaked Shearwater.

All of these were a bonus as Richard had seen hardly any seabirds during his big year list. Hong Kong University proved very productive for thrushes, with five species being seen in a single day. With Mai Po still closed, Po Toi became the popular birding destination and during one of my many visits I was lucky to be in the right place at the right time when an Olive-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula (narcissina) owstoni* was found. With the Orange-breasted Green Pigeon being seen again I hired a junk the following day, feeling sure I was going to see it, but how wrong could I be? No sign and an expensive dip! I did, however, manage to see it on a subsequent visit. By the end of the month my year list stood at 232 species.

## April

During April I was out of Hong Kong for nearly two weeks; not the best time to be away but fortunately I missed very little. Long Valley produced a Citrine Wagtail but despite a number of visits I failed to find any of the Japanese Yellow Buntings which were being regularly seen. With Mai Po eventually reopening at the end of the month I had the chance to catch up with a number of the waders I was still missing. Visits to Po Toi and Southern Waters at the end of the month produced even more seabirds including Hong Kong's second record of Short-tailed Shearwater and, at the end of the month, all the regular terns. Visits to Po Toi continued to add birds to the list, including Chinese Goshawk and Eye-browed Thrush but it was a bad year for Grey-faced Buzzards with hardly any being recorded. A visit to the Boardwalk towards the end of the month produced a Styan's Grasshopper Warbler singing in the mangroves and a dawn twitch to Tai Po Kau on the last day of the month to look for the Fairy Pitta seen the previous day surprisingly proved successful. (*Thanks for that one, Graham! — Ed.*) had rated my chances of seeing at about 2%! An impressive total of 45 species were added to the list during the month, mainly due to Mai Po reopening.

## May

During this month I managed to find two firsts for Hong Kong: a Rosy Pipit at Long Valley and a Ruddy Kingfisher on Po Toi. The latter proved very elusive and was only seen well by me and in flight by a few other lucky observers. Shing Mun produced Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo, now a regular bird in Hong Kong, with others being seen at Tai Po Kau. Visits to the Sai Kung area failed to produce the hoped-for Black Baza, but Chestnut-winged Cuckoo and Great Barbet were relatively easy to see. Night birds seen during the month included Grey Nightjar at Yung Shue O and Malayan Night Heron at Ping Kong. Long Valley still managed to turn up a number of year-ticks including Schrenck's Bittern, Pechora Pipit and Watercock, whilst Nam Chung, an under-watched area, produced a Pheasant-tailed Jacana. A late Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Mai Po was a welcome addition. The first of a number of visits to Tai Mo Shan was undertaken during the month, and although the usual upland birds were seen, there was no sign of Crested Bunting or Chinese Babax, neither of which seem to breed in the area any longer. A report of a Bay Woodpecker at Lai Chi Wo saw me trekking there at 4am the following morning. I was full of confidence that I was going to see it at first light but despite an extensive search there was no sign of it. By the end of the month I had passed the 300 barrier with my list standing at 306.

## June

June was a poor month for birds and only one year-tick was added: Rose-ringed Parakeet in Hong Kong Park. Visits to Tai Mo Shan continued but they failed to produce any additions.

## July

As expected July was an equally poor month, but a Lesser Tree Duck at Nam Sang Wai was a welcome addition. My quest for Crested Bunting turned to the Ping Shan range of hills, a past stronghold, but again I failed to find any.

## August

August was another quiet month, though a typhoon at the beginning of the month blew a Lesser Frigatebird into Tolo Harbour, and I managed to see it just before I left Hong Kong for a few weeks' vacation.

## September

I knew if I was serious about breaking the record I needed to put plenty of effort in during the last few months and had to hope that it was a good year for birds.

The month started well with a Yellow-rumped Flycatcher at Kap Lung. However, a twitch to Dong Ping Chau the following day in search of a Brown-chested Flycatcher proved fruitless. Another visit to Kap Lung a few days later looking for Eurasian Jay did however produce a Brown-chested Flycatcher, though no Jay. A midweek twitch to Po Toi eventually produced the elusive Tiger Shrike seen the previous day but we had to sweat for the bird as it was only located a few minutes before the ferry was due to leave. An early morning search at Kap Lung for a Grey-headed Woodpecker, seen the previous day, proved unsuccessful. Would I ever see a woodpecker in Hong Kong? A visit to Mai Po with the ringing group allowed me to catch up with Pale-legged Leaf Warbler but it was followed later in the day by two crucial dips: a Black Bittern near Long Valley and a Drongo Cuckoo at Tai Po Kau. Poi Toi still continued to add birds to my list, including Dollarbird, Sooty Flycatcher and Purple-backed Starling. Returning to work following a disappointing few hours at Tsim Bei Tsui, I received a call about a Speckled Piculet at Ng Tung Chai. I was only ten minutes away and although I had second thoughts about going I eventually decided to give it a try and was rewarded with excellent views of my first Hong Kong "woodpecker"! The end of the month finished with yet another rarity; a very early Pallas's Reed Bunting at Lok Ma Chau. With three species being added during the summer and thirteen in September my total had reached 322, only six off the record!

## October

I thought September was good but October was even better. A midweek session with the ringers at Mai Po early in the month produced Paddyfield Warbler, Pied Harrier, Blue-tailed Bee-eater and Amur Falcon. A tip-off led to a flock of Black Bazas near Fanling. I was now level with Richard's total and needed just one more to beat it. This was achieved by a visit to Tai Po Kau, where I eventually saw Buff-breasted Flowerpecker, supposedly a relatively regular bird in Hong Kong, but nonetheless one that had eluded me for most of the year. A twitch for a Thick-billed Warbler at Long Valley was unsuccessful, but another session with the ringing group at Mai Po in the middle of the month added Lesser Whitethroat to the list; this was a second for Hong Kong. A number of visits to Po Toi continued to add birds to the list, including Mugimaki Flycatcher, Chestnut-cheeked Starling and Greenish Warbler. Mai Po produced the grand finale of the month, when whilst birding at Long Valley I received a phone call about two probable Cotton Pygmy-Geese. I rushed there and confirmed their identification. The birds were appreciated by the numerous people who managed to see them that day. Feeling lucky I decided to make yet another visit to Cloudy Hill in search of Oriental Scops Owl. My luck held and one was found perched on a branch overhanging the road. By the end of the month my list was 339. Could I make 350?

## November

The month started well with a Sulphur-breasted Warbler at Tai Po Kau, though it took me a whole day to locate it. Another Oriental Scops-Owl was seen at Cloudy Hill, proving that it is the best place in Hong Kong to see that species. My quest for Eurasian Jay continued with further visits to Kap Lung and Tai Lam Chung Reservoir, but all were in vain. Deep Bay provided the majority of the year ticks. A late afternoon call made me rush to the KCRC wetland to see Hong Kong's first Lesser White-fronted Geese, and at Mai Po I found the hoped-for Chinese Penduline Tit and surprisingly, a Daurian Jackdaw. These now seem to be regular winter visitors. A phone call during the month's wildfowl count saw me heading to Ma Tso Lung to see a Russet Sparrow. The final year tick of the month was a Barred Buttonquail at Long Valley. My total now stood at 345; I needed to find five more by 20 December, as I had made a rash promise to spend the Christmas holidays with my long-suffering girlfriend in Canada and that day would be my last day birding in Hong Kong in 2006.

## December

I picked up my only speeding ticket of the year this month rushing to see a "Western" Water Rail at Mai Po. I failed to see it that evening, missing it by just 15 minutes, which just happened to be the amount of time it took to issue me with a ticket. I did, however, manage to see it the following day, and also managed to find the Carrion Crow which had been reported earlier in the week. I was hopeful that a visit to Tsim Bei Tsui would produce at least one of the missing big gulls but, despite some expert help, none were to be found. A couple of visits to the hills behind Kam Tin failed to locate any wintering Crested Buntings. With only fifteen days to go I concentrated my efforts at Mai Po and Ng Tung Chai, as I believed these locations held the best chance of producing new species. Mai Po did eventually yield Common Pochard and during an early morning visit to Ng Tung Chai a superb male Japanese Robin was seen, though not the hoped-for Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher. An evening spent in a ditch at Lam Tsuen looking for an Eastern Water Rail, a recent split, was unproductive. With my total now on 349 I considered canceling my Canadian vacation but then thought better of it.

So that was it: 349 species, of which eight were category D. On a technicality I could claim I saw 350 if I split Spot-billed Duck into two species, as has recently been proposed. Also I saw an "Oriental-type" cuckoo which has been recently split into two species. Looking back I had my share of luck. It was a particularly good year for birds, with the number of seabirds seen boosted due to the seabird survey, and Po Toi regularly watched. On the other hand what would my total have been if Mai Po had not been closed and if I had not left gone overseas in April and December? I believe 365 is a possibility.

It was certainly not easy doing the year list. To reach my total I went birdwatching on over 150 days, visiting Po Toi 28 times and Mai Po 33. Mai Po produced the highest number of year ticks with 128 followed by Po Toi with 43 and Long Valley 31. I didn't record the number of miles I drove but it was quite substantial considering the size of Hong Kong. From a scientific point of view year listing has no real benefit, but I did spend a considerable amount of time looking for Crested Bunting and Eurasian Jay, and failing to see either suggested to me they probably do not breed in Hong Kong anymore.

Finally my quest would never have been possible without the help of the growing number of active Hong Kong birdwatchers who found a lot of the key birds and, more importantly, let me know about them. Thank you all very much!



Being a leader of a bird watching guided tour at the Hong Kong Wetland Park, on the 14th of October of 2007, 4 Bee-eaters were spotted resting on a tree branch when we arrived at the mudflat bird hide. Later on, they were confirmed to be Blue-tailed Bee-eaters (*Merops philippinus*) after being observed with a telescope. Some of them had long tails, some of them had short tails and some had no tail at all.

Later on, at around 4pm, when Mr. CHENG Bing Kuen, one of our team members, was spotting birds for visitors to observe, there was a Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) landing on the grassland near the bird hide suddenly. Since it was moving closer to the bird hide, I encouraged visitors in the bird hide to remain quiet. The Purple Heron was tidying up its plumage, and walking slowly forward to the bird hide. We enjoyed close views of this secretive creature for ten minutes before it flew away.

## Code of Conduct for Birdwatching and Bird Photography

The objective of HKBWS is to promote the study, appreciation and conservation of birds in Hong Kong. In addition, the Society also facilitates the exchange of experience and information related to birdwatching. In recent years, more and more people in Hong Kong become interested in birdwatching and bird photography. Since birds are sensitive to disturbance, special care is required to avoid bringing disturbance to their lives. In order to provide a model for good practices in birdwatching and bird photography, the Society's Executive Committee has drawn up the following code. It is intended to be a reference and guide to both HKBWS members and the general public.

### 1. The Welfare of Birds Comes First

Birdwatching and bird photography should be carried out with minimum interference to the birds. Disturbance must be avoided as far as possible.

- Stop if the birds appear disturbed begin to move away or exhibit other abnormal reaction
- Exercise additional precautions when the activity is undertaken with a large group of people
- Do not attempt to influence the behaviour of birds, e.g. by flushing, chasing or baiting
- Use flash only sparingly
- Do not damage the natural environment

### 2. Protect Sensitive Sites

The roost of rarities are particularly vulnerable. Take extra care to minimize disturbance.

- Keep a suitable distance to avoid stressing the birds
- Do not land on islands with breeding colonies
- Do not disturb nests and their surrounding vegetation, or the nest could be abandoned or become exposed to predators
- Share information about the sites with discretion and do not reveal it casually in public. Explain clearly to those who may not understand the Code, to avoid bringing disturbance to the site
- Beware that your actions may attract unwanted attention and hence disturbance to the site

### 3. Report Disturbances

If you find people disturbing or causing harm to birds, advise against the act when it is safe to do so. If they cannot be stopped, take photos and report to the AFCD as soon as possible. Post a report at the Society's online Forum.

### 4. Respect Others

- Share the fun-avoid disturbing other birdwatchers or photographers on site.
- Take care not to damage facilities or crops at the site.

## Obituary – the late Mr. Xu Weishu

On behalf of the Board and all members of the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, we would like to pay our highest respects to renowned Chinese ornithologist Mr. Xu Weishu, and express our deep regrets at his passing. His departure is a great loss both to ornithology in China, and to us as a great teacher. Following in his footsteps, the Society will continue to do our best in the study of birds.

May he rest in peace.

Sincerely yours,  
Cheung Ho Fai  
Chairman, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society



### Short History of Mr. Xu Weishu

Mr. Xu was a researcher at the Beijing Museum of Natural History. He was born on 16 July 1930 at Ji County in Tienjin City. He graduated from Peking University. Before he retired in 1992, Mr. Xu has been the research officer of the Institute of Zoology and Institute of Ecology at the Beijing Museum of Natural History. Capacities in which he served included:- Committee member and Executive Committee member of China Zoological Society (1979-1992); Secretary of Chinese Association of Natural Science Museums (1988-1992); Deputy Secretary and Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee, China Ornithological Society (1980-2002); Secretary of the Chinese Committee, International Union of Biological Sciences (1996-2008); Editorial Committee member, Biology Section of China Canon (2007); corresponding member and honorary life member, British Ornithologists' Union; life member of American Ornithologist's Union; Honorary Vice Chairman, International Ornithology Congress (1986-1990) and Secretary of the 23<sup>rd</sup>

International Ornithology Congress (1998-2002).

Mr. Xu attended international academic conferences and made oversea study visits to the U.S. (3 times), U.K. (twice), Australia (twice), Canada (twice), India, New Zealand, Austria, Italy, South Africa, Egypt, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

A specialist in the systematics, bio-ecology and migration of birds, Mr. Xu worked in natural history education and ornithological research for 40 years. He was the first person in China to compare the egg shell of Reeves's Pheasant and Elliot's Pheasant under the scanning electron microscope, a piece of research that has set a new standard in avian systematics. In the area of bird migration, his seminal 10-year study on bird population dynamics at Beidaihe won admiration and respect from ornithologists in both China and overseas. He was awarded a second prize in Scientific Progress by the Chinese Academy of Sciences.



For his editorial work on the Encyclopedia of China, Mr. XU was awarded a certificate of merit from the General Administration of Press and Publications of the PRC in 1993, and also received a special allowance from the PRC Government from the same year. He has twice received the Wang Daheng – Gu Fangzhou award from the Beijing Association for Science and Technology. His publications include 8 academic treatises and nearly 100 papers and technical reports, the most important ones include Chinese Raptors – Eagles and Falcons, Volumes 8 and 9 of Aves, Fauna Sinica, National Birds and Representative Birds of the World.

**Observers are reminded to submit their bird records to the Records Committee. This is NOT an “official” record of sighting.**

### ▲ January

The highlight of the month (and contender for bird of the decade) was a **White-billed Diver** found off Sai Kung. Two other potential Hong Kong firsts were a **Red-headed Bunting** and a **Pacific Swift** of the subspecies *kanoi*, both photographed beside the Mai Po access road. The month was also notable for a series of rare gulls, thrushes, warblers and flycatchers.

On 1<sup>st</sup>, the over-wintering **Bianchi's Warbler** and **Red-breasted Flycatcher** were again noted at Po Toi along with an **Eagle Owl** and a **Common Rosefinch** (EMSK, GW). The next day a male **Small Niltava**, presumably the individual first found at the end of December, was seen in Tai Po Kau (EMSK). This bird was then occasionally reported up to 20<sup>th</sup>.

Other notable reports in the first week were a **Ruddy Crake** and the two over-wintering **Citrine Wagtails** at Long Valley (MK, PW, Hey), single **Siberian Thrushes** at Shing Mun, Tai Po Kau and Ng Tung Chai (GH, KPK, EMSK), an **Orange-headed Thrush**, **Sulphur-breasted Warbler**, possible **Chinese Leaf Warbler** and **White-spectacled Warbler**, all at Shing Mun (GH), and a **Pale-footed Bush Warbler** at Lai Chi Kok (YTC photos on HKBWS web-site).

A **Red-headed Bunting**, a potential first record for Hong Kong, was photographed beside the Mai Po access road on 10<sup>th</sup> (TC). Unfortunately the news was not released until 21<sup>st</sup> and there were no further sightings.

A small band of determined birders who visited Lai Chi Kok on 11<sup>th</sup> failed to find the Pale-footed Bush Warbler but were thrilled to see a **Desert Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia minula*** (GT, PJJ), only the second for Hong Kong. Some fine photographs (MK, PW, MH) aided the identification process.

On 13<sup>th</sup>, two Chestnut-flanked White-eyes were noted at Fung Yuen (GH) whilst coverage of Deep Bay for the January waterbird count resulted in a record count of 15,900 **Avocets** and views of a first-winter **Glaucous Gull** and a first-winter Relict Gull, both in front of the new WWF HK hide (YYT). Also noted on the deep Bay mudflats around this time was a **Nordmann's Greenshank** (YYT). Subsequently one or two first-winter **Relict Gulls** were regularly reported from the boardwalk, but the **Glaucous Gull** was not seen again.

The fish ponds beside the Mai Po access road attracted small flocks of **Barn Swallows**, up to 75 **Red-rumped Swallows**, quite large flocks of **House Swifts** on some days and occasionally other aerial feeders, including up to three **Himalayan Swiftlets** during 18<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> (KJ, YYT) and a **Pacific Swift** of the subspecies *kanoi* on 24<sup>th</sup> (PJJ, MH), potentially the first confirmed record of this taxon. Among other notable reports at this time were a **Water Rail** at Au Tau (JAA), three Mountain Bulbuls at Kap Lung and a **Ferruginous Duck** at Nam Sang Wai (JAA).

An already memorable winter hit new heights with the discovery of a **White-billed Diver** off Town Island, Sai Kung on 25<sup>th</sup> (YYT) coinciding with an intense cold front which crossed the South China coast and



led to a prolonged spell of cold weather. This was a first for Hong Kong and Guangdong and only the third or fourth for China. It was seen the next day but not subsequently.

An exciting month concluded with a **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** and **Pallas's Gull** from the boardwalk (CHF) and single **Sulphur-breasted Warblers** at Wun Yiu and Tai Po Kau (WT).

### ▲ February

Prolonged cold weather bringing the heaviest snowfalls to Central China for 40 or 50 years led the news in the run-up to the Lunar New Year holidays, as power lines collapsed under the weight of snow and ice, whole cities went without power for days on end and millions of people were stranded at railway stations or stuck inside trains and buses. Newspaper pictures and TV news clips show snowed-out landscapes in Hunan and northern Guangdong, and it seems likely that lakes only a few hundred kilometres north of Hong Kong froze over. Although large numbers of over-wintering birds must have left Hunan and northern Guangdong under these conditions, no widespread influx was apparent in Hong Kong. The only weather-related influxes reported were of 250 **Common Coots** which suddenly appeared in Deep Bay and 100+ thrushes and chats at both Sai Kung CP and Pui O. It would be interesting to learn if significant influxes were recorded along the China coast or on Hainan or Taiwan.

February was nevertheless an interesting month, the highlights being a series of rare flycatchers including the first Hong Kong record of **Slaty-backed Flycatcher**.

The month opened with news of a **Daurian Jackdaw** amongst **House Crows** at Cheung Sha Wan, Kowloon (GC). The bird was reported to have been in the area for the previous two months. Also on 1<sup>st</sup>, a **Grey Nightjar** was found in the Lam Tsuen Valley (KPK). This was followed by reports of a **Chestnut-crowned Warbler** at Tai Po Kau Headland (RB), a **Pied Harrier** at Mai Po and a male **Small Niltava** at Siu Lek Yuen, Sha Tin, all on 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>.

Thrushes and chats reported at Pak Sha O, Sai Kung on 7<sup>th</sup> comprised six **Red-tailed Robins**, three **Red-flanked Bluetails**, 15 **Grey-backed Thrushes**, 10 **Chinese Blackbirds**, seven **Japanese Thrushes**, two **Brown-headed Thrushes** and a **White's Thrush** (PJL). Larger numbers were reported in Sai Kung CP two days later – 10 **Red-tailed Robins**, 13 **Daurian Redstarts**, 20 **Red-flanked Bluetails**, 39 **Grey-backed Thrushes**, 11 **Japanese Thrushes**, two **Brown-headed Thrushes** and five **White's Thrushes** (PJL). A **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher** was also at Pak Tam Au on 9<sup>th</sup> (PJL).

An influx of similar size was reported at Pui O, Lantau during 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>, with peak counts of 14 **Red-flanked Bluetails**, 10 **Daurian Redstarts**, 70 **Grey-backed Thrushes**, 10 **Japanese Thrushes**, three **Eyebrowed Thrushes**, three **Dusky Thrushes**, two **Brown-headed Thrush** and six **White's Thrushes** (PA). Also reported at this site was a **Chinese Song Thrush**, though photographs appeared to show significant feather damage suggesting captive origins, and up to 10 **Red-throated Flycatchers** (PA). As a further indication of the diversity and quality of habitat at Pui O, a **Brown Fish Owl** and a **Water Rail** were photographed there later in the month (NLY, LEL photos on HKBWS web-site). Sadly, large areas



of Pui O are being trashed and infilled for village-type housing.

However, thrushes and chats were reported in only small numbers at a number of other sites where influxes have previously been noted, such as the Brides Pool-Plover Cove-Wu Kau Tang area, Airfield Road, Fung Yuen, Sha Lo Tung, Tai Po Kau and Ng Tung Chai. So, it seems that the winter's influxes were localised.

One bird which presumably came in with the hard weather was a **Slaty-backed Flycatcher**, the first for Hong Kong and Guangdong. This was photographed on a rocky river-bed near Tsuen Wan on 12<sup>th</sup> (AC) and remained there until at least 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The cold middle third of the month brought reports of a **Water Rail** at Lam Tsuen (EMSK), a male **Fujian Niltava** at Ha Fa Shan, the over-wintering **Bull-headed Shrike**, a **Japanese Robin**, an **Orange-headed Ground Thrush** and a female **Fujian Niltava**, all at Ng Tung Chai (EMSK) as well as the long-staying **Bay Woodpecker**, a **Japanese Robin**, a **White-spectacled Warbler** of the distinctive "*cognita*" morph, a possible **Rufous-bellied Niltava**, a **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher** and a male **Mrs Gould's Sunbird**, all at Tai Po Kau (SLT, KPK, GH, MK, PW). In addition, at least three male **Japanese Thrushes** with the mantle noticeably paler than the head and breast were seen at Fung Yuen (RWL), Lamma and Pui O (GM, SS photos on HKBWS web-site) and a freshly-dead male **Chinese Blue Flycatcher** was found at Ng Tung Chai (EMSK).

Both **Yellow-browed Warblers** and **Grey-headed Flycatchers** were reported to have become scarce during the cold spell (MDW, GJC, GW), dead or moribund **Japanese White-eyes** were found at Tai Po Kau Headland (RB) and there were no signs of the over-wintering **Red-breasted Flycatcher** and **Bianchi's Warbler** at Po Toi (GW).

A fly-by diver off Po Toi in the middle and at the end of the month was thought to be a **Red-throated Diver**, potentially only the third Hong Kong record, and five **Ancient Auklets** were seen off the island on 27<sup>th</sup>.

In Deep Bay, 250 **Common Coots**, the first sizeable gathering of the winter, were noted on 17<sup>th</sup> and a single adult **Dalmatian Pelican** was found on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Notable records in the last week of the month were a **Radde's Warbler** at Fung Yuen (GH), a **Lanceolated Warbler** at Kam Tin and a **Siberian Thrush** and **Bianchi's Warbler** at Mui Tsz Lam (GC).

### ▲ **March**

The month was memorable for a **Masked Booby** photographed off Po Toi. In addition, a good variety of gulls were seen in Deep Bay.

An influx of thrushes and chats was noted at Lamma on 2<sup>nd</sup> with three **Red-tailed Robins**, eight **Daurian Redstarts**, three **Red-flanked Bluetails**, 29 **Grey-backed Thrushes**, 17 **Japanese Thrushes**, 58 unidentified **Turdus** thrushes and three **White's Thrushes** (JAA).



Other notable reports in the first week of the month included a first-winter **Slender-billed Gull**, a **Pallas's (Great Black-headed) Gull** and the adult **Dalmatian Pelican**, all in Deep Bay (GJC, DAD, YYT), single **Water Rails** at Pui O and Lam Tsuen (SS web-site photo, EMSK), an **Orange-headed Ground Thrush** at Ng Tung Chai, a **White-throated Rock Thrush** at Ping Long (EMSK), a **Mugimaki Flycatcher** at Wonderland Villas (TJW) and a singing **Sulphur-breasted Warbler** at Brides Pool (RWL).

On 8<sup>th</sup>, a **Gull-billed Tern** was seen from the boardwalk (GJC), the earliest spring record by 6 days, a **Black Bittern** was reported flying past the Mai Po Education Centre (YYT), no fewer than 6 weeks ahead of the previous earliest record, and a **Bay Woodpecker** was heard at Tai Po Kau Headland (R&KB).

A lull now ensued, with no birds of note reported until 13<sup>th</sup> when six **Ancient Auklets** were off Po Toi (GW) and a **Fujian Niltava** was photographed in Tai Po Kau (FSP). The next day a **Speckled Piculet** was found at Brides Pool (RWL), a new site for this rarity, and in the following days there were reports of a **Kamchatka Gull**, a **Pallas's Gull** and four **Slaty-backed Gulls** in Deep Bay, a **White's Thrush** at Shuen Wan, single Eurasian Woodcocks at Pui O and Shek O, 20 **Chinese Starlings** at Shek O, 20 **Black Bulbuls** and a **Mrs Gould's Sunbird** at Tai Po Kau and a **Ruddy Crake**, **Oriental Pratincole** and **Bright-capped Cisticola** at Long Valley (GJC, EMSK, DB, RWL, PA, Hey).

On 18<sup>th</sup>, an immature **Masked Booby**, a potential first for Hong Kong and China, was photographed flying past Po Toi in company with a flock of Heuglin's Gulls (GW).

New birds reported over the Easter holiday of 21<sup>st</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> included a **Brown-headed Gull**, a **Vega Gull**, a **Kamchatka Gull** and a **Long-billed Dowitcher** at Mai Po (GJC, MDW), a Crested Honey Buzzard at Tai Po Kau (KPK), 10 **Crested Serpent Eagles** over Shap Long (MDW), a **Black-naped Oriole** at Ping Long (EMSK) and a **Streaked Shearwater** and five **Ancient Auklets** off Po Toi (GW).

Subsequently, passage was slow until the last day of the month when an easterly surge arrived. **Large Hawk Cuckoos** and flycatchers were much scarcer than usual for the time of year, only two **Grey-faced Buzzards** were found (at Po Toi on on 26<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>) and there were no phalarope flocks. However, quite an interesting list of sightings can be put together from Birdline reports at this time, including a **Black-winged Kite**, a **Hoopoe**, an **Ashy Minivet**, a late **Red-flanked Bluetail**, a **Brown-headed Thrush**, single **Asian Brown**, **Ferruginous**, **Narcissus** and **Red-throated Flycatchers**, a possible **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, up to three **Blue-and-white Flycatchers** and a **Pale-legged Leaf Warbler**, all at Po Toi (GW, EMSK, MK, PW), four **Nordmann's Greenshanks**, a **Kamchatka Gull**, up to three **Vega Gulls**, a **White-vented Needletail**, a **Dollarbird** (on 30<sup>th</sup>, GJC, the earliest spring record by 9 days) and an **Eastern Crowned Warbler**, all at Mai Po (GJC, YYT), a **Eurasian Woodcock** and 14 **Black Bulbuls** at Tai Po Kau Headland (K&RB), five **Red-tailed Robins** and a **Ferruginous Flycatcher** at Ng Tung Chai (EMSK), three **Blue-and-white Flycatchers** (KPK) and the first **Slaty-legged Crake** of the spring at Tai Po Kau (the latter on 30<sup>th</sup>, K&RB) and finally 500 **Barn Swallows** at Cheung Chau (MDW), probably the highest spring count outside of Deep Bay.