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221

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The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society

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Bulletin 221

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Editor's Note

Conservation issues loom large in this edition. In May 2011 the PRC Government extended acceptance of the United Nations "Convention on Biological Diversity" (CBD) to Hong Kong.

This should remind our Government officials of their responsibilities when planning procedures are set in motion. But just in case they waver, the HKBWS and a number of other Environmental NGOs are striving to keep officialdom "reminded".

Every HKBWS submission made will carry more weight with greater membership support. Our environment needs US. 

John Holmes

Members Affairs

Assistant Membership Officer - Bonnie Chan

Bonnie started her work on September 1st. We hope she can contribute to improved membership services. If you have any enquiries or suggestions to raise about membership, please don't hesitate to contact her.

Extraordinary General Meeting

An Extraordinary General Meeting was held on 28 July 2011. The following resolutions had been passed during the meeting:

- (1) THAT the name of the Society be changed from 'The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Limited 香港觀鳥會有限公司' to 'The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society 香港觀鳥會'. (But we are still incorporated in Hong Kong under the Companies Ordinance. We are just granted a License to omit the word "Ltd")
- (2) THAT the Society's existing Memorandum and Articles (M&A) of Association be deleted.
- (3) THAT a new set of M&A of Association form an integral part of this resolution, be adopted as the Society's new Memorandum and Articles of Association. (The new M&A was sent to all members before the EGM. Please contact us if you want an extra copy.)

The most important change of the new M&A is the combination of the Board of Directors and the Executive Committee. In future, the Executive Committee will be the key decision maker of the Society's daily operation. All members of the Executive Committee should be elected in the Annual General Meeting by members.

HKBWS Bird Shop

Code	Items for Sale	Member's Price HK\$	Non-member's Price HK\$
B0025	A Handbook of HK Waterside Birds (Chinese edition only) < New item >	\$70	\$88
B0016	A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Hong Kong (Revised edition 2010)	\$240	\$270
B0019	Birds of Hong Kong & South China	\$135	\$158
SOU0006	Cross Binocular Straps	\$70	\$80
SOU0005	Scaly-sided Merganser Tie	\$200	\$300

A Handbook of HK Waterside Birds (Chinese edition only)

Following the success of "A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Hong Kong", HKBWS is launching another series of pocket-size field guide with Wan Li Books for your convenience of use in the wild. The first issue – "A Handbook of HK Waterside Birds"(in Chinese) is now available for sale at HKBWS Bird Shop. The second issue on land birds is coming soon.

Crested Bulbul Club

Early Morning Bird Watchers

No. of participants in Hong Kong Park from Jun - Aug 2011: 318

No. of participants in Kowloon Park from Jun - Aug 2011: 439



Urban Oasis Elderly Ambassador Scheme

Date: Mar – Dec 2011

Phase 1 of the project has almost been completed. We are now preparing programmes of Phase 2 and 3 for the elderly and local residents, including talks and guided tours in the parks. Anyone is welcome to join the activities in these parks on the following days:

Education

Venue	Date
Ma On Shan Park	15-16 Oct, 2011
Kowloon Park	22-23 Oct, 2011
Walled City Park	22-23 Oct, 2011
Shatin Park	29-30 Oct, 2011
Tsing Yi Park	29-30 Oct, 2011
Tin Shui Wai Park	12-13 Nov, 2011
Lai Chi Kok Park	12-13 Nov, 2011
Hong Kong Park	26-27 Nov, 2011
Po Hong Park	26-27 Nov, 2011
Tai Po Park	10-11 Dec, 2011

2010-2012 Nature Conservation Management for Long Valley

~ Vicky YEUNG

Long Valley was still noisy after spring migration ended. Resident species were busy displaying, calling and then nest-building and feeding chicks. The breeding bird survey this year recorded almost 30 species either breeding in Long Valley or utilizing resources there during the breeding season. This is the highest record since the survey started in 2009.

The first round of paddy rice was harvested in late July. We planted the second round in August to prepare for autumn migrants. 11 and 12 Yellow-breasted Buntings were recorded by bird surveyors in autumn 2009 and 2010 respectively. And eight



Let's make a guess bunting species were recorded last autumn (Little, Yellow-breasted, Black-headed, Chestnut-eared, Black-faced, Yellow-browed, Crested and Rustic Buntings). How many Yellow-breasted Buntings will visit Long Valley this autumn? How many bunting species? A game on guessing the number of buntings has been launched. Make a guess! Please visit: <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/BBS/viewthread.php?tid=14524>

Common Kingfisher feeding a juvenile during the breeding bird survey.
© Cindy & Philip



A School Environmental Education Project in Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province— Promoting Bird Conservation

~ By Vivian Fu

HKBWS has been working on conservation of the Critically Endangered Blue-crowned Laughingthrush (*Garrulax courtoisi*) in Wuyuan with support from the “Preventing Extinctions” Programme of BirdLife International and British Birdwatching Fair since 2009 (For more details of past projects, please refer to Bulletin 215). Last year, we were also grateful to have funding from the Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (HK) to continue this project in Wuyuan.



Members of bird monitoring group introducing birds of Wuyuan
(©Vivian Fu)



Students were active in approaching citizens to introduce birds
(©Vivian Fu)



Certificates and a flag were presented to students of participating schools
(©Vivian Fu)



Teacher of QiuKou Secondary School sharing experiences gained from the project (©Vivian Fu)

From October to December 2010, Dong Wenxiao was contracted to stay in Wuyuan to run school education programmes in four primary and secondary schools, including talks, bird watching activities and setting up bird monitoring groups. It was reported that after the talks, the students were so enthusiastic and interested in joining the bird monitoring groups that they needed to go through selection in order to become a group member.

Apart from bird education programmes, we also aimed to spread the message of bird conservation to the citizens in Wuyuan. Therefore, on 12th March 2011, Dr. Cheung Ho-fai, Dong Wenxiao and I went to Wuyuan to hold a promotional event to raise the awareness of birds there. We were grateful to have the support of the Wuyuan Photographers Association, who had provided photos of over 100 bird species for the production of a leaflet of common birds in Wuyuan. This was the first bird and bird watching promotion activity in the city. Exhibition panels introducing birds and bird watching were placed beside a busy pedestrian area. Members of the bird survey group of each school participated in introducing birds, distributing the leaflets of common birds of Wuyuan and enthusiastically shared their experiences in bird watching with

the passers-by. More than 400 citizens had visited our booth, and they showed interest in the birds of Wuyuan.

In the afternoon, a project closing ceremony was held at Ziyang Secondary School. We were honored by the participation of Mr. Wang Gui Fu (汪桂福先生), Deputy Chief of Wuyuan Forestry Department, Prof. He Fen Qi (何芬奇教授), ornithologist from Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and representatives of the Wuyuan Photographers Association. School principals, teachers, students and parents also attended the ceremony. After opening speeches, student representatives and teachers of each school shared their experiences. We learnt from Mr. Wu, school principal of Ziyang High School that this project

had been commended as a model of an integrated practical learning curriculum in Jiangxi Province. This is no doubt a big encouragement for schools to continue environmental education through birdwatching!

To conclude, the objectives of raising public awareness on birds and engaging students to conserve birds in Wuyuan were successfully achieved. We have also built up good relationship with the Departments of Forestry and Education as well as the local birders. After the closing ceremony, teachers and students had expressed that they would like to keep running the bird monitoring groups and wish that their schoolmates, friends and neighbors will also learn to appreciate and treasure the natural environment in Wuyuan.



Group photo of the school environmental education project in Wuyuan (©Zhang Yingqun)

New book release: China Coastal Waterbird Census Report 1.2008-12.2009

Published in August 2011 by Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, this is a compilation of data summaries of the monthly waterbird censuses conducted at 11 sites (Dandong, Liaoning; Tianjin; Cangzhou, Hebei; Yellow River Delta, Lianyungang, Jiangsu; Shanghai; Min Jiang Estuary, Fujian; Xiamen, Fujian; Haifeng, Guangdong; Shenzhen and Hong Kong) between January 2008 and December 2009, with summaries in English in each section.

The China Coastal Waterbird Census was started in September 2005, and is conducted by volunteers with the aim of monitoring the distribution, migration and seasonal changes of waterbirds through monthly surveys along the eastern coast of China. It is hoped that results of the project can help in conserving China's biodiversity and Important Bird Areas.

Report of 2005-2007 can be downloaded at: www.chinabirdnet.org

Selling price of the report is HKD100 each, all income earned will be donated to support China Coastal Waterbird Census Programme.



Nature Conservation

~ Cheng Nok Ming, Conservation Officer

We have submitted our comments on the 2011-12 Policy Address, to urge for Nature Conservation policies that match the global standards. Our comments are published elsewhere in this bulletin and on the HKBWS website.

HKBWS has published a "Hong Kong Biodiversity Headline Indicators 2011 Report". The report is a co-operative result of input from various Green Groups and Academics. The report will show that HK's current nature conservation policy is outdated and far behind global best practice, and the community and government have to work hard to enhance nature conservation.

Meanwhile, our earlier comments have been seriously considered and adopted by various Government Departments. The Study Brief issued for the residential development in Ping Kong (near Sheung Shui, N.T.) specifically asked for a study on the birds, especially on Malayan Night Heron and raptors. A number of smaller-scale developments and applications for filling fishponds have been subsequently rejected by the Town Planning Board. The Architectural Services Department has also promised to pay extra attention to bird nests on government buildings, thanks to the efforts of our Swift and Swallows Research Group.

The HKBWS shall spare no effort in conserving birds and their habitats by various approaches. We need your support and please feel free to provide comments or report incidents of concern to us!



White-bellied Sea Eagle update 2011

~ White-bellied Sea Eagle Research Group

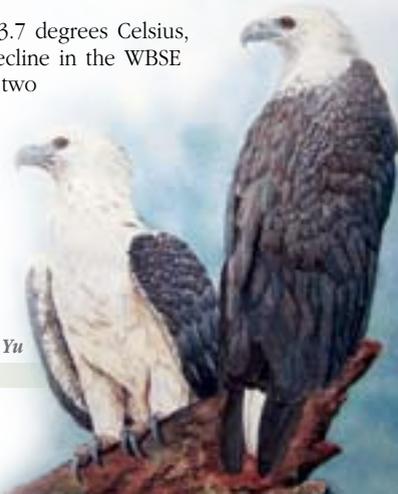
In the most recent breeding season (2010/11 winter), a total of seven WBSE pairs have successfully bred, and three nests have been seen to contain two juveniles, making a total of ten fledglings. There may have been more juveniles, but some nest locations were too remote to observe clearly. Ten WBSE fledglings is the highest total in recent years and is very encouraging.

January was cold in 2011, with an average temperature of 13.7 degrees Celsius, 2.7 lower than average. Despite this, there was no sign of decline in the WBSE breeding success rate. In the winter of 2007/08, when only two fledglings were produced, some people suspected that cause was due to the influence of a very cold February. From this year's observations it appears that success rate has little to do with winter temperatures. In fact, in Australia, WBSE also breeds in winter.

From this year's observation, we know that even when we feel the winter is chilling, it doesn't mean too much to WBSE. Winter is the season they breed, no matter how uncomfortable it seems to humans.



Illustration: Wendy Yu





Hong Kong Bird Watching Society's comments for 2011-2012 Policy Address and 2012-2013 budget

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) urge for policies and actions to better protect our biodiversity and their habitats, in order to catch global standard of Biodiversity Conservation in Hong Kong:

1. Implementation of Convention on Biological Diversity and review of nature conservation policy

- 1.1. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has been formally extended to Hong Kong in May 2011¹. HKBWS welcomes the extension but we urge for a formal publication and implementation of Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) before May 2012, in order to meet the requirements of the CBD;
- 1.2. HKBWS urge for enhanced Public Involvement in plan-making either in the CBD implementation or other policies²;
- 1.3. HKBWS urge for publication of a list of locally endangered organisms³ and offer better protection to locally and globally threatened species;

2. Review of EIA system

- 2.1. HKBWS emphasize the need of introducing a formal and comprehensive Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment⁴ to higher policy-making processes.
- 2.2. HKBWS call on a reform on the current authority in Environmental Impact Assessment process to ensure professional scientific judgments and avoid conflict of interest⁵.
- 2.3. The government should enhance public engagement by adopting new strategies, with regard to oversea experiences and other local examples (e.g. Town Planning processes);
- 2.4. Improvements should be made to the current Advisory Council on the Environment to widen the scope of expertise of members, as well as allowing public to present & raise issues, in order to make best use of both professional and public knowledge.

3. Enhanced Protection on countryside areas

- 3.1. HKBWS appreciates the introduction of planning control on country park enclaves. However, we urge for the extension of planning control on remaining Country Park enclaves as soon as possible⁶. Planning control should also be applied to other ecologically sensitive areas not in the "Enclaves" list, e.g. Tung Chung River Valley⁷ and outlying islands.
- 3.2. The government should allocate more resources for enforcement actions by various departments including AFCD, EPD, PlanD and LandsD for more effective control on environmental destruction. A cross-departmental Task Force should be set up to co-ordinate these actions by the end of 2011.
- 3.3. The loopholes in legislation should be filled, in order to tackle activities such as fly-tipping and mass tree removal activities on private land.
- 3.4. Active Biodiversity Management should be introduced in country parks⁸

4. Land Resources

- 4.1. The Government should identify and utilize areas such as old industrial areas, planned New Towns, before considering Country Parks. Developments around recognized sites of conservation interest should be avoided.
- 4.2. Future land use planning should be made with consideration of ecological linkage between areas of conservation interest, in order to fulfill the targets of the CBD⁹.
- 4.3. The government should actively consider resumption of ecologically sensitive areas for nature conservation as a "public purpose".

¹ http://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=XXVII-8&chapter=27&lang=en

² <http://www.cbd.int/cooperation/organizations.shtml>

³ <http://www.regionalredlist.com/site.aspx?pageid=117>

⁴ <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ea/papers/ea0627cb1-2584-3-e.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.civic-exchange.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/110627EIA.pdf>

⁶ Open Letter: Country Park Enclaves, Jointly from various organizations to Chief Executive, 17 August 2011. Available from: http://www.designinghongkong.com/cms/index2.php?option=com_yanc&act=archive&task=view&cid=273&Itemid=&no_html=1

⁷ Joint Green Group Position on Planning and Engineering Study on the remaining development in Tung Chung, letter from Green Power to Development Bureau and the Finance Committee of LegCo on 7 July 2011

⁸ http://www.civic-exchange.org/wp/110829countrypark_en/

⁹ <http://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/rationale/target-5/>



Mai Po Update

~ Bena Smith

Pond #8a Egretty

Over the summer, the project to construct an Egretty inside the Reserve finished with the planting of 80 bamboos and 10 trees on the island in the northwestern corner of Pond #8a. The four species planted (*Bambusa textilis* 青皮竹, *Celtis sinensis* 朴樹 and *Ficus microcarpa* 細葉榕) were chosen because of their known usage by nesting ardeids elsewhere in Hong Kong.

The plants are likely to take the best part of 20 years to attain a structure attractive to nesting ardeids, and then follows the big question, will they like it? If they do and a breeding colony forms, then it will become the only one within a protected conservation area in Hong Kong.

Finishing off the egretty is a big relief for the management team. Unbelievable as might seem, the process to establish the egretty began in the early 1990s when the interior of Pond #8a (then Gei wai #8) was enhanced and the island constructed. However shortly after its construction a decision was made not to plant bamboo and shrubs because of logistical difficulties transporting freshwater onto the island in order to water the plants.

It was not until 2009 when the pond was separated from the seaward end of the gei wai and converted into a freshwater pond that planting become logistically possible. The following year we reshaped the island to maximise its north-facing aspect (there is some evidence in Hong Kong that ardeids prefer to nest on the northern side of bamboos / shrubs) and prepared the site for planting.

A long history and a lot of hard work, but we got there!



Credit : Bena Smith
Planted Bamboo at the egretty

2011 - A good waterbird breeding season

The 2011 breeding season was certainly one of the best in recent years. The number of Black-winged Stilt nesting pairs reached 58 in May, almost double our previous high in 2007. The increase is attributed to a combination of possible factors; a very dry spring, late start to the wet season, and a greater provision of suitable breeding habitat (mainly low height islands in shallow water) and foraging habitat (shallow freshwater).

Other than the Stilts, notable records include 5 nesting pairs of Greater Painted Snipe inside Gei wai #16/17, of which at least 2 successfully raised young. They seemed to like the abundance and patchiness of grasses which remained following last years flooded grassland trial for wintering duck at the gei wai.

On the downside, the number of Yellow Bittern and Striated Heron spending summer at the Reserve continues to drop. Although nests are not directly surveyed, partly because of difficulties in locating them, local birdwatchers are generally reporting fewer observations of nesting pairs - the reason for which is unknown.



A pair of Chinese Spot-billed Duck hung around Gei wai #16/17 most of the summer, prompting us to think they might indeed nest again after a 5-year absence, but alas they did not. Personally I am hopeful that Pond #8a will attract a nesting pair in the not too distant future now that the 3-year period of enhancement works is complete and the pond will be less disturbed during the spring / summer period.

Credit : Neil Fifer, A nesting Black-winged Stilt

Restoring open water in Gei wai #6

Each year at least one gei wai is de-silted to ensure the Mai Po gei wai system continues to function and also its waterbird value optimized. Typically this involves the removal of silt from perimeter and cross channels to keep them clear of vegetation and improve water flow.

This summer however the earthmoving in Gei wai #6 includes additional work to restore former areas of open water at the seaward end of the pond. Those areas had become heavily overgrown with reed and climbers due to the gradual accumulation of silt when water enters the gei wai during water exchange. The primary purpose of the restoration work is to reinstate open water; the preferred roosting habitat for many species of waterbird including the Black-faced Spoonbill.

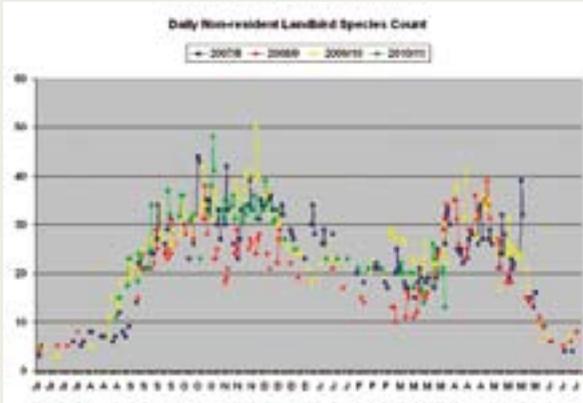
As reported in the summer bulletin, the neighbouring gei wai (#7) is undergoing extensive works to restore similar habitat for Spoonbill. Collectively these 2 projects aim to restore around 3 hectares of open water.

The works will be complete before the very end of October, just in time for the return of wintering waterbirds and of course the Spoonbills.



This article deals with autumn, the second season of the year when Po Toi comes alive. To start with, a chart showing the number of non-resident land bird species I have seen each day on Po Toi over the period 2007 to 2011 but this time the year is charted from July through to June the following year to give a better perspective of the flow from summer through autumn and into winter (Fig 1)

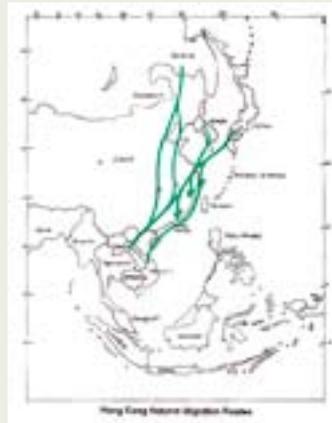
Figure 1. Daily Non-resident Land Bird Species Count – Po Toi, 2007-2011



Autumn is a much longer migration season than spring as can be seen from Fig 1, lasting 15 weeks from the last week in August through to the end of the first week in December. Birds are in less of a hurry to return to their winter quarters than they are when going to their breeding grounds which makes for more leisurely bird-watching. Autumn also has two distinct halves, the first from the last week in August to the end of October for species travelling right through to peninsular SE Asia and the second from the end of October into December for species which winter in south China (although often not on Po Toi). There is an overlap for the last two weeks in October when species of both types can be seen, making this the time when the greatest number of species can be seen in autumn.

Migration in autumn is very different to spring for many reasons, the main one being that birds are flying over land from the north east, heading towards wintering grounds in peninsular SE Asia or south China (figure 2)

Figure 2. Autumn Land Bird Migration Routes



In spring they are mostly flying over the South China Sea having wintered in the Philippines. Different wintering grounds means different species are seen in each season – e.g. SE Asia wintering species such as Radde's Warbler and Yellow-rumped Flycatcher are seen in

autumn and not in spring whereas Philippine wintering species such as Grey-faced Buzzard and Narcissus Flycatcher are seen in spring and not in autumn.

Flying over land means the birds are less affected by weather since they can simply land if the weather is not helpful, not an option they have when they are flying over the sea in spring. The only weather system which results in more migrants in Hong Kong in autumn is strong northerly winds which blow them further south than they intend and so into Hong Kong. This particularly affects the less-experienced first-winter birds which make up the majority of the migrant numbers on Po Toi in autumn.

Major north wind events have occurred every year since I started going to Po Toi, but I particularly remember those on 12th September 2006, unusually early for strong north winds, which resulted in an unprecedented fall of Tiger Shrikes around Hong Kong including one on Po Toi. Also, a strong north wind on 19th November 2009 produced two Hong Kong firsts, -Common House Martin at Lok Ma Chau and Red-throated Thrush (number 500 on the Hong Kong List) photographed on Po Toi by Eling Lee.

If you look closely at Fig 1, you can see that the daily number of species in autumn 2008/9 (red dots) fell below the normal level from the end of October right through the winter and did not return to normal levels until the first spring migrants started to arrive in the middle of March. I puzzled over the reason for this for a long time since there was nothing unusual about the



Radde's Warbler - 25th November 2009.
Another typical autumn only species for the same reason as the Yellow-rumped Flycatcher.



Sooty, Aleutian and Common Terns, - 13th September 2006





Red-throated Thrush, first-winter female – 19th November 2009 - photo by Eling Lee



Black Stork – 21st November 2008



Purple Cochoa, female – 11th October 2007 – photo by Y L Tam



Japanese Yellow Bunting with ring – 27th November 2007 – photo by Owen Chiang



Yellow-throated Bunting – 11th November 2009

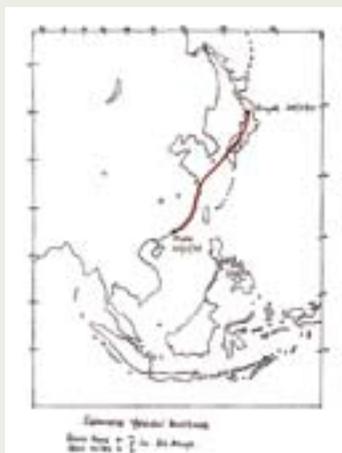
weather in autumn 2008. Although all the usual species were present, their numbers were lower than normal and consequently I didn't see them as regularly as other years. Eventually I found the answer. February 2008 was the coldest for 40 years. This had a serious effect on the birds wintering on Po Toi, killing many of them. I guess it had the same effect throughout our part of south China which meant that in winter 2008/9, birds wintering in south China were low in numbers. This would affect species numbers on Po Toi from end October onwards, exactly what the chart shows. Numbers had recovered by autumn 2009 after two breeding seasons, showing the resilience and fast recovery small birds have to a severe winter. But two severe winters in succession would have a much longer and more serious effect.

Early morning visible migration of land birds is one of the delights of autumn and effectively replaces seabird watching as an early morning activity for me in October and early November on the South Peninsula of Po Toi. On calm days with light winds, birds pass over going south west. Pipits, wagtails and drongos form the bulk of the species plus the occasional raptor and sometimes a rarity such as a Black Stork. Great Egret flocks numbering several hundred can be seen flying high out to sea heading south east – destination the Philippines? Large flocks of migrant Chinese Bulbuls start appearing from late October with flocks of Japanese White-eye from early November, both from populations which must breed further north.

Migrants can be seen passing over anywhere on Po Toi in autumn, not just the South Peninsula. I take all my meals on Po Toi out-of-doors and, having breakfast while it was still dark on 25th November 2009, I could hear thrushes passing over. As it became lighter I could see they were Japanese Thrush and Blackbirds and in 30 minutes of early light I counted a Hong Kong record number of 56 Japanese Thrush although there must have been many more earlier when it was still dark. That day gave me my highest ever daily species count of 50 species (see Fig 1), none of them particularly rare.

Rare or interesting species are always turning up in autumn. Even escaped birds can be exciting, as the Purple Cochoa on 11th October 2007 proved. Also memorable was the November 2007 invasion of Japanese Yellow Buntings with up to four birds on the island through most of November. These were the first Japanese Yellow Buntings ever in autumn in Hong Kong, but most amazing was that one of them was ringed. Owen Chiang took a high quality photograph of the bird on 27th November and the ring number could be read, enabling it to be traced back to being ringed as a juvenile bird in north Honshu, Japan, on 24th October, a total distance of 3000 kms in 34 days. Its migration route was probably as given in Fig 3.

Figure 3. Japanese Yellow Bunting – probable migration route



The Yellow-throated Bunting invasion of November 2009 was a similar exciting event. Only a few isolated Yellow-throated Bunting records existed before these birds arrived, and they were always under suspicion as escapes. However, the arrival of at least eight birds on Po Toi and others on Lamma Island and Tai Po Kau Headland in mid-November 2009 showed that the species could reach Hong Kong naturally given the right weather conditions. The return passage of this species through Po Toi in early April 2010 confirmed that the birds were of natural occurrence.

Unlike spring, seabirds in autumn are scarce and confined to a few species in early September – mostly Aleutian Terns and Red-necked Phalaropes. Although autumn typhoons can bring unusual seabirds into Hong Kong waters, I have never managed to be on Po Toi for a typhoon in autumn – probably a good thing considering the damage some have caused. But I was there as Tropical Storm Lion Rock passed through the Taiwan Straits in early September 2010 which created a movement of Aleutian Terns through Hong Kong waters. 430, or 2% of their total world population, passed Po Toi in one hour in the early morning of 9th September.

Aleutian Terns are a mystery species. Apart from their breeding grounds in Kamchatka and Alaska, they are only known for their spring and autumn passage through Hong Kong and their wintering grounds remain unknown. Last year geolocators were been fitted to 100 Aleutian Terns on their breeding grounds to find out where they winter. These devices can track a bird's daily movements over a year or more and by the time this article is published, their wintering grounds may be known. My guess is, somewhere to the east of Vietnam in the South China Sea.

Which brings me full circle back to Po Toi Winter. This is the last of my four articles on the Seasons of Po Toi. At some time, I'll have to start my own personal withdrawal from Po Toi. It may not be next year, but whether it's then or some future year, I will never forget the everyday thrill of expectancy and the pure isolation of birding on such a superb migration island.



Koel

~ Samson So



In spring and summer, the Koel's call can be heard everywhere, be it the city or the countryside. "Ko~~el Ko~~el" ! A melancholy but impressive calling that can go on all night.



The Koel is not an attractive-looking bird. The male is all black, the female brown with white spots; both sexes have yellowish-green bills, and bright red eyes. They lack the glint of the kingfishers, they do not grow graceful, elegant breeding plumage like the egrets, and they can't sing like the hwamei. Furthermore, the Koel is an elusive bird which is more often heard than seen. It is not surprising that the Koel draws attention but is rarely a favourite species amongst birders. In fact, there's one more aspect that contributes to their unpopularity: brood parasitism.

Koels belong to the cuckoo family. Many species in this family adopt a special breeding method: to lay eggs in the nests of other birds. The female would select suitable hosts and lays eggs in their nests, the eggs will be incubated by the host birds, and when hatched, fed by them. The cuckoo nestlings grow rapidly. When they become strong enough, they will eliminate the other nestlings by pushing them out from the nest and gain total dedication from the host parents. Birds that adopt a breeding strategy involving the use of other birds' efforts to raise their own young are known as "brood parasites".

This breeding strategy is often labelled as lazy, opportunistic, or cruel, and seen by many birders in a negative light. The Koel's other traits go unnoticed, such as the male's perseverance and stamina demonstrated by its' night-long mating call, the intelligence and skill of the female in selecting hosts, and the determination and fighting spirit of the young.

I have known from field observation some of the hosts that Koels use; they include Black-collared Starling, Crested Myna, Blue Magpie and Common Magpie. Cuckoo in ancient Chinese is known as "shih jiu" (Turtle Dove). In a Chinese proverb, "Occupation of the magpie's nest by jiu", the jiu refers to a cuckoo and not a dove. Chinese people had long observed the special behavior of birds in the cuckoo family, with migration noted thus in the Royal Regulations of the Warring States Period: "When cuckoos become eagles, it's autumn". In the past, the concept of migration did not exist; people thought cuckoos and eagles transformed from one another in different seasons. The ignorance of the ancient people may make us laugh, but we should also bear in mind that knowledge expands through accumulation, and the same applies to concepts of ecology.

When autumn comes, the young Koels have already gained independence. After the feeding and protection from their foster parents, these fully fledged young ones also lack training and guidance from their biological parents. From learning to fly, to looking for food, to mating and breeding, everything has to be worked out by the young Koels by themselves. It is not known how many Koel nestlings leave the nests successfully or how many of them grow up and breed in the next year. In nature, survival and reproduction is never an easy task.



Parasitism is one way of maintaining natural balance. There are no good or bad animals, no justice or injustice, nothing moral or immoral, only the survival of the fittest. Whether it is the Koel or other brood-parasites, the success of this breeding strategy lies in the survival of the hosts. Parasites cannot wipe out the populations of their hosts. Brood-parasitism is a unique breeding method that exemplifies the adaptation of living things, and demonstrates a highly advanced evolutionary process. Throughout the entire breeding process, from courtship to mating, looking for hosts to raising chicks, Koels cannot afford any miscalculation in any of the links. A wrong host, or untimely egg-laying will mean the whole reproduction process will be in vain, and the chance for passing on their genes will be lost. If we look at it from a different perspective, we may even marvel at the brilliance of the breeding strategy adopted by Koels and other brood-parasitic birds.

Wisdom is shown by determination and courage in searching for truth, knowledge is the result of accumulation of observations and records. In recent years, Black-collared Starlings have become increasingly common in urban areas of Hong Kong, probably because there are more parks and green areas than before. A higher number of potential hosts means more opportunities for brood-parasites, and the Koel population also seems to have increased compared with 20 years ago. This kind of delicate relationship in



bird ecology is a subject worthy of systematic and long term observation by researchers in ornithology.





綠翅金鳩
陳巨輝
丹竹坑村

Emerald Dove
Sam Chan
Tan Chuk Hang

21/03/2011
DSLR Camera, 600mm f/4 lens +
1.4x teleconverter



灰斑鳩
陳澤榮
尖鼻咀

Eurasian Collared Dove
C W CHAN
Tsim Bei Tsui

18/10/2010
Digiscoping



棕頭鴉雀
余柏維
大帽山

Vinous-throated Parrotbill
Yue Pak Wai
Tai Mo Shan

27/05/2011
DSLR Camera, 500mm f/4 lens

大草鶯
鄭諾銘
大帽山

Chinese Grassbird
Cheng Nok Ming
Tai Mo Shan

07/08/2011
DSLR Camera, 300mm lens +
1.4x teleconverter



小鴉鵂
葉紀江
大帽山

Lesser Coucal
Herman Ip Kee Kong
Tai Mo Shan

03/06/2011
DSLR Camera, 300mm f/2.8 lens+ 2x teleconverter



矛紋草鵂
葉紀江
大帽山

Chinese Babax
Herman Ip Kee Kong
Tai Mo Shan

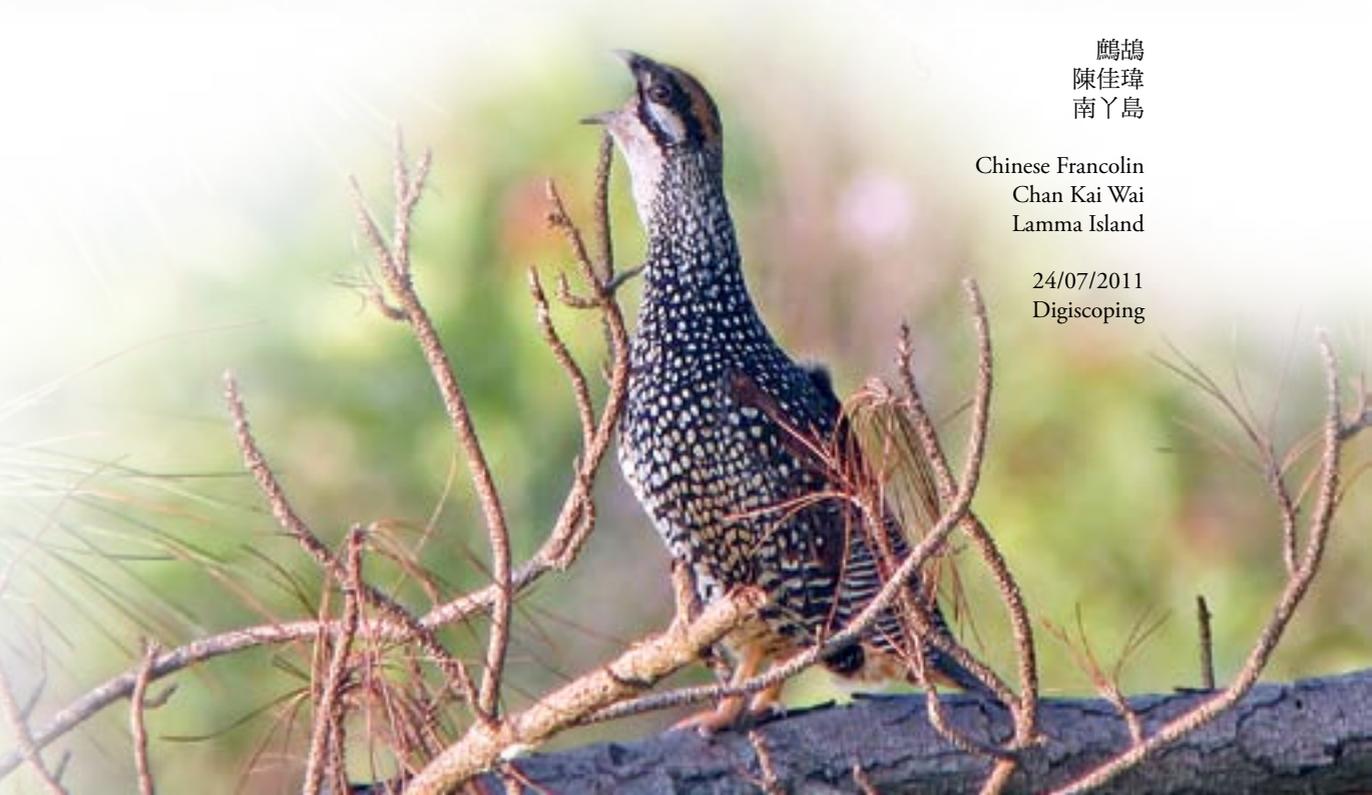
01/08/2011
DSLR Camera, 300mm f/2.8 lens+
1.4x teleconverter

A Chinese Francolin bird is perched on a large, light-colored rock. The bird has a distinctive pattern of black and white spots on its body, with a reddish-brown patch on its back and a black and white striped head. The background is a soft-focus green landscape.

鷓鴣
何建業
大帽山

Chinese Francolin
Kinni Ho Kin Yip
Tai Mo Shan

25/06/2011
DSLR Camera, 600mm f/4 lens +
1.4x teleconverter

A Chinese Francolin bird is perched on a dark, textured branch. The bird's body is covered in a dense pattern of black and white spots, and it has a black and white striped head. The background is a soft-focus green landscape.

鷓鴣
陳佳瑋
南丫島

Chinese Francolin
Chan Kai Wai
Lamma Island

24/07/2011
Digiscoping

MY BLACK-EARED KITE STORY (2)

~ Peter Chan

On a fine afternoon two years ago, my family members told me they had found a pair of Black-eared Kites nearby. The kites were picking up tree branches for nest-building. The nest, however, was built just about 20 meters from the ground, in an area bustling with people during holidays. It was absolutely astonishing to see the pair chose such a place for nesting. After I joined the HKBWS Kite Research Group, I was determined to become a paparazzi for this pair of Black-eared Kites.

One of the pair swooped low just above my head soon after I first saw them. It was only the second time I had felt threatened by a low-flying kite since my numerous bird counts for the Kite Research Group began at the Peak. I named the female kite "Tai Ma" whilst the male one became "Siu Ying"



"Tai Ma"



"Siu Ying"

How did I distinguish between Tai Ma and Siu Ying? Female Tai Ma resembled male Siu Ying but was a bit larger. She had shiny plumage which made her black ears more outstanding. Siu Ying's feathers were rather dark and his forked-tail was more distinctive. In the past two years, they had successfully bred three chicks and I thought that they would continue to breed this year.

At the end of January 2011, I returned to the nest area with my photo gear and looked for the pair with my binoculars. Soon after I arrived, I found Siu Ying calling from rooftop # 3. He was calling Tai Ma to return. He seemed to be announcing "It's time for breeding!"

4 February. Tai Ma had indeed returned. She perched on rooftop # 4 and her feathers at the back were a bit messy. Probably they had mated before I arrived. Although I missed their precious moment, I was delighted to see they were going to breed again this year. They were beginning one month earlier than in previous years.

Tai Ma's feather was a bit messy



5 February. I returned even earlier than the previous day. Tai Ma was moving nesting material around; - the branches, towels and tissues - so as to make the nest more comfortable for incubation. Later, Tai Ma flew to rooftop #2 for resting and made a soft chirping call. Upon hearing the calls of Tai Ma, Siu Ying quickly responded by a loud rapid chirping call and landed on the top of Tai Ma for mating. It was just a brief encounter. The total mating time took about 15 seconds only. During mating, Siu Ying's claws were sticking together so as not to injure Tai Ma underneath.

Siu Ying was calling during mating



Tai Ma was managing the nesting materials

9 February. Tai Ma spent most of her time in the nest. Eggs had been laid as indicated by her motions of standing up, turning around, sitting down and shaking body frequently. At the same time, Siu Ying was guarding at rooftop # 1. Whenever other kites were flying close, Siu Ying would then make a loud call against them. It was a warning to the passers-by "Don't

get close to my territory!" Suddenly Tai Ma flew to rooftop # 2 after a long day on the nest. They mated again hoping to have more eggs.



Tai Ma was incubating in the nest

17 February. It was foggy and visibility was low. Tai Ma spent the whole day incubating inside the nest. Although the visibility was very low, Siu Ying was still performing his usual guardianship every ten minutes or so around his territory. The pair mated once during the day.

27 February. A white towel appeared on the side of the nest. Was it stolen by them from rooftop # 2 as nesting material? The inclusion of towels and foam boards as their nesting materials not only makes the incubation more comfortable but also serves as a warning signal to invaders to stay away from their territory. Moreover, foam board helps to preserve heat for the eggs. Tai Ma still spent most of her time in the nest to incubate whilst Siu Ying was a bit busy as many other Black-eared Kites flew low to get a glimpse of the chicks. Siu Ying called continually as a warning to deter other kites from getting close to the nest. Any uncooperative intruders were driven off by Siu Ying.



Tai Ma was soaring above Siu Ying

13 March. My first observation for almost two weeks. Good news: As she sat on the nest, two chicks emerged beneath Tai Ma's breast. By the feather condition, I guessed these chicks had been hatched between 9th and 11th of March. The one with fewer feathers I named "Siu Hak" and the larger one "Siu Yuen". I was very eager for another chick as their names could be made up to "Hak" "Yee" "Yuen" (the Chinese pronunciation of Black-eared Kite). Unfortunately there were only two chicks this time. The adults were now fully occupied with the supply of food to the chicks. Siu Ying worked very hard to search for food in his territory and Tai Ma offered help in case her partner needed it. Just outside the territory of Tai Ma & Siu Ying, there was another pair of Black-eared Kites breeding. They flew to rooftop#4 to loaf together whereas Tai Ma & Siu Ying perched at rooftop # 3 for resting.



Birth of the chicks

27 March. I was exhausted. I missed the precious moments of feeding chicks as I needed to lead tours to Mai Po on 6th and 20th. Siu Hak & Siu Yuen were much bigger than 13 days ago. Their snow-white hair and feathers made them look very cute. However, their feet were still very weak. They just squatted inside the nest for the whole day. Tai Ma & Siu Ying were either resting on rooftop # 6 or on the tree.



Tai Ma & Siu Ying



Another pair of Black-eared Kites



Very cute chick "Siu Yuen"

3 April. Siu Hak & Siu Yuen were almost a month old. Their feathers were still brownish-white but their size had almost double compared with a week earlier. It seemed that Tai Ma & Siu Ying decided to use rooftop # 1 as the platform to exchange food items. Usually Siu Ying searched for food and put it on rooftop # 1 then Tai Ma was responsible for taking the foods to the nest for feeding. However, if Tai Ma couldn't find any food on rooftop # 1, she would find food herself. In case Siu Ying couldn't find Tai Ma around, he brought the food directly back to the nest.

9 April. Siu Hak & Siu Yuen had been in the nest for a month. Their feathers turned brownish suddenly and all the whitish feathers disappeared. They looked like they were wearing a new uniform. The chicks were growing fast and their food consumption was more demanding. The parents were busy finding food. Siu Hak started flapping its wings and ready to build its muscle whilst Siu Ying was enjoying a delicious frog from Tai Ma.



Tai Ma fed Siu Hak



The chick has beautiful feathers



Tai Ma guarded against the nest

16 April. I went to the nesting site early in the morning while the chicks were still asleep but I could see that they were almost fully fledged. The chicks got up to enjoy their breakfast only when Siu Ying returned with delicious food. Siu Hak was doing stretching exercises in the nest whilst poor Siu Yuen had nowhere to escape. I sensed that Siu Hak was a female and Siu Yuen was a male. Siu Hak was tiny but cute and had a pair of big eyes. Siu Yuen loved to peck Siu Hak.



Siu Hak was flipping the wings



Siu Yuen pecked at Siu Hak



Chicks were curious about the outside world

24 April. It was getting hot. Most of the daily activities of the chicks were performed inside the nest. They had nothing to do except sleep, eat, play with paper cartons or flap their wings. They stretched out their wings in order to cool down their bodies. It seemed that not much food was found by their parents as it took longer intervals for them to return.

1 May. The chicks were almost two months old & their feathers were almost fully fledged. They were almost the size of their parents. They were curious about the outside world and it seemed that they wanted to leave. A White-bellied Sea Eagle appeared abruptly just above the nest. Siu Ying called rapidly to warn against the eagle while Tai Ma chased it away in order to protect her chicks. I watched this fierce battle through my camera and it seemed that no one would give way. They showed off their claws as their weapons. The WBSE was like a fighter plane attacking his enemies and Siu Ying also joined this battle. It was lucky that the eagle finally retreated as the two kites jointly and successfully threatened him (the White-bellied Sea Eagle was later chased away by another 11 Black-eared Kites).



An almost fully fledged Siu Yuen

5 May. I foresaw that the chicks would be leaving soon so I went there to check. Surprisingly both chicks were not inside the nest. I was so worried that they had fallen down from the tree during their first flights. Subsequently I heard some calls begging for food and I found Siu Hak 30 meters away from the nest. Siu Yuen had jumped to the top of the tree and was waiting for his first flight.



A fight between Tai Ma & White-bellied Sea Eagle

6 May. I felt so happy as both chicks were soaring in the sky and they looked so great. They flew out from the left side of the nest and went inside the forest. Then they made two circuits and disappeared. It seemed that I was playing a game



Siu Yuen perched on the top of the tree

of “hide-and-see” with them. The parents were still finding food for them, too. They put the food in the nest so that the chicks could consume it whenever they wanted. Siu Yuen flew back to the nest for food but I couldn't locate Siu Hak. While Siu Yuen was taking a piece of meat like a hungry ghost, Siu Hak suddenly emerged from the nest. What an amazing “hide-and-see” game!



Siu Yuen already inside the nest

Siu Hak emerged from the nest

8 May. The chicks were two days short of two months old. It was Mother's Day. A Dragon Boat race was held near their territory causing them to rest for the whole day. Chicks were sleeping inside the nest while Tai Ma was taking a rest in Rooftop # 3 & 1. Siu Ying was the one who guarded against any predators by soaring above the nest. Some people threw food (presumably sticky rice dumplings) into the sea during the boat race which attracted many Black-eared Kites to go for them. Siu Ying did not miss this chance and took some dumplings back to the nest.

11 May. Siu Hak & Siu Yuen started looking for food themselves and strayed a bit far from their nest. They did not return until late evening.

26 May. The parental duties of Tai Ma & Siu Ying had almost come to an end. Siu Hak & Siu Yuen seldom returned to the nest. It was getting more difficult for me to see them returning to their territory. Probably they went to somewhere far away to start their new lives.

Nature is so wonderful. I have been so lucky to see the pair's mating, incubating and rearing chicks in the past 3 years. Although Siu Hak & Siu Yuen have already gone, their images always vividly appear in my mind. Where are the chicks now? Will Tai Ma & Siu Ying return and mate again next year? Who knows.

Footage:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gSOKm1me70&hd=1>



Siu Hak in flight



Siu Yuen in flight



“Hong Kong Nature Walks – The New Territories”



Author: David Diskin

**267pp,
Size: A5,
many photos by
the author**

In the mid-1990s David Diskin produced a well-received guide to birdwatching sites around Hong Kong. Now he has turned his attention to describing 21 readily-accessible walks with directions to various aspects of the wildlife to be seen. Not just birds, but flowers, butterflies and dragonflies as well.

The emphasis – as stated in the book – is on nature rather than the walk itself. The main purpose of the book is “to enable readers to put a name to the animals and plants they come across...”

This A5-sized book is designed to be carried in the pocket or rucksack, and each site is covered on an average of twelve-or-so illustrated pages.

Each account is divided into sections, beginning with an overview which sets out the main reason the walk has been selected, and a sketch map to clearly show the recommended route to be taken.

The main body of the text describes the path to be followed, and which species are to be looked out for on the way, with good use of photos by the author himself. Many of the walks are sites familiar to birders, such as Long Valley (Walk no.2), Tai Po Kau (3) and Airfield Road (7).

Each section is rounded off with practical details that include opening hours (for sites like KFBG and HK Wetland park), bus routes and whether the site is accessible by car. The distance, duration and degree of difficulty of the walking routes are all compared and graded on a scale of 1 to 3. Advice on which season to go is included. The photos of common butterflies and plants will be useful everywhere in Hong Kong, not just on the walks selected.

Does the book succeed in its aim of enabling the reader to name what he sees along these selected walks? The answer is a resounding “Yes”! The briefest of glances will tell you the names of the common butterflies and dragonflies you’ve been noticing while birding and not been able to put a name to. The same applies to flowers and plants. The depth of the authors’ background knowledge and research is really impressive. The book concludes with a Further Information section which directs you to further reading (pp.248 – 251), an extensive bibliography and a carefully-compiled index of plant and animal names (pp.255 – 267) mentioned in the book.

Unfortunately, there is no Chinese-language version available. But despite this, whether you have just arrived in Hong Kong or been here for years there is much to be discovered. There’s no excuse any more to mope around and say “I don’t know where to go!”

The book is available directly through David Diskin’s website www.accipiterpress.com as well as through most major bookshops in HK, including Dymocks. Further info is also available about the book (& HK nature in general) through David’s other website www.hknaturewalks.com

(Review by John Holmes)

When is the best time to see a rare bird in Hong Kong?

~ Geoff Welch



Eurasian Roller, Black Point, Tuen Mun, 5th October 2010 – photo by Peter and Michelle Wong

When I first asked myself this question, I rather confidently expected the answer to be spring and autumn with May and October probably the best months. As a records geek, I thought I would check out the answer by looking at the records in past years. I already had lists of unusual records going back to 1999 (the year after the records considered in “The Avifauna of Hong Kong” concluded), so I checked against these.

The answer to the question turned out to be something rather different to what I had expected.

To start with, I looked at the recorded month for all Hong Kong First Records in the period 1999 to 2010. There are 49 First Records in that period, but the peak month was November with 9, then October and December with 8 each followed by May with 7. Not so far from my prediction but I was surprised at the concentration in the last quarter of the year – over 50% of all First Records in the three months October to December (25 out of 49) and a very high count in December.

I decided to extend the count to all First to Fifth Hong Kong Records over the same period 1999 to 2010 and to separate Sea Birds from Land Birds. The results can be seen from these graphs

For seabirds, the best months are January to May, fairly equally divided for First to Fifth Records although May scores best for First Records.

For land birds, October to December are by far the best months with over 50% of both First and First to Fifth Records. Both January and February as well as September score better on First to Fifth Records than any of the spring months March to May for land birds.

For seabirds, this is not a surprising result as late winter and spring are the main months for seabird migration through Hong Kong. But the land bird result may be a little surprising until looked at in more depth.

The depth is to consider the type of birds being seen as First to Fifth Records in Hong Kong. Most of the records concern migrant first-winter or juvenile birds, which means they are on their first migration. With only their instincts and genes to guide them, they more easily get lost than the experienced birds and so end up in Hong Kong when they should really be somewhere else. They are either birds which normally winter in north and central China which have come too far south or birds which normally winter well to the west of Hong Kong, in western SE Asia, India or Pakistan which have come too far east.

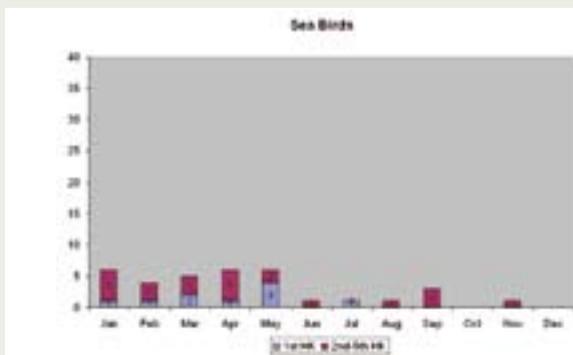


Fig 1. 1st to 5th HK Records for Sea Birds by Month

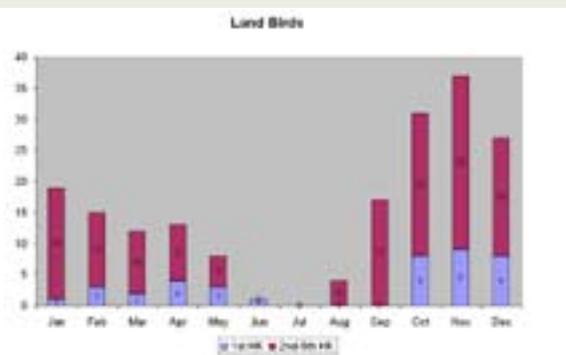


Fig 2. 1st to 5th HK Records for Land Birds by Month

Lesser White-fronted Geese, Lok Ma Chau, 11th November 2006 – photo by Peter and Michelle Wong



Recent examples of each type are the two juvenile Lesser White-fronted Geese which arrived at Lok Ma Chau on 6th November 2006 and stayed for most of the winter, when their normal wintering grounds are central China, and the juvenile Eurasian Roller in the Tuen Mun area on 5th October 2010 which probably should have been in northern India.



My Bird Watching Diary

~ Text and Illustrations: Wendy Yu

14th May 2011

The Osprey is well-equipped to kill dramatically. With sharp eyes and long claws it strikes fast and decisively when catching fish. It is easy to spot the Osprey while birding in Mai Po. Ospreys sit atop poles in the Deep Bay mud, where they may often be seen tearing their prey apart. This time I decided to leave out this aspect of their behaviour and instead portrayed this individual sunbathing.



~ Richard Lewthwaite

These are unchecked records and members are reminded of the importance of submitting all records to the Records Committee on cards or electronically.

April

- ▶ As drought conditions prevailed over the South China coast, this was an exceptionally dry April, leading to the stream at Tai Po Kau, for example, almost completely drying out by mid-month. The feeling amongst experienced birdwatchers was that it was the poorest April for birds in many years. That said, there was one potential first record, an **Ashy Woodswallow** below Lower Shing Mun on 23rd (JL), and three rarities showed themselves: the drake **Green-winged Teal** (reappearing after 6 weeks) at Pond 20 at Mai Po on 4th-8th (JGH), a **Black Redstart** at Po Toi on 5th-13th (GW), only the 2nd Hong Kong record, and a male "**Ryukyu Flycatcher**" (F. n. owstoni) at Airfield Road on 10th-12th (YYT), a 4th or 5th record. In addition, no fewer than 466 **Chestnut Bulbuls**, a record count for Hong Kong and indeed for China, flew over Tai Po Kau Headland on 7th (RB) and shorebird passage at Mai Po was very good throughout the month (YYT). Sightings of **Spoon-billed Sandpiper**, now placed in the highest threat category (Critically Endangered), were as follows: one on 4th (JGH), two on 5th (YYT, RWL, JGH), one on 6th (MH) two on 12th (YYT, RWL) and one on 21st, all at Mai Po NR or in front of the Mai Po boardwalk.
- ▶ Passage was fairly diverse in the first week of the month. A **Baillon's Crake** was found at Lam Tsuen on 2nd (DT), the earliest spring date by 16 days, and the over-wintering **Eastern Water Rail** and a **Citrine Wagtail** were at Long Valley on 3rd-4th (SMP). On 5th, flocks of 20 or more **Ashy Minivets** flew over at Mai Po and Lamma (JAA, GS) and single **Narcissus** and **Blue-and-white Flycatchers** were at Po Toi. On 6th, a **Brown Bush Warbler** and an unusually early **Grey-streaked Flycatcher** turned up at Po Toi (GW), the bush warbler being the first ever spring record. Single **Japanese Yellow Buntings** were at Po Toi and Long Valley the same day (GW, HKBWS) and a **Brown Wood Owl** was calling that evening at Tai Po Kau (RB). The next day, 165 **Black Bulbuls**, probably a record spring count, were at Tai Po Kau Headland (RB). Sightings in the Mai Po area in this period included a **Grey-tailed Tattler** on 2nd (JAA), equalling the earliest spring date, included 35 **Nordmann's Greenshanks** and a **Black-legged Kittiwake** (resting at Pond 21) on 5th (YYT, MT) and five **Long-billed Dowitchers**, possibly a record number, and a first-summer **Relict Gull** on 8th (WAP).
- ▶ In a very quiet second week of the month, there were reports of up to 25 **Ashy Minivets** at Tai Po Kau Headland on 9th-10th (RB), two **Bramblings** and a **Yellow-browed Bunting** at Po Toi on 11th (PJL), two **Grey-faced Buzzards** at Mai Po village and a singing **Chinese Grosbeak** at Cheung Chau the same day (MDW), a late **Asian Stubtail** at Airfield Road on 12th (DAD), an early **Black Bittern** at Po Toi on 12th (GW), the first **Chinese Goshawk** of the spring at Po Toi on 14th (GW) and a **Narcissus Flycatcher** at Lau Fau Shan on 15th (BK).
- ▶ Reports from Mai Po in the same week included a **Little Stint** and the first **Asian Dowitcher** of the spring on 11th (YYT) and a **Swinhoe's Egret**, 38 **Nordmann's Greenshanks**, the **Relict Gull** again, 96 **Caspian Terns** and 247 **Gull-billed Terns**, all on 12th (YYT, RWL).
- ▶ Passage picked up in the third week of the month. Visits to Po Toi, especially on 16th-20th and 22nd-23rd, brought reports of up to three **Swinhoe's Minivets** and seven flycatcher species: **Grey-streaked** (peak count of 10 on 23rd, PW, MK), **Asian Brown**, **Ferruginous**, **Narcissus**, **Red-breasted** (19th-21st), **Blue-and-white** and **Hainan Blue** (PW, MK, MDW, GW). Elsewhere, the long-staying **Eastern Water Rail** was still present at Long Valley on 17th (BK) and there were sightings of two **Brown Hawk Owls** at Lai Chi Kok Park on 21st-22nd (PW, MK) and seven **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters** at Long Valley on 23rd (TW).
- ▶ Reports in the last week of the month included a **Chinese Goshawk** at Lower Shing Mun (one of very few noted during the spring) and 10 **Oriental Pratincoles** on the edge of the Shuen Wan Golf Driving Range on 25th (RWL), a **Ferruginous Flycatcher** at Po Toi on 26th (GW), two **Black Bazas** (now very rare) and a **Citrine Wagtail** at Long Valley the same day (KJ), a **Swinhoe's Minivet** at Po Toi on 27th, a **Brown Hawk Owl** and an **Oriental Dollarbird** at Po Toi on 28th (GW) and 400 **Terek Sandpipers**, one of the highest counts on record, at Mai Po on 30th (JAA). In addition, two species were reported on latest ever spring dates: a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** at Mai Po on 25th (BS), the latest by 3 days, and a **Tristram's Bunting** at Po Toi on 28th (GW), the latest by 8 days. A **Mugimaki Flycatcher** and a **Japanese Paradise Flycatcher** at Po Toi on 30th (Yau, BK) were also unusually late. The Shuen Wan Golf Driving Range (the former Shuen Wan landfill) held 71 **Collared Crows** on 29th (RWL).
- ▶ Passage of seabirds was very light throughout the month, with no shearwaters reported. The only rarity was a **Great Frigatebird** at Po Toi on 22nd (PW, MK). Other sightings at sea, mainly near Po Toi, included an early **Greater Crested Tern** and a **Bridled Tern** on 6th, the latter the earliest in spring by 6 days, an **Ancient Murrelet** and **Arctic Skua** on 7th, 30 **Red-necked Phalaropes** on 9th, the peak count in the first half of a very poor month, up to three **Arctic Skuas** on 14th-16th, 13 **Greater Crested Terns** on 20th, an **Aleutian** and three early **Roseate Terns** on 21st, and 200 **Red-necked Phalaropes** on 22nd and 12 **Oriental Pratincoles** (rarely seen at sea) on 23rd (GW, PW, MK).

May

- ▶ As the drought continued, this was another mainly dry and disappointing month. Po Toi, which was again the place to be, hosted the rarest bird - a summer-plumaged **Rosy Pipit** on 10th (GW), only the second for Hong Kong. The star bird for many people, though, was an adult **Brown Wood Owl** which showed itself at Tai Po Kau on 11th-14th (BK, SMP).
- ▶ Although passage was generally much lighter than usual, the month produced latest ever spring dates for nine species, all at Po Toi (GW) except as otherwise indicated: **Forest Wagtail** on 3rd (the latest spring date by 2 days), **Grey-faced Buzzard** at the Soko Islands on 5th (the latest by 4 days, YYT), **Black-winged Cuckooshrike** and **Eyebrowed Thrush** on 8th (the latest by 1 day, both species, PW, MK), **Eurasian Siskin** on 16th (2 individuals, the latest by 45 days), **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** on 18th (the latest by 1 day), **Ashy Drongo** on 3rd and 18th (the latest by 21 days on the latter date), **Japanese Paradise Flycatcher** on 19th (the latest by 13 days) and **Brown Hawk Owl (Northern Boobok)** on 25th (the latest by 4 days).
- ▶ Among other sightings at Po Toi in the first two weeks of the month (mainly GW) were a **Von Schrenck's Bittern** on 2nd-3rd, a **Lanceolated Warbler** and late **Mugimaki Flycatcher** on 3rd, a **Black-naped Oriole** on 4th, a **Fairy Pitta** and 29 **Brown Shrikes** on 5th and a **Short-tailed Shearwater** on 11th, the first shearwater of a very poor spring. A trip to the Soko Islands on 5th turned up three **Chinese Goshawks** and a **Hainan Blue Flycatcher** (YYT). Sightings at Long Valley included five **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters** on 1st (JL), a **Narcissus Flycatcher** equalling the latest spring date on 2nd (MKF), a **Eurasian Hobby** (now rare) on 4th (KJ) and three **Oriental Dollarbirds** on 11th (DT), another spring migrant which was much rarer than usual. Notable nightbirds on 2nd were two **Slaty-legged Crakes** and a **Brown Wood Owl** at Tai Po Kau (BK) and single **Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoos** at Lam Tsuen, and Tai Po Kau (DT, BK). A **Bay Woodpecker** was heard at Tai Po Kau Headland on 7th (KB, RB).
- ▶ Following the arrival of a weather front, an influx was noted at Po Toi during 15th-19th (mainly GW) including the late **Eurasian Siskins**, **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler**, **Ashy Drongo** and **Japanese Paradise Flycatcher** mentioned above and also up to 62 **Brown Shrikes** (on 18th), single **Brown Hawk Owls** on 16th and 18th, a **Lesser Frigatebird** on 17th and 19th, five **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters** and a **Silky Starling** on 18th and a **Swinhoe's Egret** on 19th. Elsewhere, there were reports of a late **Saunders's Gull** at Mai Po on 15th (WWF), 42 **Aleutian Terns**, 80 **Bridled Terns** and 10 **Pechora Pipits** in eastern waters on the same day (PJJ), a **Swinhoe's Egret** at Tsing Yi (FC) on 18th, a **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** at Mai Po (WWF) also on 18th and juvenile **Oriental Pratincoles** (not thought to be locally bred) at Mai Po on 23rd.
- ▶ At Lam Tsuen, a **Brown Wood Owl** was calling on 18th (DT) and an **Asian Lesser Cuckoo** on 22nd (EMSK). The latter is now reported almost annually in song in May, usually at night.
- ▶ In the last week of the month, a period of heavy rain brought a minor influx to Po Toi on 24th-25th (GW) including a **Swinhoe's Egret**, a **Von Schrenck's Bittern**, up to nine **Yellow Bitterns**, an **Oriental Cuckoo**, a **Brown Hawk Owl** and two rather late **Grey-streaked Flycatchers**. A **Black Bittern** at Mai Po on 25th (JAA) and single **Von Schrenck's Bittern** at Tsing Yi on 25th (FC) and Kam Tin on 28th (JAA) were also reported.
- ▶ Reports from Mai Po NR on 27th-28th included 58 breeding pairs of **Black-winged Stilts**, three **Greater Painted Snipe** chicks, three **Pheasant-tailed Jacanas** and an **Oriental Reed Warbler** (BS, KL, WWF). Elsewhere, there were sightings of two juvenile **White-cheeked Starlings** at San Tin fishponds on 28th (JAA), 70 **White-winged**, 15 **Bridled** and 20 **Black-naped Terns** off the Soko Islands on 29th (MDW) and a **Chinese Grosbeak** in song at Cheung Chau on 30th (MDW).

June

- ▶ In a very quiet month, the most notable reports were of 143 **Collared Crows** at Mai Po NR on 8th (WWF), a record count for Hong Kong, and 47 **Silky Starlings** at Nim Wan on 28th (DS), by far the highest summer count of this starling which is a locally abundant winter visitor and scarce breeding summer visitor. In addition, a **Little Tern** at Mui Wo, Lantau on 21st (DC) was a rare mid-summer report and 14 **Mountain Tailorbirds** were noted at Ng Tung Chai on 6th (RB), possibly the highest count of the species.
- ▶ Birds reported at Mai Po NR and from the Mai Po boardwalk (mainly WWF) included a male **Greater Painted Snipe** with three young on 4th, a **Swinhoe's Egret** on 6th, 118 **Black-winged Stilts** and 13 **Terek Sandpipers** on 14th, six **Black-tailed Godwits** on 23rd, seven **Black-faced Spoonbills**, three **Chinese Spotbills** and a **Red Knot** on 28th, an **Asian Dowitcher** on 29th and a **Wood Sandpiper** and three **Gull-billed Terns** on 30th.
- ▶ A **Eurasian Hobby** at Hang Tau on 14th (JGH) was the only individual reported during the month.
- ▶ Rarer nightbirds reported were a **Eurasian Eagle Owl** at Discovery Bay on 4th, two **Grey Nightjars** at Wu Kau Tang on 8th (SYH) and a **Brown Wood Owl** at Tai Po Kau on 27th (RB, KB), all calling.
- ▶ A boat trip in southern waters on 5th led to counts of 175 **Black-naped Terns**, 90 **Roseate Terns** and 70 **Bridled Terns**. In addition, nine **Common Terns** were noted in southern waters on 9th (JAA).



The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Bird Watching Tours Jan - Mar 2012

Outings

Date	Duration	Time and site	Difficulties (1...3)	Target species
1/1/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Long Valley (08:00 Pavilion beside public toilet at Yin Kong Village)	☆☆	Farmland birds & waterbirds
7/1/2012(Sat)	0800 - 1300	Tsim Bei Tsui (Crested Bulbul Club Activity) (08:00 Tin Chak Estate Shopping Centre Exit, near Tin Yat Light Rail Station, Tin Shui Wai)	☆	Waterbirds
8/1/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Tai Po Kau (08:00 Tai Po Kau carpark)	☆☆☆	Forest birds
15/1/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Wild Card Day (Details will be announced on 12 Jan on Discussion Forum)		
29/1/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Shek Kong (08:00 Exit C, Kam Sheung Road West Rail Station)	☆☆	Forest & farmland birds
4/2/2012(Sat)	0800 - 1300	Nam Sang Wai (Crested Bulbul Club Activity) (08:00 V Cuisine Restaurant, Exit G2, Yuen Long West Rail Station)	☆	Waterbirds
5/2/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Shing Mun (08:00 Exit B near Hang Seng Bank, Tsuen Wan MTR Station)	☆☆	Forest birds
12/2/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1600	Mai Po Nature Reserve (08:00 Kowloon Tong MTR Station (Kent Road exit), OR 09:00 Mai Po carpark, end 15:00 Mai Po, 16:00 Kowloon Tong)	☆☆	Waterbirds
19/2/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Wild Card Day (Details will be announced on 16 Feb on Discussion Forum)		
26/2/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Nam Chung and Luk Keng (08:00 Exit C, Fanling MTR, i.e. MTR exit near minibus terminal station)	☆	Waterbirds
3/3/2012(Sat)	0800 - 1300	Tai Sang Wai (Crested Bulbul Club Activity) (08:00 outside Hang Heung Cake Shop, Yuen Long)	☆	Waterbirds
4/3/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Tai Po Kau (08:00 Tai Po Kau carpark)	☆☆☆	Forest birds
11/3/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1600	Mai Po Nature Reserve (08:00 Kowloon Tong MTR Station (Kent Road exit), OR 09:00 Mai Po carpark, end 15:00 Mai Po, 16:00 Kowloon Tong)	☆☆	Waterbirds
18/3/2012 (Sun)	0800 - 1200	Wild Card Day (Details will be announced on 15 Mar on Discussion Forum)		
25/3/2012(Sun)	0730 - 1600	Po Toi and HK South Waters (07:30 Aberdeen public pier, near Ocean Court) Note: This will be a long trip on open waters. The ride could be quite rough and some people may be seasick.	☆☆☆	Seabirds and migrants

Member: Free of Charge

Non-member: Free of Charge (registration not required)

Member: Free of Charge

Non-member: HK\$30 (HK\$10 for age under 19 student) (registration not required)

Member: HK\$40 (Student Member: HK\$20)

Non-member: HK\$70 (registration required)

Member: HK\$160

Non-member: HK\$200 (registration required)

Indoor Meetings

Date	Time	Topic	Speakers	Venue
19/10/2011(Wed)	1900 - 2100	China Coastal Waterbird Census: An overview of census result 2005-10 (Cantonese with English powerpoint)	Mr. Yu Yat Tung	Rm. 1107, Scout Asso of HK, Austin Road, Kowloon
15/11/2011(Tue)	1900 - 2100	Bird Watching & Chinese Culture (Cantonese)	Mr. Lam Chiu Ying	Rm. 1030, Scout Asso of HK, Austin Road, Kowloon
29/12/2011(Thu)	1900 - 2100	Wildlife in Madagascar (Cantonese with bilingual powerpoint)	Dr. Billy Hau and his students	Rm. 901, Scout Asso of HK, Austin Road, Kowloon
11/1/2012(Wed)	1900 - 2100	Planning overseas trip for bird photography: from Norway to Ecuador (Cantonese)	Mr. Felix Ng	Rm. 1105, Scout Asso of HK, Austin Road, Kowloon

Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Activity Booking Slip

I would like to register the following HKBWS activities: (Please as appropriate)

Mai Po Outings [Coach Fare: Member: HK\$40 Student Member: HK\$20 Non-member: HK\$70]

(Members not using the coach do not need to pay. Non-members will have to pay the coach fare of HK\$70 disregard of whether they make use of the coach.)

- 12 Feb 2012 (Sun) (_____ member(s), _____ non-member(s)) No. of person(s) using the coach is _____)
- 11 Mar 2012 (Sun) (_____ member(s), _____ non-member(s)) No. of person(s) using the coach is _____)

Po Toi and Hong Kong South waters [Boat Fare: Member: HK\$160 Non-member: HK\$200]

- 25 Mar 2012 (Sun) (_____ member(s), _____ non-member(s)) No. of person(s) is _____)

According to the requirement of the Hong Kong Police and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, participants entering Mai Po should provide their full name and Hong Kong ID Number (passport number for oversea visitors) that day in order to access to the Frontier Closed Area and Mai Po Marshes.

** We will confirm the participants whether their application is accepted or not about 5 days before the outing. Once confirmed, no refund will be made no matter they can attend the outing or not. Refund will be made only if the outing is cancelled officially due to inclement weather or special reason.

Information of Participant(s)

Date	Destination	Name	Membership No.	Mobile Phone	Email Address	Fare*

* Activities are processed individually, please use separate cheque.

Enclosed please find a Cheque of HK\$ _____ (Payable to The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society)

Name : _____ Membership no: _____ E-mail: _____

Mobile Phone No. : _____ Date : _____ Signature : _____

Please send this slip together with a crossed cheque to: **14/F, Ruby Commercial Bldg, 480 Nathan Road, Kln**

Notes :

- HKBWS members have a high priority to join four weeks before the activity. Thereafter, application will be made on first come first serve basis.
- Any changes of the activities will be announced in our website: (<http://www.hkbws.org.hk/BBS>).
- Arrangement during bad weather: When Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No.3 or above or Rainstorm Warnings Red or Black are hoisted by the Hong Kong Observatory at 7:00 am on the event day, the activity will be cancelled. If Thunderstorm Warning is announced during the activity, Team Leader will decide if the activity should be continued or cancelled. You can call the team leader at 9457 3196 during the event day if you have any query about the weather.

Disclaimer

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society shall have no responsibility, financial or otherwise, for expenditure or other liabilities arising from the activities. Participants are recommended to purchase relevant insurance.

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勞浚暉
柴灣

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Lo Chun Fai
Chai Wan

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Brown Wood Owl
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