

HKBWS



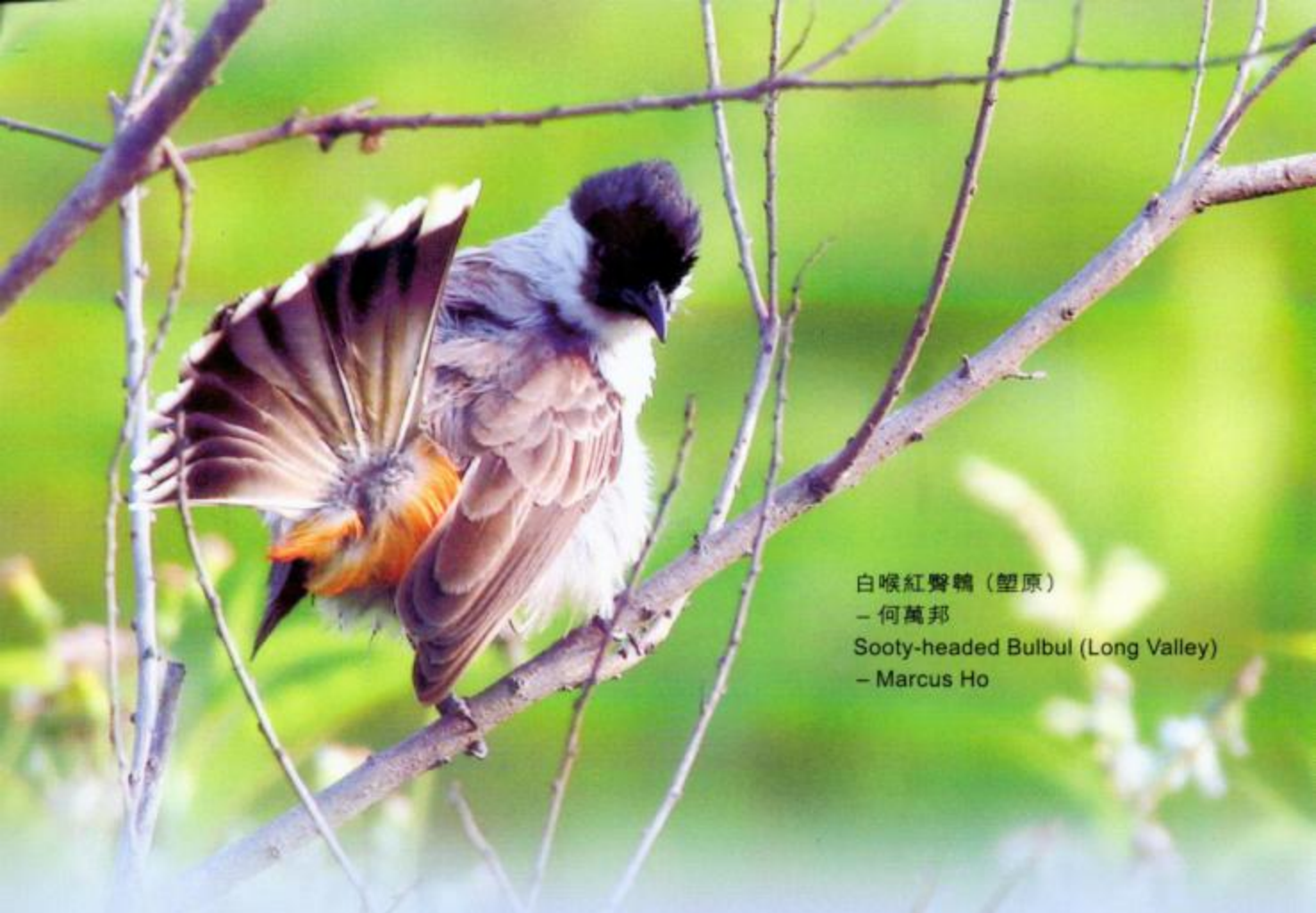
bulletin

會員通訊



191

Spring 2004 ~ 春



白喉紅臀鵲 (塹原)
- 何萬邦
Sooty-headed Bulbul (Long Valley)
- Marcus Ho



黑卷尾 (塹原)
- 關寶權
Black Drongo (Long Valley)
- Kwan Po Kuen



The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Limited

(Approved Charitable Institution of a Public Character)

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– Lee Hok Fei (Tsim Bei Tsui)

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From the Chairman ...

Humans and birds have lived side by side harmoniously since ancient times.

Owing to recent deaths from avian flu communicated by domestic chicken, reports in the mass media have gradually led to the formation of a view that wild birds are the source of the epidemic or the cause of its spread. This is an unfortunate misunderstanding.

I spent some time reading a book called, "Guns, Germs and Steel", and realized that epidemics started after humans domesticated animals and birds. The increased contacts with domesticated animals and birds enhanced the chances of viruses jumping to human beings. Most of the time there is little harm, but occasionally viruses could cause illness. It depends on further mutation of genes before the virus involved could move from one person to another. Finally, only with the concentration of dense populations in towns and cities could the virus move around and spread. That is how epidemics arise. In brief, it is the result of the actions of humans.

Humans and birds have always carried a potpourri of bacteria and viruses on their bodies. But after several million years of co-evolution, they have settled into a state of equilibrium where they co-exist peacefully. Neither is bothered by the others' illnesses. From this broad perspective, resident birds living among us, as well as migratory birds on passage, do not constitute a threat to our health.

When we watch birds, we pay due respect and keep a good distance. Thus the chances of picking up anything from birds is miniscule. Indeed, throughout the world, there is as yet no reported case of anyone catching avian flu through bird watching. Therefore, bird watchers need not worry unduly. Naturally, it is also prudent to observe common-sense rules of hygiene, such as taking a bath and washing clothes and shoes on returning home from field trips.

The various claims that migratory birds spread the avian flu are unsettling and frustrating. Firstly, the recent cases of avian flu in humans arose from contacts with domestic chickens. Secondly, claims related to migratory birds so far are all hypothetical. Confirmed cases are yet to be reported in reputable scientific publications. Thirdly, the recent avian flu took place in mid winter, at a time when migrants were settled in their wintering grounds and not making long-distance flights. They could not be spreading anything. Further details are given in the statement issued by BirdLife International, which is presented in this bulletin.

SOCIETY NEWS

2004 membership badge

You will receive the membership badge for 2004 along with next issue, if you have already renewed your membership. This year, the winner of the "My Favourite Hong Kong Bird Election", the Tree Sparrow, was selected for the badge.

Membership renewal

Please remember to renew your subscription. You may send the completed subscription form with a crossed cheque to the society. This is the recommended method for renewal, however, you may directly credit the 'The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Limited' account (Hong Kong Bank account no. 534-361423-838) and return the pay-in slip and the completed subscription form to the society. Thank you for the continued support.

Hong Kong Bird Report 1999/2000

The combined issue HKBR 1999/2000 will soon be ready for typesetting. The editor and volunteers are working on the articles. We will keep you informed on the development.

BBS of HKBWS

Members are encouraged to visit the BBS section of the society's website to get the latest news and bird information, exchange views, and share experience, fun and photos with others. The BBS section contains various forums for the participation of members including: Membership Affairs, Outings/Activities, HKBWS Projects, General Information, Birding Tips/Identification, Photo Galleries, Conservation, BFS and various interest groups, etc.

Indeed, once we think about it, we realize that in winter, the number of people moving through Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chou and the airport everyday far exceeds that of birds crossing the border. People flying long distances on the East Asia migration flyway are much more numerous than birds, too. From the SARS episode, it is clear that the rapid spread of modern epidemics is mostly due to the mobility of human beings. The focus of epidemic containment should be firmly on humankind. Shifting the blame to birds, which are actually victims of the flu, misplaces the emphasis and misses the point.

My heart aches greatly on hearing the sporadic calls to fill Mai Po or to kill migratory birds, or even all birds, "in order to stop viruses spreading". Such calls ignore the fundamentals of epidemics and more sadly reflect a horrifying view of the universe centred on the individual, which sees all other living things as aliens and enemies. While we keep on teaching young children to value life and to respect life, what they see or hear now is always the word "kill". How can they possibly grow up with a healthy mind? My worry is that one day when they become adults they might demand the elimination of other virus-carrying people!

We live at the apex of an immensely complex food chain, benefiting from the collective provisions generated by millions of species. This is an incredible miracle for which we should be forever thankful. We cannot lightly decide to kill other life forms. Once biodiversity is destroyed and once the food chain is



broken, humans must also come to grief.

For the long-term sustenance of the human race on Earth, we must prudently handle our relationship with nature. The emergence of avian flu is a serious alarm signal from nature. We must carefully re-think how we care for domesticated birds, since we have severed their links with nature. We should respect and protect those birds which continue to roam freely in the wild, as our way to thank Providence for enabling us to enjoy our lives.

Dear birders, I urge you to make use of every opportunity to help your friends see the beauty of life and nature, as well as the intimate relationship between humans and nature. Hopefully we would give the world a greater sense of peacefulness.

People and Birds Together. Nature Forever 

CY Lam

– Carrie Ma, Jimmy Chim

- Lee Kwok shing is currently helping the Blackfaced Spoonbill Research Group to develop a ringing database for BFS.
- Several students from the Faculty of Computer Science and Information System of HKU are helping the society to develop an online record submission system and an IT Plan.
- Carrie Ma renewed the bird-watching map on the website in February. Up-to-date bird-watching spots and habitats are now available.
- Technical support of the BBS is provided by volunteers Lee Kwok-shing, Karl Ng, Forrest Fong, Sophia Wong and Beta Yip.

Special thanks go to all contributors and volunteers.

Swift and Swallow Research Group

A Swift and Swallow Research Group has been formed

with members Apache Lau Wai Man, Tsim Siu Tai, William Wong and Captain Wong.

The Research group is focusing on conservation of these birds in Hong Kong, especially the local breeding species – House Swift and Barn Swallow. The Research Group's specific objectives are:

- i. Conducting surveys and research in relation to the target species
- ii. Making connections with other NGOs which have shown concern in the conservation of swifts and swallows locally or overseas
- iii. Drawing public attention to the need for conservation of the target species
- iv. Conducting desktop reviews on any literature and written material related to the target species, and
- v. Producing education materials and publications

Acknowledgments

The contract of temporary clerk, Miss Connie Chan, ended in February. Connie served us for four months since last November. We thank for her hard work on the 'My favourite Bird' election project, and wish her a great success in future.



Special thanks to Tim Woodward, who has donated a scanner to the society.

Thanks, too, to John and Jemi Holmes who donated a Sony Zoom-eye Telescope and 50 sets of postcards to the society.

A request and a reminder

The project office of the society is set up for the research and promotional projects. With the demanding workload, the project staff may not be able to handle routine members' queries immediately. If this is the case when you call, your patience would be greatly appreciated. Should the phone line be busy, please leave your message and contact on the voice mail. Members wishing to visit the office should note that the opening hours are from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm on weekdays.

The operations of the society are mainly supported by voluntary members, who kindly offer their spare time to work for the benefit of other members. Financial constraints mean there is currently no staff to deal with membership matters. May we ask for your patience for allowing us time to process members' application. Moreover, if you can offer help, please contact Ms. Ronley Lee at bulletin@hkbws.org.hk, Chair of the Membership Affairs Committee.

Thank you very much.

Amendment Notice

There is a typing mistake in the Annual General Meeting minutes sent to members with the winter 2003 Bulletin.

Under item (2) Honorary Treasurer's Report, the figures on last line should be amended to:

"Total anticipated income 1.18 million | Total anticipated expenditure 1.28 million."

Please accept our apologies. 

AFCD subvented: Waterbird Monitoring Programme at the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site

1. Waterbird Count Training

A "Waterbird Count Training" was organized on 14 December. This is an annual event to encourage more members of the Society to contribute to waterbird monitoring. 14 members joined the event, there was also participant from Shenzhen Bird Watching Society. The Waterbird Count Training provides an exchange platform for members to understand and increase their skills in waterbird counting. Most importantly, members could participate in frontline data collection and contribute to wetland conservation.



2. Black-faced Spoonbill International Census

The Black-faced Spoonbill census took place on 16-18 January 2004. The census was coordinated by Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, and is supported by the Wild Bird Society of Japan, Black-faced Spoonbill Network in Japan, Seoul National University Wildlife Ecology & Management Lab., Wild Bird Federation of Taiwan, BirdLife International Indo-China Programme, Jiangsu Yencheng National Nature Reserve, Hainan Normal University, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, and bird watchers in Xiamen, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujiang, Shenzhen, Macau, Thailand and the Philippines.

Preliminary result showed 238 Black-faced Spoonbill present in Hong Kong during the census period. Mr Yu Yat Tung is coordinating collection of records, which will be posted onto the HKBWS website for members' information. For detailed information, please contact the HKBWS Black-faced Spoonbill Research Group.

3. Research Report

The summer report is published and uploaded onto HKBWS website for public access. In addition to this, the 2002-03 Shorebird Monitoring Report has also been published. A total of 28,514 migratory shorebirds was recorded, which is lower than the

30,759 of last year. The Deep Bay area supports at least 8 species of migratory shorebird which are above 1% of the flyway or regional population:

Species	Flyway/regional population	Hong Kong population	Percentage
Avocet	25,000 – 100,000	5,846	5.8 – 23.4%
Kentish Plover	100,000	–	Minimum 1%
Curlew	35,000	1,014	2.9%
Spotted Redshank	25,000 – 100,000	1,828	1.8 – 7.3%
Marsh Sandpiper	90,000	2,051	2.3%
Greenshank	55,000	940	1.7%
Terek Sandpiper	50,000	557	1.1%
Curlew Sandpiper	180,000	4,583	2.5%



Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site
Waterbird Monitoring Programme
Summer 2003 Report
V. T. Yu



Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site
Waterbird Monitoring Programme
Shoreland Monitoring 2003-2004 Report
V. T. Yu, D. J. Carey and H. K. Yip

Asian Waterbird Census

The January 2004 Waterbird Count took place on 25 January 2004 (Sunday) at Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site, to coincide with the annual Asia Waterbird Census organized by Wetlands International - Asia Pacific.

The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) is a regional programme organized by Wetlands International - Asia Pacific to promote public participation to monitor the distribution and populations of waterbirds and the status of wetlands. The census has



been ongoing since 1987. The AWC covers the region of Asia, from Pakistan eastwards to Japan, Southeast Asia and Australasia. AWC runs parallel to other international censuses of waterbirds in Africa, Europe, West Asia and the Neotropics, under the umbrella of the International Waterbird Census (IWC).

Information about the HKBWS Waterbird Monitoring Programme is available on the HKBWS website at:

<http://www.hkbws.org.hk/waterbird/index.html>

Information on the Asian Waterbird Census is available on the AWC website:

<http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/awcmain.html>

2003 Breeding Tern Survey

With funding from the Environment and Conservation Fund, the Society conducted a "Pilot Project to Increase Awareness of the Ecological Importance of the Breeding Colonies of Terns in Hong Kong" between May to November 2003. This was a first ever project combining environmental research, ecotourism and education, using Terns as a medium to increase the public's awareness of seabirds and marine conservation.



Field Work

A number of surveys were carried out to collect information on tern breeding sites in Hong Kong. These include 10 regular surveys at Mirs Bay as well as 8 large-scale surveys in the NE, SE and southern waters. HKBWS also organized 7 demonstration tours to introduce to local environmental groups and tour operators to the skills and guidelines for tern watching, and to highlight the importance of breeding sites as well as marine conservation.



Publications

The Society has published a Guidebook that provides information on terns and guidelines for tern watching. A Code of Practice for watching terns was drawn up and

included in the Guidebook. The Project was widely reported in newsletters of hiking groups and local non-government organizations. It also appeared in a news headline in Ming Pao Daily News on 3 August 2003. Results of the project were documented in the Project Report, which comprises two parts: (I) Monitoring and Surveys for Tern Colonies in Hong Kong and (II) Demonstration Tours: Ecological Education and Ecotourism. The report was completed in last December and submitted to the ECF. Members who would like to see the report should contact the Project Office or the Tern Research Group.

Below is the Code of Practice for watching terns:

- Do not land on islands where terns breed during the breeding season (May to September). This will disturb the breeding birds and lead to lower breeding success of the colony.
- Tern-watching activities should be performed in a boat.
- Avoid making loud noises such as sounding sirens, using loud-hailers and playing loud music.
- Report any willful disturbance to breeding terns to AFCD (tel.: 2471 4411) immediately. Take photos if the situation allows.

Black-faced Spoonbill Age Structure

The HKBWS is conducting the 2003-04 Age Structure of wintering Black-faced Spoonbills. Hong Kong has been a leader in global conservation initiatives for Black-faced Spoonbill, encouraging more effective research methodology and information exchange for the conservation of the species. This long-term monitoring of the age structure of the wintering population in Deep Bay is crucial for estimating population trends and breeding success of the globally endangered Black-faced Spoonbill.



The Survey was organized from October 2003 to April 2004 by the Black-faced Spoonbill Research Group. Survey area sites included in or around Mai Po Nature Reserve and Tsim Bei Tsui. Surveys to find out the ratio between adults and non-adults took place once every 10 days, and results were compared with the previous studies.

The most obvious distinction between adult and non-adult Black-faced Spoonbills in distant views is the colour of the wing tips. The wing tips of non-adults are black,

gradually replaced by white as the birds gain adult plumage. This method of identification was introduced to the Research Group by Mr Yu Yat Tung, who adopted it during his Master's thesis on ageing the wintering Black-faced Spoonbills in Mai Po. The results are consistent with those of "Black-faced Spoonbill International Census", and this has been proven an effective survey method. However, it is very difficult to see wing tips clearly unless birds are extending their wings or flying. By taking photographs of flying Black-faced Spoonbills, the number of adult and non-adult can be recorded and their percentages can be determined. On 20 December 2003, the Society organized a large scale "Photography of wintering Black-faced Spoonbill", inviting 14 photographers to take part.

The overall percentage of adult Black-faced Spoonbills was around 60%, based on information including birth rate, number eggs per brood, and equal age ratio among wintering sites. A prediction of the world population of 1185 was made in the report of winter 2001-02 (Anon 2002). In January 2003, the International Black-faced Spoonbills Census yielded a total of 1068 Black-faced Spoonbills in many known wintering sites of East Asia. An outbreak of avian botulism in Taiwan caused a death of total 73 birds, otherwise the number could have been as high as 1142 individuals. The estimated figure is very similar to the actual number, regardless of this outbreak.

The known population of the Black-faced Spoonbills has increased more than three fold from the lowest 294 individuals in early 1990s to 1068 individuals in January 2003. In addition, the consistent percentage of non-adult Spoonbills indicates that the breeding of this species has been successful in the past few years. The overall number is still very low, and close co-operation between each habitat area is still required to conserve the birds' habitat and monitor their population.

Difficulties: The aim of the large-scale survey is to collect information from different sites, and to act as a control to for data accuracy. It is a difficult job for one surveyor in the field only, so we look forward to seeing more photographers join us. It is a challenge to take pictures of flying spoonbills, since they often rest in groups which are difficult to observe and fly away quickly from encroachment, but we hope some photographers will rise to the challenge.

We also encourage members to provide relevant sighting information, including date, number and description of ring (if any, please send us detail of the colour distribution, location on the leg, and marked number). All

information is important in helping our researcher to understand the birds' migratory patterns. The information will be posted on the bulletin board to be exchanged locally and internationally. Please send information to HKBWS Black-faced Spoonbill Research group at bfspoonbill@hkbws.org.hk.

For relevant education material and latest information, please browse the bulletin board and Black-faced Spoonbill webpage at www.hkbws.org.hk.

Winter Atlas Survey

This is the third year of Winter Atlas Survey, which takes place from November to mid-February. Information on bird numbers and species is collected. The survey started in 2001/02 winter to collect baseline ecological information for future reference. Members who have participated in the survey are encouraged to submit records as soon as possible to Geoff Carey (geoffcarey@netvigator.com) and Cheung Ho Fai (apcheung@cityu.edu.hk). A data form is available for download at:

http://www.hkbws.org.hk/fileServer/Projectofficer/WA_form.XLS

Education and Publicity

Elderly Leading the Elderly to Watch Birds

A new 2-year programme, "The elderly leading the elderly to watch birds and nature", has been launched as an advanced programme after the completion of "Bird Watching - Learning from Nature". The programme is funded by the Elderly Commission and The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. It facilitates trained elderly nature interpreters to organize bird watching activities and outings on their own.



The programme was launched in October 2003. It is now operated by the "Crested Bulbul Club" under the guidance of the Elderly Bird Watching Committee of the

Society. The programme has been warmly received. The application quota for the first year was almost filled within four months. Over thirty organizations were contacted and a total of 1,400 people including the elderly, visually disabled children and young leaders were served by the project. We received positive feedback regarding their coordination skills and knowledge.

Some members of the "Crested Bulbul Club" are conducting a review of education materials so as to fit the requirements of other elderly bird watchers. They are also organizing regular outings to practice bird watching skills. We are glad to see that their interest in, and knowledge of, bird watching are increasing.

Members who wish to encourage senior members of the family to take part in this meaningful programme should contact the Elderly Bird Watching Committee Chairman Chen Chi Po at 6125 9514 or Vice-chairman Leung Kwok Wah at 2369 8423.

Early Bird Watching at Kowloon Park

Starting from 5 March 2004, there will be Friday bird watching sections to be organized at Kowloon Park. This event is co-organized by HKBWS and Leisure and Cultural Services Department. It is a trial project for 3 months. Kowloon Park has sought help from Hong Kong Tourism Board to promote the event to visitors.

Crested Bulbul Club members have accepted the invitation to arrange nature interpreter for the event, as a

part of the project to provide services for senior citizens. The project is supported by the Education and Publicity Committee. Apache Lau will kindly arrange technical support (e.g. English, Mandarin or advance interpretation).

Members who wish to join us or offer technical support, please contact Apache Lau at apachewm@netvigator.com, or meet at the Kowloon Park Arcade (entrance of swimming pool). For detailed information, please visit www.hkbws.org.hk.



"My Favourite Hong Kong Bird" election

The "My Favourite Hong Kong Bird" election has been successfully completed. The project was organized by HKBWS and sponsored by The Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and with support from other organizations. It is the first wildlife election in Hong Kong – some 25,000 people voted for their favourite local bird species.



The election further enbirds for themselves. We have produced a book, "My Favourite Hong Kong Bird", to introduce each of the bird "candidates", the places where they can be found, and some good bird watching spots.

The book can be used as reference material by green groups, government departments, and by the Tourism Authority to generate positive publicity for Hong Kong. It could also become a blueprint for future wildlife elections. In addition, it provides practical educational material on the topic of life science, biology and tourism, which helps in increasing the public's knowledge of the environment.

We welcome ideas for further promotion of the book. Please contact Carrie Ma (hkbws@hkbws.org.hk).

World Wetland Day – the 4th Junior Bird Race

To support AFCD for the World Wetland Day Celebration activity, HKBWS conducted bird watching training for students on 13, 20 and 27 December 2003 and on 3 January 2004 for 34 schools. On 11 January,



48 teams participated in the "4th Junior Bird Race". The event took place at Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve, and most of the participants got satisfactory result. The winning teams managed over 40 bird species within 3 hours! The winners include Baptist Wing Lung College,

Lee Kau Yan Memorial School, St. Stephen's Church College, and Immanuel Lutheran College. Thanks are due to the following members for various supporting services including co-ordination, liaison, arrangement of venue, education materials, training and bird race arrangements: Ada Chow, Anise and Stanley Ng, Apache Lau, Beta Yip, C Y Lam, Carrie Ma, Hung Wai Ming, Jemi Wong, Y L Tam, Forrest Fong, H K Ying, William Wong, H F Cheung, Winky Huen, Robin Fung, Aukie Au, Ronley and Ronnie Sham, Jimmy and William Tsui, Mr and Mrs T P Luk, and M F Ho.



Unfortunately, we were informed by AFCD that the presentation ceremony scheduled on 7 February was cancelled because of the Avian Flu issue.

Bird Watching Class

Below is the updated information of bird watching classes, for members' information.

HKBWS Bird Watching Class

Time: 25 February to 4 March 2004

Details: <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/fileServer/Projectofficer/bwclass.jpg>

HKU Space "Watching Birds in the Wild"

Robin Fung conducted the HKU Space "Watching Bird in the Wild" from 19 November to 17 December 2003. Some of the participants joined the "Records 202" Bird Race. We thank him for his kind support.

Newspaper Report

2003 was a "productive year". The smooth coordination of projects relied on members' support and participation. There were 100 press reports on bird watching stories, achieves and pictures, 2 of them were newspaper headlines.

Year	News on research and activities	Headline	Conservation Campaign
2003	100*	2*	-
2002	59*	4*	1* (total# 8)
2001	50*	2*	8* (total# 259)

Year	News on research and activities	Headline	Conservation Campaign
2000	10*	~ 5	82* (total# 341)
1997-99	4*	-	-

Note * Information source from HKBWS
No. of newspaper clippings

Members who wish to read the newspaper clippings, please contact Carrie Ma (hkbws@hkbws.org.hk).

China and Overseas Update

HKBWS China Project Fund

Last winter, the Society promoted the "HKBWS China Project Fund" through China Ornithological Society, and we have received applications from various provinces. The applications will be vetted by the China Project Fund Committee. For details, please contact H F Cheung at apcheung@cityu.edu.hk. We welcome donations from members to support bird conservation and education in China, and we thank members for their support and participation.

National Bird Watching Database

HKBWS Chairman C Y Lam and Vice-chairman H F Cheung continue to offer support for the establishment of a National Bird Watching Database. Members who have been bird watching in China are encouraged to provide their bird watching information to Dr Zheng Zhenwang at zzw@bnu.edu.hk. Please also send a copy to our Hon. Recorder Richard Lewthwaite at rwlethwaite@cuhk.edu.hk.

Yellow-throated Laughingthrush Survey at Wuyuan, Jiangxi

Yu Yat Tung, Apache Lau and members of HKBWS went to Wuyuan from 17 to 21 April 2003 for the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush survey. The survey was funded by Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, to collect habitat and ecological information for the future



Campaign

conservation plan. The report was submitted to KFBG in Summer 2003.

The Yellow-throated Laughingthrush has raised international concern, partly because their narrow distribution



range is only known at the southern part of Yunan and SE China. Their status and distribution is still unknown. There is concern that it has reached a globally threatened level.

At least 150 individuals have been recorded, from Binyin Lin, Shimen, Maja and Taibai. They are found in groups only in Spring and Summer (March to August) at fung shui woods, and their favourite foods are insect larva and fruit. Breeding season is April to July. However, there is no information about their wintering grounds. There is some suggestion that they winter at secondary forest nearby. The bird faces different level of threats, including damage to fung shui woodland, habitat fragmentation, hunting and human encroachment.

There is a lack of funding for further work. Members who wish to support the project and/or offer suggestions, please contact the Society at hkbws@hkbws.org.hk.

Lower Yangtze River Waterbird Survey

From 29 January to 8 February 2004, Yu Yat Tung, Apache Lau, Gary Chow and H K Ying joined the Lower Yangtze River Waterbird Survey. This survey was jointly organized by WWF China and State Forestry Administration.

The survey area covers 5 provinces and 1 city along the lower Yangtze River and the southern part of Yellow Sea, including Jiangsu. The aim of the survey is to collect information, in particular after the Three-Gorge Project, on bird populations, distribution and present environmental information, for future reference. Participants in the survey included government representatives, high school and research institutes, NGOs, and volunteers from Hong Kong, Beijing, Guangzhou, Xiamen, Shanghai and Wuhan. Detailed information can be found at WWF China website:

<http://www.wwfchina.org/zhuanti/2004-2/index.shtm>

An e-mail was received from the Jiangxi Academy of Sciences dated 9 February about result of the survey. A total of 116 bird species were recorded. There were

132,700 waterbirds of 72 species, 42 raptors of 9 species and 35 other bird species. There were 2,760 Siberian Crane (National Category I wildlife in China), 1030 Common Crane, 13680 Tundra Swan, 3571 European Spoonbill. There were also a good number of Greater White-fronted Goose and Tundra Swan.

The highest number of birds of 48,240 individuals were found in the biggest lake (Daihuchi 3000ha); the second largest was Clam-Lake (7300ha) with 25,670 individuals; Sand-Lake (1400ha) had 5,040 individuals; Jiujiang Xaicheng Hu (access to Yangtze River) had 3360 individuals; Pearl Lake (Baisha County Nature Reserve) had 9380 individuals; Inner Kanshan Lake (Kanshan County Nature Reserve) had 4120 individuals and Xinmiou Hu (Docheng Province Nature Reserve) had 4,850 individuals.

On 6 February, volunteers of Xiamen and Hong Kong Bird Watching Society found Red-breasted Goose. On 1 and 8 February, they found Swinhoe's Rail (National Category II wildlife in China) at southern Poyan Hu Nature Reserve.

Dongting Lake Bird Race

On 4-8 December 2003, members of the Society joined the "2003 Swarovski China Dongting Lake Bird Race". The aim of the event is to promote bird watching, and to raise public awareness of birds and promote ecotourism. Bird watchers from various provinces formed 17 teams. Richard Lewthwaite, Apache Lau, Jemi and John Holmes and Carrie Ma formed the "HKBWS Team", Yu Yat Tung formed the "Greater Flamingo Team" with bird watchers from Beijing (Liu Yang, Lei Jinyu) and Macau (Silvia Choi).



The event was a good exchange platform for bird watching. The vetting process is a serious one – H F Cheung is one of the members of the vetting committee. For the results, Green Earth Volunteer Team achieved the highest record (97 species), and the Greater Flamingo

Team took the second highest. HKBWS Team listed 73 species; We also got the "Best Oral Examination" prize (i.e. no birds were removed from our list).

Some members stayed on after the race to join a bird survey at Dongting Lake. Thanks to H F Cheung sponsoring the survey.

3rd Symposium on Asian Raptors



Etta Hui, Beta Yip and Karin Chan of the Kite Research Group attended the 3rd Symposium on Asian Raptors on 10-13 October 2003 in Kenting. The event was jointly organized by the Raptor Research Group of Taiwan and the Asian Raptor Research and Conservation Network.

Yip Chi Lap presented a paper on Kite research in Hong Kong. The event facilitated information exchange for raptor researchers. We thank the Kite Research Group for various arrangements, and for their contribution to the conservation of Black Kite in Hong Kong. For further information about the event, please contact Dr Yip at beta@acm.org



Wetlands International - Asia Waterbird Census meeting

The first AWC international coordinator meeting was held at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 9 and 10 October. The HKBWS Waterbird Monitoring Programme coordinator, Yu Yat Tung, had been invited to make a presentation during the meeting.

This meeting aims to share the experience of coordinating

waterbird censuses in each country and making a future plan and strategy for AWC. Yu Yat Tung presented the development, current situation and some results of the waterbird monitoring in Hong Kong. Other coordinators applauded the Hong Kong Waterbird Monitoring Programme in terms of quality of data and reporting, recruitment of count Tung at (bfspoonbill@hkbws.org.hk).

BirdLife International Asia Council

The 8th BirdLife International Asia Council meeting was organized on 18-23 October 2003. Carrie Ma attended the event to represent the Society. The meeting included reporting of strategies for Asian threatened birds, and there were also workshops on Black-faced Spoonbill, updated information for the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, Bird-ecotourism, Important Bird Areas, and IBA Site Supporting Groups. There was also a launch for the new version of Asia Red Data Book (<http://www.rdb.or.id/>) which facilitates searching of information. During the meeting, representatives of Wetlands International offered a presentation on flyway conservation strategy.



Participants had a chance to visit the Gunung Gede National Park, where representatives of HKBWS, Taiwan and UK attended a presentation on the ecotourism facilities of the Park.

BirdLife International World Conference

The BirdLife International World Conference was organized from 7 to 13 March 2004 in Durban, South Africa.

The HKBWS ExCo has endorsed HKBWS Chairman CY Lam and Project Officer Carrie Ma to attend the Conference as representatives, after considering the combination of "policy" and "execution" side. Carrie Ma was funded by BirdLife International for a bird eco-tourism project, under the Japan Fund for the Global Environment. C Y Lam pay his own expenses. Before the Conference, they were join a bird eco-tourism project organized by BirdLife Asia on 4-6 March.

Important Bird Area - Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Tai Mo Shan



HKBWS has submitted the new IBA data form to BirdLife International in October 2004. This is another IBA on woodlands after the last one on wetlands in 2000 (Deep Bay and Shenzhen River Catchment Area).

Hong Kong is located in the transition zone between the Oriental and Palaearctic region. Hong Kong is part of the 'South China Mountains' zone, which extends from East Yunnan, through Guizhou, Guangxi, Guangdong, Hunan and Jiangxi to Fujian and Zhejiang in China. The 'South China Mountains' is an important bird region because of its rich and specialized avifauna. The western part of the South China Mountains extends naturally onto the Southeast Chinese Mountains region, that includes the hills and mountains of most of South-east Asia. There, the vegetation is mostly subtropical mountain evergreen forest. Both areas have attracted substantial research and conservation interests because of their rich biodiversity. They are also relatively unknown because of the general shortage of comprehensive and long-term monitoring.

The South and Southeast Chinese Mountains region also extends to the Sino-Himalayan region. The proposed IBA shares similar characteristics in terms of the bird species in this biome range. The forests in Hong Kong are also important sites for studying migrating bird species such as Passerines and Raptors.

The proposed IBA is located in central New Territories of Hong Kong. It comprises a variety of habitats, including mountain evergreen forest, secondary scrubland, wooded grassland, and secondary grassland. The names of the protected areas in the proposed IBA include (1) Tai Mo Shan Country Park, (2) Shing Mun Country Park, (3)

Special Area: (a) Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve, (b) Ng Tung Chai Special Area, (c) Tai Mo Shan Montane Scrub Forest Special Area, (d) Shing Mun Fung Shui Woodland Special Area, (4) SSSI include: (a) Ng Tung Chai Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), (b) Tai Mo Shan SSSI and (c) Tai Mo Shan Montane Scrub Forest SSSI. This area covers 3315 ha which comprises approximately 41.3% mountain evergreen forest, 22.7% secondary scrubland and 32.5% secondary grassland and wooded grassland. The area is managed by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department for nature conservation, public education, scientific research and recreation purposes.

Most of the forest areas in Hong Kong have regenerated after the Second World War in 1945. Part of the proposed IBA that is within the Country Park is managed by AFCD and so has a high level of protection against development. The forest within this area has gradually matured and attracted forest bird species of this biome range. These includes cuckoo-shrikes, sunbirds, and babblers. Due to the heavy captive-bird trade in the region, populations of birds of captive origin are also present.

New and re-colonizing forest species have become apparent since long-term monitoring began about 50 years ago. Most of them represent a re-introduction of the bird species that were probably present in the past. Hong Kong has a long history of collecting field record on bird species and the data submitted in this proposal are accurate and scientific. As a representative site of the 'South China Mountains', the proposed IBA will continue to be important for scientific research and long-term monitoring of the whole region.

For further information about "Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Tai Mo Shan" IBA, please refer to:

http://www.hkbws.org.hk/fileServer/Projectofficer/IBA/IBA_centralNT.pdf

For further information about the "Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River Catchment Area", please refer to:

http://www.hkbws.org.hk/fileServer/Projectofficer/IBA/IBA_deepbay.pdf

We thank Carre Ma for compiling information, C Y Lam, H F Cheung, Y T Yu and Geoff Carey for providing comments, W H Lee and Eric Liu of AFCD for providing information.

"Saving Asia's Threatened Birds"

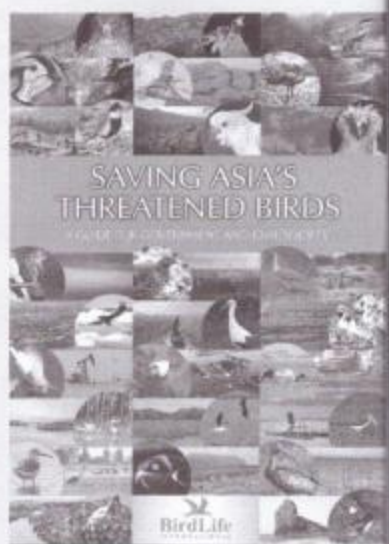
BirdLife International launched the book Saving Asia's threatened birds on 12 November 2003. This is a blueprint to provide information to government and civil society on ways to reduce threats to Asian birds.

The book identifies the disturbance or conversion of wetlands, which are crucial for the survival

of 20% of threatened species including the Black-faced Spoonbill, Dalmatian Pelican and Saunders's Gull, as one of the largest threats to Asia's birds. Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River Catchment Important Bird Area is listed for Hong Kong as part of the China Sea Coast section (W10). Other wetland-dependent species listed for Hong Kong include Styan's Grasshopper Warbler, Manchurian Reed Warbler, Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank, Chinese (or Swinhoe's) Egret, Oriental Stork, Baikal Teal, and Baer's Pochard.

41 species have already been classified as Critically Endangered under World Conservation Union criteria. BirdLife International produced the guide, with financial support from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), to help avoid the extinction of 324 threatened bird species, 12% of Asia's total. The book shows the bigger picture, demonstrating how birds connect Hong Kong's important wildlife habitats with other habitats in other ecological regions and countries throughout Asia. It also highlights Hong Kong's international responsibilities in protecting threatened species. The strategy provides a holistic solution for the survival of each species, listing necessary conservation measures by 33 priority habitat regions.

The Saving Asia's Threatened Bird is available at Natural History Book Service, the website is www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html.





Conservation News

Spring 2004

– Mike Kilburn,
Chairman, Conservation Committee

Black-faced Spoonbill Injured by Fishhook

Third incident in two years embarrasses Hong Kong

Following two incidents last winter when Black-faced Spoonbills were killed by fish hooks another bird was picked up injured in the San Tin area with a fish hook caught in its wing. At the time of writing the bird is under treatment at Kadoorie Farm under an AFCD-managed protocol for handling sick and injured birds.

It is almost certain that this incident happened due to the illegal practice employed by some fishpond operators of hanging fish hooks from overhead wires set across their ponds. Two separate ponds were found with such hooks less than 500 meters from the site where the Spoonbill was discovered. At least one incident from last year resulted from a bird swallowing a baited fish hook again set illegally on a fish pond.

Hong Kong has an international responsibility to conserve and protect Black-faced Spoonbill. At present we are failing to meet this responsibility. It is clearly time for serious action to be taken. Laws are in place - in particular the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (cap. 170), which make such activities illegal. However, laws must be enforced, and it is the duty of AFCD to enforce them, if necessary in co-operation with the Police.

It is understood that AFCD is challenged, as other governments departments, with shrinking budgets and limited resources. It is also understood that relations with fishpond operators, whose livelihoods are threatened by predation, especially from Cormorants, are difficult. However more than HK\$1 million has been spent or budgeted to help fish farmers to set wires (without hooks) across their ponds in the Wetland Conservation Area to deter large waterbirds from taking fish (a practice in itself questioned by HKBWS).

If funds are available for such activities, why are more funds not available for proactive conservation work - to educate local pond operators, to put wardens in the field and to conduct investigations leading to prosecutions against those who deliberately set out to kill and injure wildlife?

How you can help:

1) Immediately report any fish hooks (either hanging from

wires or found in fishponds and baited with fish), mist nets or other traps to AFCD: the senior AFCD Officer responsible for preventing illegal activities is Wong Che Lok. His email is clwong@afcd.gov.hk and his phone number is: 2150 6921. You should be exact as possible with the location to allow AFCD to find the site and take enforcement action.

- 2) Call the nature wardens responsible for patrolling, on 2474 8974 or 2476 9430 or 2471 4411 (especially outside office hours and at weekends). Keep these numbers on your phone or in your notebook
- 3) Post your sighting, with photos if possible, on the HKBWS BBS Conservation section. This does 2 things: i) it keeps us all informed and ii) it allows AFCD to see that we are serious about supporting their conservation efforts.
- 4) Copy HKBWS Conservation Committee on all correspondence, especially responses from AFCD in relation to such actions. Follow up with AFCD to see what actions have been taken. The Conservation Committee can also help with this.

Hong Kong 2030 Planning Study

The Planning Department has now entered the third phase of public consultation for this Territory-wide study. The major issues of significance for conservation are the proposals to open up the Frontier Closed Area for development, plans for a conference and exhibition centre on the Lok Ma Chau Loop and, on a more positive note, proposals to explore the development of wildlife corridors to connect key habitats in Hong Kong.

Lok Ma Chau Loop is a curious piece of land. It was formed when the Shenzhen River was straightened to reduce the risk of flooding, leaving a piece of land owned by a subsidiary of the Shenzhen government on the Hong Kong side of the border. The issue is complicated by the fact that one of Hong Kong's most influential developers also has a stake in the site.

These two bodies have raised a proposal to make the Loop into an exhibition centre for inland Chinese provinces, with visa-free access from Hong Kong and Shenzhen. Doing this would require a huge investment in infrastructure by the Hong Kong Government, which would have significant ecological impact on the area.

There are other complications. This site was also used as a dump for a large quantity of toxic mud dredged from the river during the retraining process. Since that time it has remained largely undisturbed. It is used by a number of waterbirds and it is surrounded by the Wetland Conservation Area (WCA) and the Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River Catchment Important Bird Area (IBA). If the land was fully under Hong Kong's jurisdiction it would almost certainly be incorporated into both these conservation zones.

At a public consultation organised in January 2004 by the Planning Department, stakeholders ranging from the environmental NGOs to the Real Estate Developers Association (which represents the major Hong Kong developers) to the Heung Yee Kuk and the Hong Kong Institute of Land Administration all raised objections to plans to develop the site. In receiving the objections, Planning Department noted that any alternative proposals, those preserving the ecological value of the site in particular, would be welcomed.

The creation of a nature reserve on the site would seem to be an ideal solution. It could provide a valuable educational and ecological amenity to Shenzhen residents, it would retain the ecological value of the site and enhance the value of the WCA and IBA. It would also reduce expenditure on infrastructure by the Hong Kong Government. Finally it would prevent the intrusion of high-density development which characterises the northern banks of the Shenzhen river into the relative tranquillity of the fishponds and marshland on the Hong Kong side.

The Frontier Closed Area (FCA) is increasingly being targeted for development. Proposed projects including further border crossings, port facilities and residential developments. At present the FCA provides a welcome corridor between the heavy development in Shenzhen and that in the northern New Territories. The low level of development and human disturbance has made it a haven for a variety of wildlife.

Some of the areas are of high ecological value. These include the fishponds and reedbeds of Ma Tso Lung (which have been monitored by HKBWS waterbird counts since the 1980s) to the west of Lo Wu. Important birds noted here include Imperial and Great Spotted Eagles and large numbers of waterbirds. The area around Lin Ma Hang and Robin's Nest close to Sha Tau Kok provides direct ecological connectivity with Wutong Shan - a scrub and forest-covered mountain on the other side of the border. A survey conducted during summer 2003 by Kadoorie Farm discovered Orange-headed Ground Thrush here - it is likely that it breeds in the area. It is essential that any future developments do not impact these areas.

Wildlife Corridors are usually narrow stretches of habitat that connect larger areas. They are intended to allow wildlife to move freely from one area to another and prevent populations becoming weakened and threatened by genetic isolation. One very recent example of this is the provision by KCRC of a tunnel under the road to Lok Ma Chau Station to provide free movement to Otters between the San Tin Fishponds and the Lok Ma Chau/Ma Tso Lung area.

Wildlife corridors have never previously been addressed by the Hong Kong Government, so the proposal to plan for them over the next 30 years is a very encouraging development that reflects a greater concern for the environment in the Planning Department. At present many of our Country Parks and Special Areas (such as Tai Po Kau) are connected and this concept may be helpful in bringing some ecologically important but unprotected areas inside the protected area system.

Sham Chung Pier project managers required to monitor nearby White-bellied Sea Eagle

Good news - following comments from HKBWS and KFBG (see previous issue) the Environmental Protection Department has required the Civil Engineering Department (CED) to monitor the White-bellied Sea Eagle nest near Sham Chung Pier as a condition granting an Environmental permit for the project. In addition to conducting monitoring, CED must also provide a contingency plan in case the impact on the birds is found to be unacceptable.

HKBWS will continue to press the Administration to reconsider this project. In addition to threatening the Sea Eagle, a nationally protected bird in China, the project appears to be a huge waste of public funds. HK\$26 million is budgeted to serve less than 10 residents!

Two HKBWS members, James Wong and Stanley Chan, are conducting a private ecological assessment of the Sham Chung area. They are concerned about the potential impact of greater numbers of visitors to the area. In the past, a large freshwater marsh which is known to support the endemic Hong Kong Paradise Fish was trashed to make way for a (currently abandoned) golf course for property developer Sun Hung Kai. Anyone wishing to help with the survey should contact them at shamchung@hotmail.com or visit the website: http://www.redbuilding.com/ska/sham_chung/sham_chung.html

EPD approves Public Transport Interchange for Lok Ma Chau Station

HKBWS concerns about the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line setting a bad precedent for development in the Wetland


Conservation Area and IBA around Deep Bay appear to be well-founded.

The Environmental Protection Department recently approved a variation of the Environmental Permit for the Spur Line to allow for the creation of a Public Transport Interchange at Lok Ma Chau Station. There are three major impacts:

- a) The loss of about 0.4 hectares of reedbeds to the east of the station. This has been mitigated by adding two fish ponds to the southeast end of the managed wetland.
- b) The cutting of a wildlife corridor between San Tin and the Lok Ma Chau Ma Tso Lung Area by the road to the station. A tunnel will be built to allow Otter and other animals to pass safely under the road (see above).
- c) The presence of 300 vehicles per hour has been planned for. This is totally unacceptable. The Spur Line impacted the

fishponds during the construction phase, and in covering around ten hectares of ponds. However the trains would travel on a viaduct above the ponds and produce little or no pollution and noise disturbance. Offering road access for so many vehicles will bring noise and run-off pollution that introduces a new degree of disturbance to the Wetland Conservation Area.

The justification for the PTI is "competition" to the railway for cross-border transport. This is an extremely weak argument. The Lok Ma Chau - Huang Gang Crossing (less than 300 metres away) is being doubled in size to eight lanes to accommodate more buses and cars, and the Western Corridor to Shekou will provide yet another option.

Because the proposal has been made by Legco members, EPD apparently can do nothing to stop the PTI. Sadly, it appears that our environment is now being sacrificed to the worst kind of local pork barrel politics. 

Mai Po update

— Lew Young

February 2004

Temporary closure of Mai Po

On 30 January 2004, the government announced that it would temporarily close Mai Po for four weeks until 29 February, as a precautionary measure against the spread of avian influenza. Hopefully by the time you read this, the temporary closure of the Reserve will have been lifted and visitors can once again enter.

As another precaution against any possible occurrence of avian influenza at Mai Po, AFCD and the Department of Microbiology at Hong Kong University have separately been monitoring the wild birds (particularly the wintering ducks) in the reserve for signs of H5N1. For example, AFCD have been collecting 10 droppings from wild ducks each day to take away for testing, whilst the HKU scientists have placed four domestic ducks in the Waterfowl Collection to look for another possible cross-infection between the wild ducks there and the domestic ducks. So far, there has been no sign of any wild birds with signs of H5N1. In fact, since monitoring at Mai Po first began from 1988 to 1990, and then from 1997 to the present, over 8,000 samples have been collected and none have shown to be positive for avian flu.

Despite the closure of Mai Po, WWF Hong Kong are still carrying on with their work in the reserve, such as...

Drain down of *gei wai* 12 and 13

The drain-down of *gei wai* 12 and 13 to oxidize the nutrients in the bottom of the pond continued but was made difficult by the heavy rains in early February that filled up the ponds every time we tried to dry them. As a result, these ponds will carry on being drained until the end of February.

Oxidizing (air-drying) the floor of the pond by draining it in winter is known to help break down any nutrients that have built up on the floor of the pond and so help to improve the water quality in the pond. It is part of the traditional management of Mai Po, and has been practiced by the original *gei wai* fishermen for decades.

Reed cutting in *gei wai* 8

The reeds in another of the 1-hectare blocks in *gei wai* 8 have been cut and are being removed off-site by hand this winter. Normally, the Reserve relies on a couple of hundred volunteers to help rake up and remove the cut reeds but this year, with the closure of Mai Po, there have been no volunteers and the work has had to be done by the Reserve staff. This means it takes longer to complete the work. In addition, a large part of the 1 ha block was badly invaded by climbers and these have had to be dug up by hand in order to allow the reeds to grow back.

This work is part of a long-term study to find a strategy for managing the reedbeds at Mai Po.

Mai Po update

February 2004 (con't)

Removal of the exotic mangrove *Sonneratia* spp.

Over the past few years, an exotic species of mangrove called *Sonneratia*, originally from south-east Asia, has been found growing on the mudflat and on the edges of the mangroves around Deep Bay. This species was introduced to Shenzhen in the early 1990s to 'green' the coastline, as it can grow 2 - 3 m high just after two years. However because of this ability, it also has the potential to quickly invade open mudflats and take over from native mangrove species. So whilst the Shenzhen government has been growing this tree along their side of Deep Bay, the Hong Kong government has been paying contractors to pull up any *Sonneratia* tree on the Hong Kong side of the Bay.

This year, *Sonneratia* trees have been seen in the *gei wai* channels immediately outside the Closed Area Fence and along the edges of the Shenzhen River north of Mai Po. Work has begun to remove some of these trees but if government cannot control these trees more quickly, then there is the danger that this species will become the next *Mikania*.

If you have any questions about these works, then please contact the staff at Mai Po by telephone on 2471-6306 or by e-mail <maipo@wwf.org.hk>.

Guam Extinctions

Two Guam species, the Mariana mallard and the Guam broadbill, have been removed from the U.S. endangered species list and officially declared "Extinct" after no sightings of either species were recorded in more than 20 years.



The two birds join only seven other species out of more than 1,300 on the U.S. national endangered species list that have been deemed extinct.



The last Mariana mallard seen on Guam was in 1967 and there have been no confirmed sightings of the bird since it was last observed on Saipan in 1979. The large duck, which also lived on Rota and Tinian, had a grayish and green head separated from a chestnut-colored breast by a white collar, with had a white tail, yellow bill and orange legs. It was listed as endangered in 1977, but was probably never abundant since freshwater marshes and lakes are not a prominent environment in the islands.

The endemic Guam broadbill was a small flycatcher. The male was a glossy blue-black in color and the female was brownish gray above and white below. "This was a very pretty bird," said Tino Aguon, acting chief of the Department of Agriculture's Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources. "It was an understory or sub-canopy bird with a beautiful, resonant whistle."

The Guam broadbill was listed as endangered in August 1984, the year of its last sighting. When it became clear that the broadbill was on the brink of extinction, a search was conducted for individuals to keep and reproduce in captivity. However, only males of the species could be found. The likely cause of extinction was the brown tree snake, as well as loss of habitat due to development.

Tino Aguon said a third Guam bird, the bridled white eye, will likely soon join the official extinction list, since there have been no sightings of this species in more than 20 years, either.

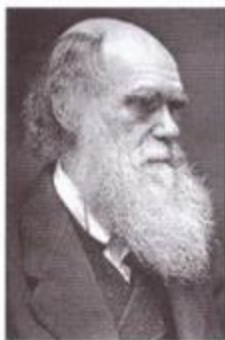
– Steve Burrows

New Bird Discovered On Indonesian Island

A bird believed to be new to science has been discovered in Indonesia. A team led by Nicola Marples and David Kelly from Trinity College, Ireland, discovered the bird, a White Eye, last summer on Wangi Wangi Island in southeast Sulawesi.



DNA is being analyzed to determine whether it's a new species or a radically altered subspecies. Marples says the species most closely resembles the Pale-bellied White Eye (*Zosterops consobrinorum*), though there are some striking differences. "The Wangi Wangi White Eye is almost half as big again. The beak is big and yellow rather than small and black, while it has grey on the breast instead of being entirely white. It also has very pale feet."



The nearest known Pale-bellied White Eye population is on another island over 30 kilometers away, and the study team suspect the bird evolved into a separate island race after being blown astray and marooned on Wangi Wangi. The process is similar to the famous example of the finches in the Galapagos Islands discovered by Charles Darwin. Scientists have suggested White Eyes are also speciating on various islands off northern Australia, lending credence to this theory.


New Zealand Petrel storms back from the dead.

The New Zealand Storm-petrel has been rediscovered in waters just off New Zealand's North Island, after being classified as "Extinct" for more than a century and a half.



First noted in January, 2003, the species was previously known only from fossil material and three 19th Century specimens. Birdwatchers first believed the bird to be a Black-bellied Storm-petrel *Fregetta tropica*, but close examination of photographs revealed several inconsistent features. Furthermore, the bird appeared smaller and slighter than accompanying White-faced Storm-petrels *Pelagodroma marina*, with longer more pointed wings and the dark feet projecting well beyond the tail. The closest match was to specimens of the 'Extinct' New Zealand Storm-petrel.

"It was just fantastic to be able to confirm that, against all the odds, the remarkable New Zealand Storm-petrel had managed to survive, undetected, for more than 150 years," said Bob Flood, one of the birders to confirm the find. Barry Weeber, Senior Conservation Officer at Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) said the priority now was to find out exactly where the birds are breeding, so the population could be assessed and monitored, and appropriate conservation measures put in place.

Although the taxonomy of the species is yet to be formalised, the New Zealand Storm-petrel is being referred to as *Oceanites maorianus*. 

Migratory Shorebirds in the East Asian – Australasian Flyway

– Lew Young

In 1996, Wetlands International - Asia Pacific formed a Migratory Waterbird Conservation Committee (MWCC; <http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/waterbirdstrategy/Org.htm>) to oversee the conservation of migratory waterbirds and their wetland habitats in the Asia-Pacific region. Members on the MWCC include representatives of government and NGOs from the region, as well as from international conventions, such as the Convention on Migratory Species and the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention).

One of the duties of the MWCC is to oversee the implementation of an Asia - Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy (<http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/waterbirdstrategy/Strat.htm>) which is updated every five years.

Three specialist groups have been established under the umbrella of this Strategy, each focusing on the conservation of a particular group of migratory waterbird. These are the Anatidae Working Group (<http://www.jawgp.org/anet/>), Crane Working Group (http://www.wetlands.org/IWC/awc/waterbirdstrategy/Network_Crane.htm), and the Shorebird Working Group (<http://www.deh.gov.au/water/wetlands/mwp/infosm1.html>).

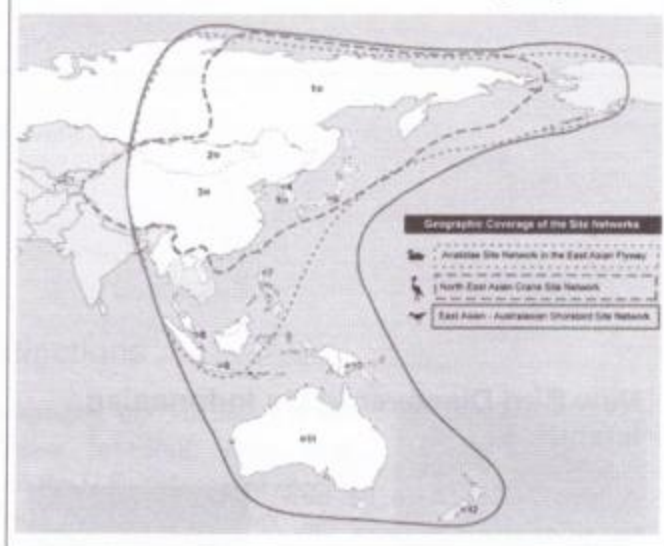
The Shorebird Working Group aims to promote the conservation of migratory shorebirds and their wetland habitats in the East Asian - Australasian Flyway (EAAF), and has members representing countries from different parts of the flyway, as well as having different skills, such as in shorebird survey and banding, and site management. The EAAF extends from the breeding grounds of many of these migratory shorebirds from as far north as the Russian Far East and Alaska, to their non-breeding grounds as far south as Australia and New Zealand.

It is estimated that whilst some 7 million shorebirds from 95 species are found in this flyway, only about 48 species (5 million birds) are long-distant migrants. Due to threats, such as from hunting and deterioration or loss of their wetland habitats, some 19 species of these shorebirds are now considered as being threatened.

From 16 - 17 December 2003, the Shorebird Working Group held their 7th meeting in Australia, to promote actions for their conservation of these waterbirds. These actions included:

- Establishing, and extending a network of well-managed sites along the EAAF that are important for migratory shorebirds. Mai

East Asian - Australasian Flyway



- Po and Inner Deep Bay is already one of these 'Shorebird Network Sites'.
- The formation of a 'Spoon-billed Sandpiper Recovery Team' to coordinate and promote action for the conservation of the endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, whose known breeding population in the Russian Far East is estimated to be between 300 - 500 pairs only. One of the first tasks of the Recovery Team will be to organize surveys of the main non-breeding grounds for this shorebird in the Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh), which has previously not been surveyed extensively.
- The formation of a 'Dunlin Task Force' to promote awareness and conservation of shorebirds in general but of the Dunlin in particular. As part of this work, the Task Force will be organizing a survey of the Lower Yangtze River in January 2004 for Dunlin and other shorebirds that may be spending the non-breeding season there.
- Continue work to raise awareness and ensure the wise use of the coastal wetlands around the Yellow Sea, since this region is probably the most important for providing staging posts for migratory shorebirds in the EAAF. Of the estimated 5 million shorebirds in the EAAF, 40% are thought to use the coastal wetlands around the Yellow Sea during northward migration, and 20% during southward migration. However, some 40% of these wetlands have already been reclaimed in recent decades, and there is concern that 40% of the remaining wetlands may be reclaimed in the future.
- Promote the greater use of colour-flags in the flyway to study the migratory routes of these shorebirds.

Further details about the work of the Shorebird Working Group or of the other species groups of the MWCC, can be found in the web-links given above.

"RECORDS 202" Bird Watching Competition 2004

A brief results report

– Forrest Fong

Despite the temporary closure of Mai Po Nature Reserve due to the fear of avian flu, our event "Records 202" Bird Watching Competition 2004 was carried off successfully on 31 January and 1 February 2004.

It is encouraging that more than 100 members, forming 21 teams, participated in the competition. Teams visited Tsim Bei Tsui, Long Valley, Chung Mei and other birding sites to record as many birds as they could within 24 hours. The results are posted below:

The HKBWS Record Award

- The Freedom Team recorded 124 species within 24 hours



The Best Record Award

- Wild-bird 2004 Team and Nightjar Team by Orange-headed Thrush



Special Team Awards

Spotted Eagle Award
(most senior team)

- Lark Team



Peregrine Falcon
(most energetic team)

- Red-whiskered Bulbul A Team & Red-whiskered Bulbul B Team



Black-faced Spoonbill
(most international team)

- EWNS Team



Rufous-faced Warbler
(most sporting team)

- Verditer Flycatcher Team



Lesser Shortwing
(most seldom seen team)

- Oriental Stork Team



Masked laughing-thrush
(most cooperative team)

- Nightjar Team & Kestrel Team



Common Buzzard
(most enthusiastic team)

- Little Egret Team



Little-ringed Plover
(most admired team)

- Freedom Team



Kentish Plover
(most look-alike team)

- Sparrow Team



Plumbeous Redstart
(most adventurous team)

- Dippers Team



Narcissus Flycatcher
(most attractive team)

- Tern Team



Spotted Greenshank
(most observant member)

To be
announced
later



"RECORDS 202" Bird Watching Competition 2004 – A brief results report (con't)

The preliminary results of each team are as follows:

Red-whiskered Bulbul A Team No. of Species recorded 68 Best Record Eurasian Wryneck		Red-whiskered Bulbul B Team No. of Species recorded 88 Best Record Rufous-capped Babbler		Tern Team No. of Species recorded 105 Best Record Scaly Thrush	
Crazy Buzzard Team No. of Species recorded 112 Best Record Siberian Rubythroat		EWNS Team No. of Species recorded 120 Best Record Little Grebe		Wild Bird 2004 Team No. of Species recorded 118 Best Record Orange-headed Thrush	
Nightjar Team No. of Species recorded 111 Best Record Orange-headed Thrush		Red-tailed Laughingthrush Team No. of Species recorded 102 Best Record Eurasian Wryneck		Kestrel Team No. of Species recorded 106 Best Record Eurasian Hoopoe	
Roadrunner Team No. of Species recorded 112 Best Record Schrenck's Bittern		Freedom Team No. of Species recorded 124 Best Record Black-naped Oriole		Sparrow Team No. of Species recorded 91 Best Record Common Starling	
Little Black Lu Lu Chu Team No. of Species recorded 101 Best Record Brambling		Hong Kong, Kowloon, New Territories and Outlying Islands Team No. of Species recorded 104 Best Record Sooty-headed Bulbul		Magpie Team No. of Species recorded 91 Best Record Crested Serpent Eagle	
Boys Team No. of Species recorded 102 Best Record Grey-headed Flycatcher		Oriental Stork Team No. of Species recorded 97 Best Record Brown Bush Warbler		Dippers Team No. of Species recorded 106 Best Record Dusky Thrush	
Lark Team No. of Species recorded 111 Best Record Mountain Tailorbird		Little Egret Team No. of Species recorded 106 Best Record White-tailed Robin		Verditer Flycatcher Team No. of Species recorded 79 Best Record Oriental Skylark	



Special issue about
Avian flu



Avian flu and wild birds

– Birdlife

The current outbreak of avian flu in Asia (early 2004) has generated a lot of press speculation about possible causes. High-profile actions, such as the EU's temporary ban on importation of cage birds from nine Asian countries, have added to this. Some stories in the press blame wild birds for the spread of the disease. However, it is more likely that the disease is being spread by the international and internal domestic poultry trade in Asia, and possibly also by wild-caught birds traded for food and as cage birds.

The US Geological Service Wildlife Health Center states: "Currently there is no evidence that humans have been affected with H5N1 influenza virus through contact with wild birds. All reported human infections have been associated with contact with domestic poultry."

Based on an examination of 6000 wild birds tested in Hong Kong, of which only one tested positive for the virus, the USGS says that it is unlikely that wild birds are spreading the disease. "While it is common for wild birds, particularly waterbirds, to carry strains of avian influenza virus, there is little evidence that the new virulent H5N1 strain is affecting wild bird populations, or that wild birds are able to spread this Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza virus."

However, Dr Carol Cardona, poultry extension veterinarian at University of California-Davis, says the disease can be caught by wild birds - but this makes it unlikely that wild birds are spreading it. "This particular variant is unusual both for the fact that it can infect humans, but also because it can make wild birds, especially ducks, sick. This is completely different than most other avian influenza viruses." Wild ducks normally carry the avian influenza virus without any sign of illness.

Dr Cardona thinks the disease may be spread by farmers and traders moving poultry and other birds. "In my experience sick and dead ducks don't fly far. But

people can very easily move sick birds over many miles. The movements may be legal or illegal, but in an outbreak of disease, they usually happen. I don't think migratory birds can be eliminated as major spreaders, but you can never underestimate the ability of humans to move disease."


Birdlife believes that it is unlikely that wild birds are playing a significant part in the spread of the disease because:

- This time of year (February) is not a period when birds undertake long-distance migrations from their SE Asian wintering grounds
- Although wild birds are known to carry the virus and develop the disease, there is no direct evidence that they are the vector between the current widespread outbreaks
There are no known cases of transmission between wild birds and humans.
- Rather, intensive farming practices and inadequate disease reporting and control seem to be the main factors behind this outbreak of avian flu. The solution lies in changing farming, trading and veterinary practices. This is where management measures should continue to be applied.

While further research on the role of wild birds is needed, it is BirdLife's view that this is likely minimal in the current outbreak, and that:

- Widespread culls of wild birds would be completely unjustified
- There is no risk from visiting places to watch migratory birds
- The possible role of other, more likely, vectors (e.g. human travellers with infected footwear from poultry farms, exported poultry) should be urgently investigated.

However:

- It would be prudent to protect domestic poultry from contact with wild birds
- The hunting and keeping of wild birds does carry the risk of transmission of flu-like viruses from wild birds to domestic birds, and the remote possibility of transmission to humans. This risk is greatly increased by the trading of wild birds in markets.
- The future risks of disease transmission from wild bird populations can be greatly reduced through appropriate conservation measures. There is need to reserve places for migratory birds (especially ducks) where they are not trapped or hunted and their habitats are not encroached by farming. In particular, wetland Important Bird Areas need to be adequately safeguarded. 

(Dr Cardona is co-author of The Economics Of Avian Influenza Control, presented at the Western Poultry Disease Conference, March, 2003.)




While Mai Po Nature Reserve is closed, some thoughts about the influence of Avian Flu

Feb 18, 2004

– Dr TH Kwan

Avian flu



In spring of 2003, when SARS was unrestrained in Hong Kong, a large number of citizens swarmed to the country parks to avoid the epidemic. Not long after that, in the second half of 2003, dengue fever began to stir up South East Asia, making many citizens become watchful about Mother Nature. In the spring of 2004, avian flu has become an issue. To some people's surprise, bird watchers were advised by the government that all bird watching activities should be temporarily stopped in Hong Kong. The government even ordered the closure of Mai Po Nature Reserve and Penfold Park in Shatin. All of a sudden, Hong Kong citizens have changed from nature lovers to being worried and doubtful about nature. As a passionate nature lover and bird watcher, I have been warned by concerned friends and relatives frequently. They ask,

"In the this particular period, do you still go bird watching?" I do not know whether to laugh or cry in response to these remarks! This preposterous situation has made me examine my innermost thoughts. After all, what is the root of the problem?

SARS took many lives and caused losses to the economy. However, it revealed the defects of the anti-infection systems in hospitals and the problems of not attaching enough importance to personal and community hygiene. Eventually, it helped crystallise the awareness of being a citizen in the community and increased public consciousness of the importance of healthy living. H5N1 avian flu has now appeared, although it has yet to make any big impact on Hong Kong. Still, citizens become worried whenever birds are mentioned. As SARS led us to deep reflections, I believe that avian flu can also give us new revelations!


The government's closure of Mai Po Nature Reserve seemed like a strike at nature lovers. However, this action should enable us to think about the relationship between humans and nature. In the past, when we promoted the concept of caring for nature, we mostly emphasized knowing and having close contact with nature. Less importance was given to respecting nature. The simple equation behind why the government has temporarily closed Mai Po Nature Reserve is that bird watching = proximity to birds = high risk of infection. In fact, people with bird watching experience understand that bird watchers have to be a good distance from the birds in order to view them clearly. Even with binoculars, the closest focus distance to view a bird clearly is 3 metres, not to mention when we use a telescope. This is like a metaphor of our attitude towards nature. There are many poisonous plants in the wild. Do we have to make them all extinct, or can we learn to know the danger or harmfulness of these creatures, respect their existence and be prepared to keep an appropriate distance? This is the correct attitude towards nature.

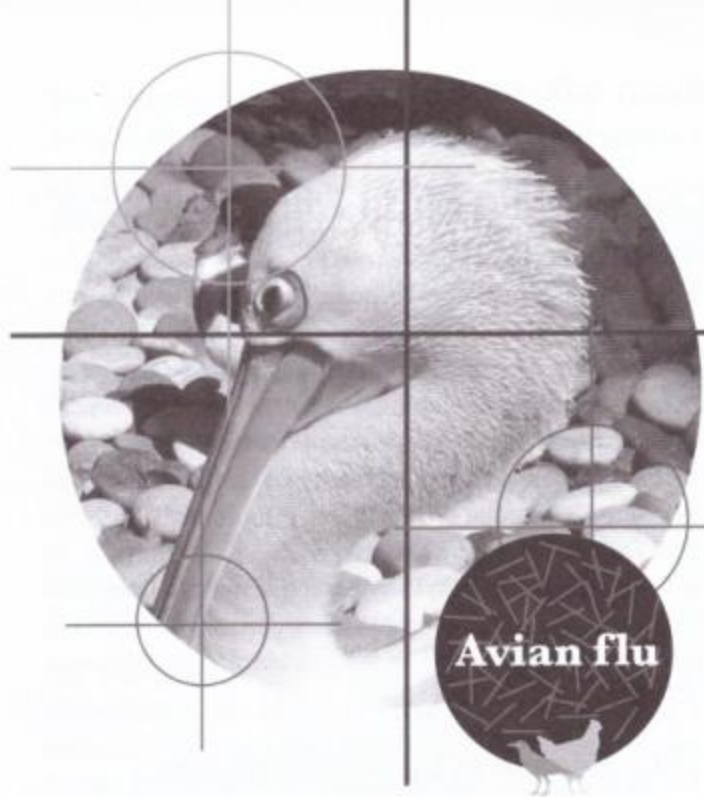
The rapid pace of modernization in China and fast development of local eco-tourism ventures have resulted in conflicts between humans and nature. In recent summers, a large number of day-trippers have taken boat trips to watch terns on some remote islands. More than a few people tried to pick up tern eggs and to smash up the nests. This behaviour made a harmful impact on those breeding summer visitors. As the result of the disturbances, the number of Roseate Tern declined rapidly in recent years.

Avian flu teaches us a lesson that whenever we are close to nature, we have to respect it as well. Mother Nature has endless wisdoms to hold in store, but still, danger exists. In our bird market, many birds are labelled as "buy and release". These "buy and release" believers may not be aware that their kind-hearted behaviour has encouraged groups of bird hunters to catch birds because there is a demand! The bird hunters are not conscious of being a medium of contact with birds, and they become a hidden channel of communication for the virus between birds and humans, thus increasing the risk of evolution of the virus. Local farmers have a practice of putting up sets of mist nets to protect their crops from wild birds. This not only does harm to birds but also increases the chances of cross infection between birds and humans. When citizens feed monkeys and pigeons in country parks, there is close contact which also increases the risk of cross infection.

At present, most of the prosperous countries adopt an enclosed environment for poultry farming houses so as to prevent contact with wild birds. When we look at the local poultry farming industry, most of the farmers are not aware of this. In general, all poultry farms have an open environment design, providing chances for cross infection.

Furthermore, live poultry in the market also increases chances of cross-infection between birds and humans

We must wake up to reality and consider the way we deal with nature. The balance of nature is wonderful but fragile. The change in the fortunes of any one of the creatures can tip the balance, affecting the other members of the eco-chain. Avian Flu can be a crisis or an opportunity. Here's hoping that we can use our intelligence to grasp this chance and change the way we interact with nature. Gradually, I hope we can increase our knowledge and respect for Mother Nature, to create a world that is forever safe and enjoyable for humans. 



Avian Influenza – a veterinary doctor's opinion

Culling wild birds *will never stop* **Avian Influenza**

– Dr Hugh A. Buck

Cyprus-based Dr Hugh A. Buck is both a veterinary doctor and founder member of the Oriental Bird Club. He offers the clearest explanation we have yet encountered of the relationship between wild birds, intensively-farmed poultry, and the spread of Avian Influenza.

This subject is understandably occupying a great deal of discussion space, and it perhaps needs a summary to cut through some of the conjecture and hysteria that surrounds it. I attempt this with credential as follows:

I am a veterinary doctor, as well as a serious birdwatcher. I work for an Animal Health Company which, among other things, specialises in vaccines for domestic poultry and ducks. I will try to put this as best I can in layman's terms (because in many ways I am, in this subject, a layman) but I have cleared it with my technical staff before release.

Much of the data comes from an excellent study



Culling wild birds will never stop Avian Influenza (con't)

entitled Avian Influenza: Ecology and risk factors for Humans and Poultry production by Dr Mauro Delogu of the Department of Public Veterinary Health and Animal Pathology at Bologna University in Italy. Mauro is a renowned virologist with a great interest in wild birds and, although the study was done in Italy, it is undoubtedly relevant to the rest of the world. I have also referred to the chapter on Avian Influenza by Easterday, Hinshaw and Halvorson in the standard work Diseases of Poultry 10th Edition (1997).

This disease is by no means new

The disease has been suspected for more than 100 years (first described in Italy in 1878), was studied intensively during the devastating 'flu epidemics following the First World War, and has caused epidemics in poultry and other birds in many countries (including the USA and several in Western Europe) all over the world throughout this and the last century. It is likely it has also been overlooked in the face of other epidemic poultry diseases in the past, and only in recent years (the virus was finally identified in 1955), in parallel with a lot of birding, have the true identification techniques been worked out. Note that domestic pigs in Asia have also long been incriminated in outbreaks of "Asian" 'flu in humans, so it should come as no surprise that intensively reared birds can also be a source. The virus has also been isolated from seals, a whale and a mink.

There is no question that Avian Influenza is, as its name suggests, largely a disease of birds. It is also clear from studies done that the virus is commonly found in wild birds, but the evidence is that it is primarily found in waterfowl and waders, and only rarely or never in other families. The presence of the virus does not mean that these birds suffer from Avian Influenza, as they are highly resistant, having developed high degrees of immunity over the millennia, and overt disease is rarely found. They are however carriers of the virus.

Dr Mauro Delogu's study sampled 21,000 wild birds of 88 species, 22 families and 12 orders. He found evidence of virus as follows (percentage of birds sampled):

Anseriformes – 15.2%
Charadriiformes – 2.2%
Passeriformes – 2.9%

It is interesting to note the species breakdown in "anseriformes" (percentage of species sampled positive for virus):

Mallards – 63.9%
Other dabbling ducks – 31.4%
Diving ducks – 22.8%
Coots – 7.1%

In addition virus was demonstrated at a much higher level in post-breeding juvenile ducks than in wintering birds, which is logical. There was also a higher percentage in birds released from captive rearing than from birds collected from the wild.

Mauro also specifically sampled other groups, for example:

Terns – 3.6% positive in 140 birds sampled
Gulls – 18.8% positive in 101 birds sampled
**Pheasant – zero positives from 424 birds
(both wild and domestically reared)**
**Quail – zero positives from 258 birds trapped
from the wild**

Finally the virus is shed by birds' faeces in addition to other modes (such as respiratory).

Serotypes of virus isolated from wild birds do not immediately cause influenza in domestic birds

The influenza virus is highly mutagenic, that is, it can change in type and virulence very rapidly. This has long been known in human 'flu, and is the main reason why there have never been (and probably never will be) truly effective influenza vaccines. The same is true of Avian Influenza - vaccines do exist and are (and undoubtedly will continue to be) widely used in attempts to control this disease. Their efficacy remains doubtful.

The serotypes of virus so far isolated from wild birds including ducks have been almost invariably low pathogenic and do NOT immediately cause influenza in domestic birds. In modern day intensive poultry units, the virus has however the distressingly rapid ability to mutate to high pathogenic forms, and this is the crux of the problem. This of course is a common phenomenon in highly crowded intensive situations anywhere - humans in the outback of Australia are less likely to suffer nasty new strains of Asian 'flu than residents of Wanchai.

There is no evidence at all that humans can spread this disease to other humans

This pathogenic virus can spread from poultry to humans, although this is as yet rare. I stress that so far the human infections have only been in people directly in contact with diseased birds, there is no evidence at all that humans can spread this disease to other humans.

As birdwatchers, we have to accept that Avian Influenza can spread from wild birds, especially dabbling ducks, into domestic poultry. This may be by direct contact, for example wild ducks coming into contact with domestic ducks, which in turn come into contact with domestic chickens; or it may be spread by humans or domestic dogs (this is documented), who wander over fields contaminated with wild duck or geese droppings, and carry the virus into a farm.

The low pathogenic virus then has the ability to mutate into the high pathogenic form, and off we go. Highly pathogenic virus has been found, rarely, in wild birds (Mauro found it in one Herring Gull out of 100 sampled) but this, like the publicised dead Peregrine in Hong Kong and Open-billed Storks in Thailand was probably caused by contact with the pathogenic virus in poultry or poultry waste.

Wild birds are a scapegoat

Hysterical conclusions, statements and reactions, such as the outbreak in Indonesia being caused by migratory birds from China in August, or Bramblings falling out of trees in Thailand, are exactly that - hysterical and ill-informed responses. Avian Influenza can be spread into poultry from wild birds and can mutate into a pathogenic form, which can cause disease in both intensively reared poultry and humans. But the major transmission from farm to farm is unquestionably movement of infected poultry and poultry products, and wild birds are only a scapegoat.

At this moment the only veterinary solution to this problem is the rapid cull (kill) of all infected and in-contact birds, but this depends (remember the last outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in Britain) on an effective mobilised infrastructure to carry this out. This is probably not present in many of the countries where the disease is present, and this inaction will lead to epidemics.


The structure of the modern poultry industry almost guarantees these kinds of outbreaks in future

Vaccination of healthy non-infected birds is now being widely recommended and is underway in many countries, but we do not know the true value of this. We also do not know the future of this current "pandemic", and whether it will continue and get more serious, or whether the virus will change again and the crisis die down. What is likely however is that this disease will, like human 'flu, continue to occur in outbreaks from now on. The structure of the modern poultry industry almost guarantees it.

What can birdwatchers do about Avian 'flu?

We finally come to the question - what can we, as birdwatchers, do about it? Firstly, understand what is going on, which is what I have tried to summarise above. Secondly spread this understanding both amongst our friends and colleagues, and wherever possible, influential persons at Government and other levels.

Some of the reactions, such as in Thailand, do show some common sense being spoken, but we all know that this may not be the majority view. The message is that culling wild birds will never stop Avian Influenza. We might as well cull all the domestic chickens and pigs in the world, and we would still have human 'flu.

There is however also, as several people have pointed out, a possible benefit in all of this: a reaction against the hunting, trapping and keeping of wild birds as pets. As birdwatchers, this possible benefit may outweigh the disadvantage. 

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Avian flu



A sorrowful reflection on avian flu

– by Miss Heung Yuen Mei, a Hong Kong citizen

The recent outbreak of avian flu across Asia has led me to realize that though humankind is the most intelligent creature on the Earth, it is also notorious as the most selfish and brutal inhabitant. The slaughter of millions of chickens is of no difference from other historical massacres in its nature. In this case, the silent death of the victims draws no words of pity, no tears of sympathy and no feeling of regret. Under the human-oriented regime, their deaths appear to be inevitable and these animals are simply regarded as “merchandise” which can be disposed of without a second thought. Yet, does anybody ever think how much they resemble humans? They have bones and flesh, and share the same desire for life and agony towards death. It is simply our dominance that renders their feelings unimportant.


The World Health Organization is simply concerned about the impact of this epidemic on human health, while the poultry merchants simply focus on their economic loss. The ordinary citizens, on the other hand, merely care whether healthy meat is available for their consumption. Not a word is ever spoken about the millions of animals who pay the ultimate price in this epidemic. Despite the fact that human civilization has marched towards a golden era in terms of materialism, the spiritual aspects, together with our passion for nature, have lagged behind. Indeed, they may even have drifted backwards. As an old saying goes, “Heaven bears the good wish to cultivate life while men have the conscience to be considerate.” In ancient times, kings would undertake merciful acts like stopping killings, releasing captives and forgiving the guilty in order to cause Heaven to alleviate natural disasters and epidemics. In contemporary times, however, nobody bothers to think about the reasons behind the epidemic. Instead, they resort simply to killing defenseless creatures. Some medical researchers even claimed that the recent outbreak of avian flu was brought about by migratory birds. Have they ever found any massive die-off of wild birds from avian flu? Do they expect that their way to cure the epidemic is to get rid of all wild birds?

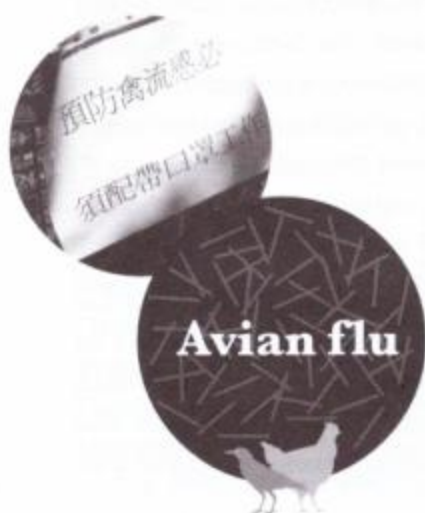
The modern meat-eating culture has led the money-minded meat producers to adopt a production-line approach to rearing their poultry, with no regard for them as living organisms. They are always kept in crowded cages with virtually no room to move around. Some merchants may even feed them inferior, hormone-enhanced food, to save costs and accelerate growth. The animals gradually lose resistance against diseases. Once any of them is infected, the crowded conditions ensure it is inevitable that the spread is alarmingly fast.

Mad Cow Disease, SARS and now Avian flu keep urging us to rethink our habit of eating meat excessively. Even if we cannot abruptly turn into vegetarians, we should minimize our intake of meat as far as possible. There is a Buddhist saying that endless meat consumption by mankind generates endless hatred. For those who want to know

why battles and confrontations continue endlessly, they need only look at the daily killings in the slaughterhouse.

But whatever our beliefs, we cannot deny that as we have moved from a simple agricultural society to industrial production and hi-tech digital lifestyles, profound changes in our quality of life have taken place. Things are available in vast quantities and choices, but the Earth pays a high price to satisfy our desires. Poisonous effluents spread from factories and harmful and radioactive chemicals pollute the air. Perhaps this virus is a result of our indulgence in a material life. Once there is an outbreak of disease, we don't hesitate to complain to the government, or criticize officials, and we wantonly slaughter defenceless animals. Why don't we realize that each of us may be accountable for the outbreak?

It is time we rethink our attitude towards animals. We need to adopt a stance of "respecting life". This Earth is not exclusively occupied by mankind. Other organisms deserve the right to life as well. Without their presence, our Earth is as dreadful and solitary as dead wood or ashes. Even as we rear the poultry for our consumption, we should treat them in a "humanitarian" way. I believe that this view will not only bring benefits to countless organisms, but also to humankind as well. 



New Release in Book


–“Appreciating Wild Birds”

– Samson So

Conservation and eco-tour related publications of varying quality have become very popular in Hong Kong in recent years. A new publication, “Appreciating Wild Birds” published by the Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), should appeal to people interested in birds.

Although AFCD has published a few books related to birds before, “Appreciating Wild Birds” (ISBN 9882016111) is the most practical one for new bird watchers. Written by Fiona Lock (HKBWS member) and W. L. Hui, this book offers basic information on birds and their status in Hong Kong, and includes topics, like “10 Common Families” and “30 Common Species”, that are useful to beginners. However, places to visit in Hong Kong for bird watching are not covered by the text.

Enriched by a large number of color illustrations related to avian ecology, including nest building, parental care and feeding, the book also gives readers a more in-depth understanding of avian life. In fact, photos of rare Crested Kingfisher and Siberian Crane alone make this book worthwhile, while the photos of Chinese Francolin, Red-winged Crested Cuckoo, Black Baza, Crested Serpent Eagle, Collared Scops Owl and Eurasian Hoopoe are also well worth a look.

With 300 attractive color illustrations, the HKD\$80 price of the book is quite reasonable, and this would be an interesting addition to the libraries of most bird watchers, whether a beginner or an ‘old hand’. 



Please note: these are unchecked records. Members are reminded of the importance of submitting all records on cards or electronically.

– Richard Lewthwaite

December

A fairly good and varied month opened with a Rufous-faced Warbler at Tai Po Kau on 1st, only the third Hong Kong record. Also reported there on the same day were two Lesser Shortwings, three Pygmy Wren Babblers and two Mountain Tailorbirds (EMSK, RWL). These four species continued to be reported at this site from time to time throughout the month and into 2004. The latter three species were also reported throughout the month at Ng Tung Chai (EMSK) and a further Mountain Tailorbird was present at Tai Po Kau Headland (K&RB).

Reports in mid month included a Eurasian Chiffchaff, the first since the early 1990s, at the KCRC managed ponds at Lok Ma Chau on 11th (GJC), two Yellow-legged Buttonquails at Shuen Wan on 12th (EMSK, WLC), a Slaty-legged Crake at Kowloon Park on 16th (DH), and a Common Swift at Long Valley on 18th (EMSK), the latter potentially only the third for Hong Kong.

Single Japanese Robins, the first in a fine series during the winter, were found at Wu Kau Tang on 19th and Tai Po Kau on 21st, with two Mountain Bulbuls also noted at the latter site on the same date (DT).

At Mai Po, the Black-necked Grebe continued to be seen until 20th, when reports also included a Dusky Thrush and two Amur Falcons (MDW). A Water Rail and four Dalmatian Pelicans were noted the next day, and a Daurian Jackdaw on 30th.

During the final week of the month, forest and shrubland sites accounted for most rarities, highlights being 50 Striated Yuhinas (DH), a Fujian Niltava (MRL) and a Bianchi's Warbler at Tai Po Kau, two Mountain Bulbuls, a very late Blue-and-white Flycatcher and a Brown-headed Thrush at Ng Tung Chai (EMSK) and an unidentified Spectacled Warbler on the coast of northern Lantau (JA) on 28th.

January

January started fairly mild until an unusually prolonged

spell of cold weather set in during the last third of the month, bringing a large influx of thrushes and chats. Despite it being an excellent month for birds, the mood of birdwatchers was gloomy following a government decision to close Mai Po from 30th on health grounds, this being a winter when parts of China and Asia were suffering an avian flu outbreak.

A Ferruginous Duck, only the third record, and a Baer's Pochard were found at the KCRC managed ponds at Lok Ma Chau (GJC) on 2nd, both remaining for much of the month. Also attracted to this area were an Oriental Stork (MRL) and for a few days from 20th an Australasian Bush Lark (YHK), a species formerly known as Singing Bush Lark.

The Oriental Stork also occasionally showed at Mai Po throughout the month. Other noteworthy birds found there included a Nordmann's Greenshank on 2nd (JA), five Greater Scaup on 4th (GT), three Daurian Jackdaws and three Carrion Crows (MLC, GT) at the month's end.

Reports at shrubland sites prior to the cold weather spell included a Mountain Tailorbird singing at So Lo Pun on 4th and up to three Mountain Bulbuls at Sha Tin Pass (GH) and Ng Tung Chai (EMSK). A White-throated Fantail, presumably the individual found in late November, was again seen at Ng Tung Chai on 13th.

Though initially poor for thrushes and chats, Tai Po Kau hosted a fine series of rarities during the month. In addition to the Mountain Bulbuls, Lesser Shortwings, Mountain Tailorbirds and Rufous-faced Warbler which were noted in December and remained through January, there were reports of a White-spectacled Warbler, from 4th, potentially only the second record following one last winter, an adult male White-tailed Robin from 11th (MT), single female Fujian Niltavas on 15th and 24th (YYT), single Chestnut-crowned and Greenish Warblers from 17th, and at least two Japanese Robins and a female Small Niltava from 23rd (OW and others).

The discovery of the female Small Niltava at Tai Po Kau

after the onset of the cold spell was followed by further reports of this species at Sha Tin Pass on 26th (GH) and Chung Mei on 28th (JW), both involving males. White's Thrushes suddenly increased at this time, with six at Lamma (JS) and at least five at Chung Mei (GT), where there was also a stunning male Orange-headed Thrush and two Plumbeous Redstarts. Elsewhere, a Brown-headed Thrush at Sha Tin Pass (GH), a Japanese Robin and Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush at Kadoorie FBG (GJC, EMSK) and a Chestnut-crowned Warbler at Pak Shek Au (FB) were all reported on 23rd, followed by a further Brown-headed Thrush at Chung Chau on 28th (MDW). Yet another Mountain Tailorbird was found in shrubland near Wun Yiu on 25th (GJC) and a further Japanese Robin at Ng Tung Chai on 31st.

Apart from *Rhodoleia championi* trees, which were flowering and attracting large numbers of Japanese White-eyes and Fork-tailed Sunbirds, very few trees or shrubs at Tai Po Kau or elsewhere were fruiting or flowering. Chestnut Bulbuls were seen feeding on unripe *Schleffera* fruit (RB, RWL). Thrushes that came in with the cold weather were invariably seen foraging in leaf litter and were often remarkably confiding, allowing a careful observer to approach within a few metres.

An indication of the scale of the cold weather influx was provided at Lantau where totals of 90 Grey-backed, 18 Japanese, three Pale and five White's Thrushes together with 31 Siberian Rubythroats, seven Red-tailed Robins and 22 Red-flanked Bluetails were logged during coverage of a 3 km stretch west of Tung Chung (PJJ).

In Deep Bay at the month's end, a record 8964 Great Cormorants were logged on 25th and a Spotted Bush Warbler of the taxon *davidi*, a long-expected addition to the Hong Kong list, was trapped at Mai Po on 30th.

February (first half of the month)

Following a few warm days at the beginning of the month, a second cold spell came through, this time accompanied by


persistent rain, before warmer weather returned and a sudden and apparently widespread departure of thrushes occurred on the night of 11th.

Still present from January during the first week of the month were the White-tailed Robin, Mountain Tailorbird, White-spectacled Warbler and female Small Niltava at Tai Po Kau, the Orange-headed Thrush and up to five White's Thrushes at Chung Mei, the Brown-headed Thrush at Cheung Chau, and the White-throated Fantail at Ng Tung Chai.









Amongst newly found birds at this time were a Citrine Wagtail at Long Valley on 1st, a Eurasian Skylark at Long Valley on 2nd and a Brown-headed Thrush at Chung Mei from 6th. The highest counts of the winter were made of Common Starlings (9) and Grey-headed Lapwings (15), both at Kam Tin on 1st (JA) and the highest ever of Greater Scaup with 67 in Deep Bay on 8th (GT) and still 53 there on 11th.

Prior to the clear-out on 11th, good numbers of thrushes and chats were noted at Chi Ma Wan (MDW), Chung Mei (GT, JW, RWL) and along the Hong Kong trail, including 18 Red-flanked Bluetails, seven Japanese and two Pale Thrushes, and two Oriental Greenfinches at the latter site on 8th (JSRE). A disproportionate number of adult male thrushes were noted at some sites, such as Chung Mei where eight out of ten Grey-backed Thrushes logged on 8th were in this category, the others being a first-winter male and an unaged female (RWL).

Visits to the Ng Tung Chai area turned up a Slaty-backed Forktail on 7th, a Mountain Bulbul, a Pygmy Wren Babbler, a Fujian Niltava and a Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher, all on 9th, four Black Bulbuls and two Rufous-faced Warblers on 12th and a Eurasian Woodcock on 15th (EMSK, GT, GJC).

Reports from 12th to 15th included, a Slaty-legged Crake at Kowloon Park, two Chestnut-bellied Thrushes at Kadoorie FBG (GA) and the White-spectacled Warbler at Tai Po Kau (MT). 

Coming Activities

Date	Leader / Speaker	Activity / Gathering location	Time	Difficulty
11 April 2004 (Sun)	Mike Turnbull Au Chun Yan	Boat Trip: Lamma Channel   08:00 Aberdeen Public Pier (near Ocean Court) 16:00 back to Aberdeen Public Pier (Member \$150, Non-member \$200)	08:00 – 16:00	XXX
	Wong Chiu Shui Ng Yan Lai (Crested Bulbul Club Leader)	Tsim Bei Tsui & San Pui Ho ** 08:00 CityBus #969 bus stop (HongkongBank Headquarter, Central)	08:00 – 16:00	XX
18 April 2004 (Sun)	Ying Hak King Lo Kar Man	Long Valley 08:00 Yin Kong carpark	08:00 – 13:00	X
25 April 2004 (Sun)	Yu Yat Tung Forrest Fong Ho Man Fai	Mai Po (afternoon) 10:30 Kowloon Tong KCR Station (Kent Road exit) or 11:30 Mai Po carpark coach leaves at 17:30 and back to Kowloon Tong at 18:30  	11:30 – 17:30	XX
9 May 2004 (Sun)	Cheung Ho Fai Marcus Ho	Boat Trip: Po Toi, Wanglan Island 08:00 Aberdeen Public Pier (near Ocean Court) 16:00 back to Aberdeen Public Pier   (Member \$150, Non-member \$200)	08:00 – 16:00	XXX
16 May 2004 (Sun)	Alan Chan Shirley Lam	Tap Mun Tern Survey 08:15 Ma Liu Shiu Pier	08:15 – 14:00	XXX
23 May 2004 (Sun)	Luk Tsun Pun Tai Sheung Lai	Mai Po (afternoon) 10:30 Kowloon Tong KCR Station (Kent Road exit) or 11:30 Mai Po carpark coach leaves at 17:30 and back to Kowloon Tong at 18:30  	11:30 – 17:30	XX
29 & 30 May (Sat & Sun)	Wong Tin Wa Ronley Lee	Lamma Island (overnight) 14:45 Central Ferry Pier No.5 (to Sok Kwu Wan) Return at 13:00 Sunday (Member \$120, Non-member \$150)* * Includes a Camping fees, BBQ dinner & breakfast only.	14:45 – 15:00 (the next day)	XX
6 Jun (Sun)	Peter Wong Michelle Kong	Tai Mo Shan 08:00 Tsuen Wan MTR Station Hang Seng Bank Return at 13:00	08:00 – 13:00	XX
20 Jun (Sun)	Man Chup Ming	Hong Kong Park Aviary 09:00 Aviary entrance	09:00 – 12:30	X

Date	Leader / Speaker	Activity / Gathering location	Time	Difficulty
7 Jul (Wed)	Mike Leven	Indoor meeting <House Crow in HK> Room 1113, Hong Kong Scout Centre, Scout Path, Austin Rd, Kowloon (Member \$10, Non-member \$30)	19:00 – 20:30	X
21 Jul (Wed)	Cheung Ho Fai	Indoor meeting <China/Overseas Trip Report> Room 1113, Hong Kong Scout Centre, Scout Path, Austin Rd, Kowloon (Member \$10, Non-member \$30)	19:00 – 20:30	X

**** Crested Bulbul Club Activity –**
These activities are led by elderly nature interpreters, members are welcome to join with elderly members of their families.



Transportation arrangement



Please fill in the booking slip and return

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

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

* Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by phone or by e-mail at least one week before the outing. If you wish to check your booking, please contact Ms. Ada Chow at 2580 6472.

**Non-members joining Mai Po trips will have to pay the coach fare
irrespective of whether they make use of the coach.**

Payment to the Society may be made in two ways:

- (1) by returning the attendance slip with a cheque in English made out to the **"Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Ltd"** OR
- (2) by depositing the fee into the A/C no. 534-361423-838 of Hongkong Bank in favour of **"Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Ltd"**. Please send the booking slip in as well to confirm your payment and attendance.

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

Activity Booking Slip

► Mai Po Trip

I wish to reserve places for _____ members and _____ non-members for the following Mai Po tour :

- * 25 Apr (Sun pm) 23 May (Sun pm)

The number of person(s) using the coach is _____.

- * Coach fare: _____ x HK\$40/Member _____ x HK\$20/Student member
 _____ x HK\$60/Guest #

Non-members joining Mai Po trips will have to pay the coach fare irrespective of whether they make use of the coach. Members not using the coach do not need to pay coach fare.

► Boat Trip

I wish to reserve places for _____ members and _____ non-members for the following boat trip :

- * 11 Apr : Po Toi, Lamma Channel (HK\$150/member, HK\$200/non-members)
 9 May : Po Toi, Wanglan Island (HK\$150/member, HK\$200/non-members)
 16 May : Tap Mun (HK\$150/member, HK\$200/non-members)

► Lamma Island Overnight Camp

I wish to reserve places for _____ members and _____ non-members for the Lamma Island overnight camp on 29 May 04 (HK\$120/member, HK\$150/non-members)

Cheque for HK\$ _____ (In English. Payable to The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Ltd)

Name : _____ Contact No. : _____

Address: _____

Date : _____ Signature : _____

*Note: Please send this application together with crossed cheque by mail to **The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Ltd, G.P.O. Box 12460, Hong Kong (member activity)***

Application should be made at least two weeks before the date of the outing. Late application will only be accepted if places are available.

** Please as appropriate*

DOs & DON'Ts for Bird Watching

1. Walk lightly and talk softly while moving around in the forest so as not to disturb the birds.
2. When encountering birds, note carefully their shape, colour, behaviour and calls first. Check field guides afterwards. This would strengthen the visual image in your mind and improve identification skills.
3. Don't chase birds around simply because you want to see them. Birds do deserve a peaceful life.
4. Don't throw stones or take other improper actions to force birds to move and show themselves.
5. Don't get too close if you find bird nests. Frightened birds will abandon their nests even if there are eggs.
6. Don't hunt birds nor pick up eggs. Both are illegal and you would be liable to prosecution.
7. Don't worry if you don't record many species. Seeing a few common birds is already the joy of life.

普通鷲 (米埔) – 陳志光

Common Buzzard (Mai Po) – Daniel C K Chan



黑翅長腳鶿 (幼鳥) (米埔)

– 黃理沛

Black-winged Stilt (*Juvenile*) (Mai Po)

– Peter Wong

虎斑地鷓 (涌尾)

— 黃亞萍

Scaly Thrush (Chung Mei)

— Jemi Wong



橙頭地鷓 (涌尾)

— 江敏兒

Orange-headed Thrush (Chung Mei)

— Michelle Kong

