



THE HONG KONG BIRD WATCHING SOCIETY

GPO BOX 12460, HONG KONG

BULLETIN NO. 133 SEPTEMBER 1989

SOCIETY NEWS

- i) Bulletin error. Apologies for wrongly numbering the last bulletin as No. 131 - please amend your copy to read No. 132.
- ii) Subscriptions. We would like to forewarn those few well-organised people who pay their annual dues before being asked for them at the turn of the year, that subscription rates for 1990 will be as follows:

Ordinary member	\$150
Students under 21	\$ 25
Corporate member	\$250
Overseas member	US\$ 20
- iii) Proposed visit to Poyang Lake. It has been decided to cancel this trip because of the recent troubles in China. Should another visit be planned details will appear in a future bulletin.
- iv) Graeme Stevens, who served on the Committee over the last year, has unfortunately left Hong Kong. We thank him very much for his help and wish him well in Australia.

MAI PO UPDATE (Michael Lau)

Mai Po Studies Centre The contractor has started excavating at the site in the WWF HK car park. There is still plenty of parking space left. Nevertheless, car owners are urged to park their vehicles as close together as possible (especially during weekends) to leave room for others. The building will be completed early next year and we apologize for any inconvenience caused.

Tower Hide The piling work is finally finished and the superstructure will be completed this winter.

Captive Waterfowl Collection Due to the terrible rain in August, the construction work is slightly behind schedule. However, every effort has been made to meet the deadline and the majority of waterfowl is expected to arrive in Hong Kong in late October/early November. After the initial release of the birds, there will be a settling-in period before the collection is opened to public view.

The Scrape The water level in the scrape will be maintained low for the waders on autumn migration.

CURRY LUNCH

Sunday 3 December is the date of this year's alfresco curry lunch at the PTU - sadly the final time this will be held as the PTU is being relocated. So don't miss this last opportunity of joining in one of the most enjoyable and informal of Society gatherings, where families are also welcome.

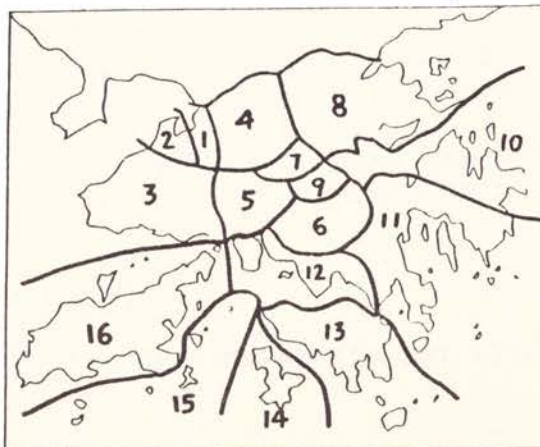
The cost (which includes food and drink) will be \$70 per head, payable in advance. All those interested should return the form at the end of this bulletin to Nigel Croft by 20 November AT THE LATEST.

CHRISTMAS COUNT - 31 December 1989 (C Y Lam)

The Christmas Count this year will take place on Sunday 31 December 1989. The purpose of the count is to get an idea of the abundance of various species in Hong Kong around the end of the year. Taking all four previous counts together, a total of 219 species (excluding escapes) has been recorded.

Hong Kong will be divided into 16 areas as shown in the map below. Each area will be under the care of a leader who will determine how best to cover the area, having regard to tide, ferries, etc. A tentative list of leaders is given below.

<u>Area</u>	<u>Leader</u>
1. Mai Po	John Edge & Simba Chan
2. Tsim Bei Tsui/Mong Tseng	Mike Webster & Francis Batson
3. Castle Peak (incl. Nim Wan, Pak Nai)	Mike Chalmers
4. Northern N.T. (incl. San Tin)	Peter Stevens
5. Sek Kong/Tai Mo Shan	David Melville
6. Shing Mun	C Y Lam
7. Lam Tsuen Valley	Verity Picken
8. Northeast N.T. (incl. Fanling, Luk Keng, Plover Cove)	Margaret & Malcolm Goode
9. Tai Po Kau	Anthony Tse
10. Tai Long (incl. Tolo Harbour)	Li Wai Ki
11. Sai Kung/Ho Chung	Richard Stott
12. Kowloon	Richard Lewthwaite
13. Hong Kong Island	Stewart Smith
14. Lamma Island	Wendy and Andrew Young
15. Cheung Chau	Martin Williams
16. Lantau Island	Roger Costin



Details about the count, including the reporting form and a confirmed list of leaders, will appear in the next bulletin. Those who wish to help are requested to call the leaders, say around mid-December, to find out how the areas are to be covered. Most leaders are happy to take parties around - so treat it as a Society outing, only that you have more choices on that day.

Those of you who prefer to watch birds from your own favourite spot, e.g. your balcony, are welcome to do so. Please submit your observations no matter where you are, even if you are confined to the urban areas on 31 December.

All participants in the count are entitled to submit a guess of the total number of species seen on the day. Whoever gets it right (or closest to being right) will receive a copy of the 'Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Hong Kong'. Should more than one person get it spot on, it will be decided by drawing lots.

Note to leaders: Please advise C Y Lam (Office 3-7329361, Home 3-7280534) if you cannot take up this task. We will then try to find a replacement.

RINGED CHINESE POND HERON CHICKS AROUND DEEP BAY (Lew Young)

With help from the many people who braved the knee-deep black mud in the mangroves at Tsim Bei Tsui, I have been able to ring over one hundred Chinese Pond Heron chicks on the nest at one of their colonies there this summer. (Some of the volunteers couldn't get enough of a good thing and even went in more than once!)

A much smaller number of chicks was ringed at the Mai Po egretty but this was due to the problem of reaching the nests which were usually located high up trees or bamboos, and often at the tips of slim branches. Hopefully, the number of ringed chicks here can be improved upon next year.

There are several kinds of data which one can gather from having a collection of ringed birds, such as looking at their survival rate, but usually results are only significant after a very large number of birds have been ringed (from ringing the chicks over several breeding seasons). Unfortunately the period of time allotted to my project is not long enough to allow me to do this. Instead, I intend looking primarily at the dispersal of these ringed chicks from their breeding area, and their subsequent movement around the Deep Bay area.

I would like to ask HKBWS members to keep their eyes open when they are out around Deep Bay (at both Tsim Bei Tsui and Mai Po) in case there are any of these ringed Chinese Pond Herons around. These birds can be easily recognised by the fact that they have two different coloured rings on each of their legs, above the tarsus, and the colours I have used are red, green, blue, orange, yellow and purple.

I would be grateful if members could report any sightings of these birds with the date, time, location and any other information that may

be useful. Many thanks in advance for your help. (Tel: Island House 0-6561272 or Mai Po 0-4716306).

WWF RESEARCH VISIT TO XISHUANGBANNA, 7-21 June 1989 (Paul Leader)

The group consisted of John 'Mad' Mackinnon (Group Leader and 'Our Man in China'), David Melville (Tall Person), Derek Scott (Group Expert), Phil Round (Group Expert), Bob Ferguson (token 'old-boy') myself (token whippersnapper), Martin Williams (token accent), Mary Ketterer (Logistics), and Nigel Watt (Group Photographer). Our mission, which we were daft enough to accept, was to go to Xishuangbanna and help Mad Mac gather data for his study of the area: to find out how much the size of each forest block, and its isolation, affected the bird communities in the blocks. 'All' we had to do was to compile a list of the first twenty species we saw, and then to start a new list recording the next twenty species (this second list could obviously include any number of species already included in the first list) and so on. It was hoped that this, when analysed, would give some idea as to the total number of species in each area.

We left Hong Kong for Kunming on 7 June, three days after the events in Beijing, and this was my first trip to China! From Kunming we flew to Simao where we were met by a fleet of Yunnan Forestry Bureau jeeps which offered varying degrees of luxury. The best was quickly commandeered by the older (or more important depending on your point of view) group members! A couple of stops on the way to Jinghong produced the first forest birds including Pin-tailed Pigeon, Blue-bearded Bee-eater, and Puff-throated and Buff-chested Babblers, and we didn't even have to do any lists yet. It was just like being on holiday - every bird I saw was new, it was great!

The next morning saw us at our first survey area doing our first lists, or trying to. John had chosen a very isolated patch for us to begin with. The only good thing about it was that it was very small so it gave us an opportunity to get to know each other! The day's birding produced a 'massive' seven lists and 33 species. I don't think I was the only one who was concerned that the whole trip was to be like this.

The following day we moved base from Jinghong to Menglun. The road followed the Mekong much of the time and a couple of stops at likely-looking places produced Great Thick-knee, River Lapwing, Plain Martin, Jerdon's Bushchat and Pale-footed Bush Warbler. The following morning we were taken to Chenzi Village forest which, although only about 5 ha., was not particularly isolated. We found 72 species including Shikra, Mountain Bamboo Partridge, Blue-eared and Copper-smith Barbets, Speckled and White-browed Piculets, Rufous Woodpecker, Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike, Little and Streaked Spiderhunters and a Baya Weaver colony (which managed to get itself onto about seven lists!) We also had two Red-wattled Lapwings fly up the small valley on the edge of the forest.

The next day, the 12th, we went to what John called the limestone forest where he promised us laughing thrushes. We saw none! We did see 74 species here and completed 13 lists. John's computer informed us

that there were another 45 species to be seen there. Those we did see included Bar-backed Partridge, Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo, Silver-breasted and Long-tailed Broadbills, Green Magpie, Limestone Wren Babbler and Grey-headed Parrotbill. Much of the forest was very dense and was quite difficult to bird but at least there was something to see!

On 13th we visited a nearby larger block where we recorded, among others, White-legged Falconet, Scaly-breasted Partridge, Common Goldenback, Hooded Pitta, Ashy Bulbul, Maroon Oriole, Large, Red-billed and Streak-breasted Scimitar Babblers, Slaty-backed, White-tailed and Hill Blue Flycatchers, Sultan Tit (including one feeding from buffalo dung in the middle of the road), Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch and lots of Crimson and Black-throated Sunbirds. This was generally found to be one of the more enjoyable areas to watch, and we managed 20 lists, which made John quite happy!

We moved camp yet again the following day, this time to Mengyang. In the afternoon we visited an area called Sanchahe which, although very good for birding, was where other things started to steal the limelight. The first was a family party of seven elephants that John saw on the first evening. The other, and for me far more dramatic event, was Bob, Mary and myself getting lost. I still don't know how it happened, all I know is that it was Bob and Mary's fault! At about 2 p.m. when we decided we were lost, we were not too worried as we were following a stream which we knew just had to reach the main river that led back to the pick-up point. At about 4.30 p.m. we reached the river. 'No problems', we said, and to celebrate drank the last of our water. We then turned the wrong way! Without realising it we had (I think) come out on to the river upstream of the pick-up point, thinking we were downstream. Anyway the short version of the rest of the story is that we were eventually found by one of the search parties at 11 a.m. the following day. However, we chose the right place to get lost as this area proved to be the richest of all the sites we visited. We recorded 145 species including Besra, Silver Pheasant, Red Jungle Fowl, Mountain Scops Owl, Collared Owlet and Brown Hawk Owl (during our unscheduled night-time birding!), Orange-breasted and Red-headed Trogons, Large Cuckoo Shrike, Wood Shrike and Asian Fairy Bluebird.

The last place we visited was very nice although extremely isolated (a five-hour walk to get to the village). That was Kuon Man, the highest area we visited. Here we saw Black Eagle, Crested Tree Swift, Orange-headed Thrush and Fire-capped Tit and Phil heard Rusty-naped Pitta. And on the 18th, we began our return to Hong Kong.

As previously mentioned, the whole point of the trip was to collect as many lists of 20 species as possible. John's computer analysis used not only the lists but other variables, including size of the forest block or patch, degree of isolation, bird size and estimated intensity of hunting in each block. It was found that bird richness was very dependent upon patch size, and especially the isolation of each patch, and that larger birds were far less common in the isolated patches. The preliminary results have demonstrated the value of the survey technique and have already impressed upon the Xishuangbanna Forestry Bureau the great importance of conserving a smaller number of large forest blocks rather than an equivalent area made up of many smaller blocks.

Xishuangbanna was for much of the time really hard going. Huge problems with shooting and clearing of the forest exist, and on the

whole the birds were very wary. We visited very little primary forest which is mainly due to the fact that there is very little; the overall impression when driving through the reserve is of huge areas of cultivation broken up by smaller areas of forest.

This is not to say it was not an enjoyable trip - far from it. For me it was a fascinating visit to a country I'd never been to before with an incredibly nice group of people; I saw some excellent birds and have now got a great story to tell my grandchildren if I ever have any!

* * *

This was the first of three planned visits; the next one will take place over Chinese New Year 1990. Anyone interested should contact David Melville at WWF Hong Kong. Participants must be available for a minimum of two weeks and preferably have experience of forest birdwatching in China or northern Thailand.

OVERSEAS BIRDING

RETURN TO NAN KUN SHAN - March 1989 (Gavin Cooper)

The visit took place between 22 and 28 March, exactly the same dates but five years after the first ever Society expedition to this reserve. The team consisted of myself, Nigel Croft, John Holmes, Kevin Lewis and Mike Turnbull and we left Hong Kong on the night ferry to Guangzhou. The girls in the bar still remembered me and the dinner was adequate so the trip got off to a really good start. Of course, it couldn't last!

We disembarked the next morning and were met eventually by two gentlemen from the Forestry Bureau. Our driver, Mr Leung, was one of the best we have ever had and only took a couple of wrong turnings on the way up to Nan Kun Shan. I easily outdid him. The plan was for us to de-bus, at about lunch-time, a few hundred metres from the top of the ingress road and walk into the reserve. This would not only give us a chance to look at one or two good spots there but also to get a panoramic view of the whole area to help in future navigation, the rest of the team not having been there before. What a hope.

My marker for de-bussing was a stone wall over a culvert. Unfortunately, as we later discovered, there are two very similar walls and I chose the first one. This was about 12 clicks further down the road than intended and when this became generally known I was about as popular as a reserve with no birds. Luckily the road was very productive; we saw several species not to be found again and these included some not recorded previously from the area e.g. Thick-billed Warbler.

We finally reached the top, but it was a long hike. Soon after starting down the mist closed in and we could see nothing and hear little but this 'little' included a Barred Owlet, a new bird for the reserve. Eventually Mr Leung put us out of our misery by driving up for us much earlier than we'd asked him to and we were all glad to make it to the quarters (especially me as I expected any minute to be hung, drawn and quartered).

The next day we left early for a day in and around the 'climax forest' as we decided that this area needed a lot more attention than it is normally given. I found a path up the hill and got part way up it but I couldn't get down again so continued upwards and checked out the forest for the rest of the day until meeting up again with the boys near Sheung Ping about 4 p.m. I had found a Rufous Woodpecker which finally put this species onto the NKS list. The boys, too, had had a good time and hadn't worried too much, if at all, about my disappearance. I couldn't make up my mind whether this was a good or a bad thing!

The second day we took things a little easier; there was quite a bit of rain and we used the van a lot and scoured the catchment areas. Spring had arrived much earlier than in 1984. There were no mixed flocks of warblers so several Phylloscopus species were missed and even birds like the Dipper and Plumbeous Water Redstart were hard to find. But we kept turning up new species for the reserve and getting good daily numbers.

The following day we tried the 'reservoir' area. Need I say we went to the wrong one but it was good birding and, having split up for a while, one group added Crested Honey Buzzard to the list. We went on a long walk which I felt sure would bring us to the other part of the reservoir but all it did was to finish in a dead end, thus adding to my fame as a faultlessly accurate navigator. The rain started again and it became just too wet to carry on. So we had to resort to the whisky bottles which was hell, of course.

On the fourth and final full day we took in the catchment early, getting the Dipper at last and then we all went back to Sheung Ping. The weather was beautiful, if a little too warm. The boys went straight into the forest while I skirted round it and found a trail which took me right up the mountain behind the climax forest. I had one hell of a walk but was rewarded, at least in part, by seeing a fine male Small Niltava - another first.

The top of this mountain affords splendid views of the surrounding countryside which is several thousand feet below one and approached by virtually sheer drops. I recommend a visit there by any future group going to NKS, but not necessarily going by my route. On the top I found species such as Mountain Bush Warbler and Spotted Bush Warbler plus two or three other species which were either new for the reserve or new for March. Unfortunately - that word again - I couldn't find a path down, not wanting to re-trace the path of the morning. I finally made it to the bottom though and was at the rendezvous only an hour adrift and very much to the relief of the driver and his mate, who were, by now, getting extremely worried.

Again the boys didn't seem unduly worried about my disappearance, indeed, I felt they were a bit peeved at seeing me back?? They had held up dinner for me but I was too bushed to eat anyway so they wasted their time. When we finally started talking to each other again it was to discover that they too had made it to the top. That is the path which any future visitors to the area should use.

Some final notes to compare this trip with the first March visit: we recorded a total of 83 species against 75 in 1984 and added 11 new

species to the Nan Kun Shan list which, when the new birds from the May 1989 visit are also included, should now stand at 145. We also recorded ten species which, while they have been seen in the reserve before, were not recorded in March.

We missed 13 of the species recorded in 1984, 11 of which were migrants and must have passed through. The most important of those missed was the Crested Kingfisher which was breeding and easily seen previously but this year was nowhere to be found.

It is obvious that considerable experience of South China birds has been gained by Hong Kong birders over the last five years and this contributed greatly to the success of the visit.

NAN KUN SHAN, 24 - 29 May 1989 (Stewart Smith)

Verity Picken, Wendy Young, Richard Lewthwaite and I, who had been willing but unable to join Gavin's Easter trip to Nan Kun Shan, made a separate visit there at the end of May. We tracked the Cooper route, leaving by ferry for Guangzhou on the evening of the 23rd, which allowed us to arrive in the reserve at midday (despite the appallingly deteriorated condition of the valley road to the foot of the hills) and thus extend our four full days into nearly five. The new China Ferry Terminal, incidentally, makes this departure a great deal more convenient and comfortable than the old one from Tai Kok Tsui.

We left only three days after Typhoon Brenda passed through and the following tropical depression made the weather universally overcast with frequent light and occasional heavy rain. Temperatures in the reserve were perhaps 25°C at highest, but with exceptions humidity was curiously low. In the first two days river water levels were very high, with raging streams and next to no uncovered riverbed. We were armed with all the Hong Kong generated literature on Nan Kun Shan which has emerged over the last few years and a copy of Gavin's March sightings, which had added or confirmed 13 species to the reserve list.

We de-bussed on the way in at the top of the new road and walked down into reserve headquarters, and spent the next day and various odd hours on the catchwaters, at and beyond the bridge and elsewhere around the village. But most of our efforts were concentrated on Sheung Ping, the climax forest rising above it, and a most interesting area of scrub and track beyond the forest (and indeed probably not in the reserve at all, since much of the surrounding hillside was deforested).

On day 3 we decided to do, as two pairs, the territory above Sheung Ping, with Wendy and Richard taking the 'low road' - along the valley and up (in theory) into the forest on the higher ground where the solitary sighting of Red-headed Trogon for all our visits had been in January 1986 - and Verity and I penetrating the climax forest. The low road party had a dismal day, with the only birds of note being a pair of Slaty-backed Forktails (less common on this visit than ever before, and indeed not seen by me). It also emerged in due course that they had found neither the forest nor even the high ground, which I presently find irreconcilable with the topography as I recall it from previous years - but there you are (Peter Stevens please investigate).

Verity and I meanwhile proceeded to cause chaos. This is not the place to recite all the events, but in sum we were by late afternoon right through the forest instead of circling down to the valley road, and ended up spending the night with an extremely hospitable forest policeman. Our efforts to phone through to Miss Ho were frustrated by an out-of-order telephone, and this led to enormous ructions at headquarters, with search parties and the lot, despite Richard and Wendy's firm (and correct) belief that we were perfectly all right. Much loss of face for all, but we are at present reasonably confident that there have been no long-lasting consequences. My repeated apologies to all.

The birds were excellent. We didn't quite make the numbers achieved on earlier visits, but then there were only four of us. As in May 1985 we had to work for what we saw (contrast the winter months) and it was noticeable how much less prominent both Horsfield's Goshawk and Black Baza were than then, with probably three and four pairs respectively. Other raptors included two birds each of Crested Serpent Eagle, Crested Goshawk and Mountain Hawk Eagle, a range of unidentified accipiters and a number of hobby sp. sightings, including an eight-second copulation.

There were the usual range of minivets and bulbuls, but forktails were uncommon with only three pairs of Slaty-backed and three birds of White-crowned seen. Rufous-necked and Rufous-capped Babblers and Brown capped Fulvettas (all seen being superciliaris) were regular, though mostly heard rather than seen. Morrisonia was more obvious, and there were many noticeable parties of Greater Necklaced Laughing Thrush. There seemed already to be the beginning of post-breeding flocking, with parties of 30/40 of both Grey-throated Minivets and Collared Sivas, and a variety of small mixed flocks including White-bellied Yuhina and Pekin Robin.

Our strengths were good, with Red-winged Crested and Lesser* Cuckoos to add to the ubiquitous Large Hawk; a good range of owls, with a fine Brown Hawk Owl seen (thanks to Wendy's assiduous searching) to complement the Collared Scops and Oriental Scops Owl* and Barred and Collared Pygmy Owlets heard; and three Grey-capped* and two Black-naped Green Woodpeckers* to go with the two pairs of Bay which we isolated (one of which gave me superb views on the first morning). The scrubland beyond the forest (about 700m) held sizeable numbers of Hill Prinia, Mountain Bush Warbler and 'zeebit' birds (assumed, because not seen, to be Bradypterus thoracicus), a Bluethroated Bee-eater*, and a Lesser Shortwing*, well seen by at least some of us and heard by all, to confirm shortwing calls heard elsewhere in the area.

The forest itself, however, delighted us most, with an Emerald Dove*, two family parties of Red-headed Trogons (at least six birds in total, juvenile scoped and calls recorded) and, most ecstatic of all, superb views of Fairy Pitta* on three occasions and of two, and probably three, birds (on the day we got 'lost', Verity and I had one in full view, and scoped, at about 20 yards for upwards of ten minutes). Our birds were, incidentally, quite different from the Blue-winged Pitta Pitta mollucensis (described as Chinese Pitta P. nympha in Viney), and corresponded to King's Fairy Pitta P. nympha. The recent Cheung Chau sighting is of mollucensis, so it seems that both occur in Guangdong.

64 species were fully identified on the reserve with a further 13 en route, including 17 Red Turtle Doves. Scotch-wise it proved to be a four bottle trip. An annotated list is being prepared and we are already talking to Miss Ho of a further visit there, or elsewhere, over next winter.

* indicates birds new to the reserve or to our trips.

A VISIT TO PHUKET ISLAND - July 1989 (Gavin Cooper)

Having won a brace of CX Discovery Tour tickets at the Jardine's Annual Ball I was able to visit Phuket any time this year with the girl of my choice. I chose my youngest daughter Stephanie and made the trip between July 22 and 26.

We elected to stay at the Pearl Village Hotel which is the closest to the airport, mainly because it seemed, from the maps, to be situated in a nature reserve. This was not in fact the case but the choice was still a wise one as there was plenty of good birding country all round the hotel with a very long beach down one side. At one end of this beach I found my 'target' species, the Malaysian Plover.

The area also produced some other very good species such as Whistling Teal, Coppersmith Barbet, Black-shouldered Kite, Red-wattled Lapwing, Baya Weaver, the Common and Great Iora and three sunbird species. But best of all on the very first evening I found a pair of Green Broadbills - they flew into a treetop right above my head giving close-up views.

The following day we reconnoitered a forest area Graeme Stevens had suggested called Ton Sai Waterfall. In a very short space of time I found Orange-bellied Flowerpecker, Lesser Cuckoo-shrike, Little Spiderhunter, Lesser Green Leafbird and quite a lot more.

The following morning I was up very early and back at the waterfall well before dawn, but there was no sign of nightjars and only one owl calling and that was a long way off. I spent nine hours walking through the adjacent forest, much of it secondary growth but some of it seemingly primary forest. The birds were there but hard to see - one pair of eyes in a new area is never a very good idea. But I found Black-headed and Stripe-throated Bulbuls, Crimson and Purple-naped Sunbirds, Striped Tit-babbler, Maroon-breasted Flycatcher and Olive-backed Jungle Flycatcher. I also found plenty of species which were not shown in Boonsong Lekagul's book as occurring in that area. It probably hadn't been birded very much when the book was published in 1974.

More familiar species found near the hotel included Tree Sparrow, Spotted and White-rumped Munias, Jungle Crow, Greater and Lesser Coucals, Plaintive Cuckoo and Black-naped Orioles. The Common Mynah was VERY common. Also a Grey Wagtail which was either a very late or a very early one. The only other raptor seen was the Brahminy Kite.

Phuket proved to be a lovely place to visit, and the Pearl Village an ideal place to stay. The people are wonderfully friendly and the seafood great. We were there in the off-season, so did not experience any crowds. Apart from a couple of torrential tropical downpours the weather was very kind, hot but by no means unbearable and usually with a cool breeze blowing. We hired an air-conditioned jeep to get around in and at very reasonable rates.

I wished I had had the time to spend another day in the forest as I was just getting used to the calls and the new species. In all I recorded about 65 species of which one third were new for me. But this was my first birding visit to Thailand so it wasn't a bad effort. I think the island would make an ideal destination for a Society 'Outing'. Oh yes, the beer is very good too!

SOCIETY OUTINGS

TAI MO SHAN - 20 May 1989 (Gavin Cooper)

This early morning outing was automatically cancelled as No. 8 typhoon signal was up when I got out of bed, but at least I checked!

TAI PO KAU SURVEY - 27 May 1989 (Clive Viney)

Obviously a spot of serious birdwatching did not appeal to many members but I'm pleased to say that Gavin Cooper, John Edge, Bob Ferguson, Christina Jimenez and Mark Nunns made the morning's survey meaningful. We recorded 46 species in the reserve in rather murky but cool conditions. The most interesting proved breeding addition was the Yellow-cheeked Tit (four birds plus a juvenile), and it also seems likely that the Silver-eared Mesia is now established high up on the Brown Walk as two pairs were found holding territory. A Slaty-backed Forktail was located easily enough in its favoured spot by the loos. It was good to record Tai Po Kau specialities like Orange-bellied Leafbird, Grey-throated and Scarlet Minivets (both proved breeding), Crested Serpent Eagle, Emerald Dove, Chestnut Bulbul, Hainan Blue Flycatcher (two pairs), Greater Necklaced Laughing Thrush, Pekin Robin and Treepie.

All six of us found the forest walk most enjoyable (we operated as three pairs) and the lunch time retreat to Luen Yick Restaurant at Yim Tin Tsai allowed for a lively call-over and analysis of results.

This is the second year that this survey has been conducted and is one of the more useful exercises carried out by the Society. If we are to make a worthwhile contribution to monitoring environmental changes, it is important that surveys such as this, the January waterfowl count and the regular wader counts at Mai Po receive the active support of members.

TSIM BEI TSUI - 4 June 1989 (Gavin Cooper and John Edge)

For the life of us we couldn't figure out why the Committee had decided that June was a good time for a Tsim Bei Tsui outing. The fact that we were both at the meeting when this was decided didn't help matters

either. But it probably had something to do with seeing how many waders were still around so late in the year?

In any case, everything got off to a bad start as the news from Beijing broke that morning, putting a real damper on things. It was also hot, humid and the tide, which should have been at least two hours off the flood was already right up and in places was covering the road along the Fence to a depth of several inches.

There were only six of us and we went down the road in two cars, one of them nearly stalling where the water was deepest. At some points the road is in a real mess from the construction that is going on - presumably in connection with the Tin Shui Wai project?

Only 32 species were recorded, mostly common stuff, but a few of interest: like the young Peregrine Falcon which was making a hash of obtaining its breakfast amongst the many egrets now breeding in the area, and the five Oriental Pratincoles, which were the only waders seen and the very late Rufous Turtle Dove. And there was an Osprey.

But I refuse to go on any more June trips to T.B.T.!!

MAI PO - 23 July 1989 (Mike Bishop)

This turned out to be as quiet a day as I have ever experienced at Mai Po, at least in terms of the number of bird species in evidence.

A party of ten, we set out at 2 p.m. along the casuarinas, encountering nothing of note save for a White-breasted Kingfisher, and that only because it was the first time that one of the group had seen any of the kingfisher species!

It was very hot and our first stop, at the disabled hide, produced Yellow Bittern and Little Green Heron - the first of several seen during the course of the afternoon. From the HKBWS hide the expected residents were seen, together with a solitary Red-necked Phalarope in non-breeding plumage. We also had quite good views of a couple of Chestnut Munias among a flock of Spotted Munias. We caught the boardwalk exactly right, the falling tide having exposed a couple of hundred metres of mud which the birds were busily exploiting. Here we had a single Terek Sandpiper, several Curlew, small flocks of Redshank and Greenshank (interesting because we had seen no Redshank and only seven or eight Greenshank on the scrape), a handful of Greater Sand Plover and excellent views of a feeding Osprey.

The return journey to the car park was unremarkable and, disappointingly, neither of the Brahminy Kites which had been seen recently put in an appearance.

The final species count? An unimpressive 43; as I said, a quiet afternoon. It's hard to believe on days like this that, within a matter of only a few weeks, Mai Po will be hopping with a mass of passage migrants fit to test the identification skills and mathematical agility of the most ardent observer.

THE PLEASURES OF MAI PO IN SUMMER (John Edge)

On 1 July 1989 Clive Viney and I made an early morning visit to Mai Po, arriving before 0630h on a beautifully clear day with some breeze. We aimed to be out for about four hours, before it became really hot - which it duly did, whereupon we retreated to the airconditioning and a jug of cold beer at the Border View restaurant.

The morning gave us 63 species, including 20 species of wader. A most interesting mix, there were singles of Greater and Mongolian Sand Plovers, Ruff, Asiatic Dowitcher, Black-tailed Godwit, Australian Curlew and Wood Sandpiper, as well as 42 Stilts, 18 Little Ringed Plover, two Great Knot, good numbers of Whimbrel and Curlew, 61 Greenshank and 45 Grey-rumped Sandpipers. Up to five Pied Kingfishers were in the scrape area, posing attractively; there was also a juvenile White Wagtail, a species not yet proved to have bred in Hong Kong, and a Hwamei was in good voice in the middle of the marsh.

A thoroughly enjoyable morning persuaded me to drop my prejudice against midsummer birdwatching at Mai Po. It was also an excellent opportunity properly to observe waders, as the numbers were manageable and the singles were easily picked out.

REPORT ON THE BIRDS - 1 June to 26 August 1989 (Mike Chalmers)

June

The Black Bittern previously reported at Mui Wo was seen again on 2nd (MT). At least 12 Little Whimbrel were present at Mai Po on 3rd/4th (JEB) while on 7th a minimum of five Black-naped Terns was observed at the Soko Islands again, suggesting that there may be a breeding colony in that area (SS). Two unidentified needletail swifts were seen over Tai Po Kau between 7th and 11th (unusually late dates) (RWL/WY). Nordmann's Greenshank continued to be recorded at Mai Po with six on 8th (PRK) and three on 10th (RWL). On the latter date over 20 Black-winged Stilts in pairs were still present. The Slaty-backed Forktail was seen again at Tai Po Kau near the lay-by on 10th (RWL). On 11th an Oriental Pratincole, Black-faced Spoonbill and two Chestnut Bitterns were reported from Mai Po (JH) and on 14th a Black Baza with nesting material was seen at Tai Mei Tuk (WY). On 19th a dead Slaty-legged Crake was found on the road near Kadoorie Farm suggesting that this elusive species may breed in that area (ML).

July

The number and variety of summering waders continued the increasing trend observed over recent years since the construction of the wader scrape, and several new late dates were set. On 1st 20 wader species were recorded including singles of Ruff (Reeve), Asiatic Dowitcher and Australian Curlew, two Great Knot, 61 Greenshank, 42 Black-winged Stilt and 45 Grey rumped Sandpiper (CAV/MB). Also present as unusual summer records were Grey Heron, Garganey and Shoveler. The next day 185 birds of 18 wader species were counted including three Great Knot and two Red-necked Phalaropes (RWL). On 5th an unusual summer record for Arctic Warbler was reported on the Peak (VBP). Positive proof of the

breeding of Black Bazas was obtained on 11th with two adults and two fledglings seen next to Sha Tau Kok Police Station (NC). With the Recorder (and many others) on leave reports for the rest of July and early August are lacking but include a Hoopoe at Route Twisk (Sek Kong side) on 22nd (MH).

August

A visit to Tai Mo Shan on 6th produced at least eight Chinese Babax and several Large Grass Warblers (PRK, MB). Another Hoopoe turned up at Shek O on 10th (JH). On 12th wader numbers had increased at Mai Po and included 240 Redshank, 53 Marsh Sandpipers, 29 Curlew Sandpipers and two Australian Curlew (MB). On 14th Tai Po Kau produced two surprises in the form of an early Asian Paradise Flycatcher and a Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (S & M O'B). The latter is presumed to be the same bird as the one seen in April this year, and was again found near the large terraced picnic area on the Red/Blue Walk. On 15th eight Black Bazas and a Crested Goshawk were seen at Sek Kong Catchwater (Gavin has resumed his jogging!) and the next day an Eagle Owl was reported at Bate Head and another Asian Paradise Flycatcher, clearly a migrant, at Hole Island, Sai Kung (ARL). At least one Hainan Blue Flycatcher was still present at Tai Po Kau on 18th (MB), and a total of three Brahminy Kites was seen at Mai Po around this time (DSM, ML, SC). Other interesting reports from Mai Po included a single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and an immature Spotted Eagle on 20th and three Asiatic Dowitchers and a Black Bittern on 26th (MB).

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

<u>DATE</u>	<u>LEADER</u>	<u>VENUE</u>	<u>TIME</u>
30 September Saturday	Li Wai-ki John Holmes	Ting Kok Road Meet: Plover Cove reservoir car park Bi-lingual	0730
1 October Sunday	Nigel Croft	Tsim Bei Tsui Meet : car park	0900
15 October Sunday	Anthony Tse	Mai Po Meet: car park Bi-lingual	0730
21 October Saturday	John Burton	Tai Po Kau Meet: car park	0730
28 October Saturday	Paul Leader	Luk Keung/Nam Chung* Meet: Luk Keng car park	0730
29 October Sunday	Stewart Smith	Tsim Bei Tsui Meet: car park	0800