

**HK NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
REPORT ON BIRDWATCHING OUTING TO MAI PO
SUNDAY, 29 JANUARY 2012**

Although it was a grey day with the promised sun not appearing, at least it stayed fine, and the fifteen members and guests thoroughly enjoyed their day out bird-watching at Mai Po. We arrived in good time around 11am and, having met our guide Mabel, set off to see what we could find. We were rewarded very soon by seeing three herons at fairly



close quarters near the waterway right outside the warden's office where Mabel had to register our names; also cormorants in a nearby tree, and shovellers on the water. Although it is quite easy to see these grey herons (*left*) in HK, they are such beautiful birds that one doesn't tire of marvelling at them. They were quite a favourite with the group. Continuing on toward the Education Centre we saw a Chinese Pond Heron (*below*) and a couple of us were lucky enough to see the turquoise flash of the common kingfisher. We then came across a



HUGE flock of herons sitting in the trees; even though we couldn't see the birds in such detail at that distance, it was very impressive to see them in such big numbers. Egrets (both little and great) were everywhere of course, as were cormorants, and we enjoyed watching the egrets feeding from the first hide, especially one which looked very poetic casting its reflection onto the water.

After a quick picnic lunch alfresco on the benches outside the Education Centre, Mabel took us to a viewing platform from where we saw a group of Eurasian wigeon, with their attractive gingery-coloured heads. We then headed for the path toward Deep Bay. Just before joining it, a couple of the guys were surprised by an animal darting across the path in front of them and into the greenery on the banks. We could not sight it again, but after subsequent online enquiry, John and Ken are confident that it was an Asian mongoose. Andy Leung (Marketing Manager at Mai Po) has confirmed that these are not uncommon at Mai Po, and that they eat the snakes (which we did not see!)

Once through the gateway into Deep Bay proper, it always adds to the adventure having to negotiate the wibbly-wobbly boardwalk. Mangroves flourish in the mudflats here, and a quick glance shows that there are several different types, including one with quite spiky holly-like leaves. This is also home for the mud skippers of course (*right*).

We arrived at the Deep Bay hide around our intended time of 1.30pm, and indeed there were plenty of waterbirds for us to identify. Two favourites here were the strikingly beautiful avocets (*next page*) and the black-capped kingfisher; the former were easy to see but the latter's colours (rufous belly and red bill), although he perched nicely on a pole for





us for long periods of time, could only be seen with the help of the telescope. As well as greenshanks, plovers, curlews and others, a single osprey sat and looked back at us from his perch on a T-bar.

One thing we could not understand was why the sea was still so far out despite our having planned this trip to coincide with high tide of 1.9 metres at 2pm. My subsequent enquiry to Andy at Mai Po revealed that Deep Bay is getting increasingly silted up,

and whereas a tide of 1.7m just four years ago would have meant water quite close up to the hide, the water now rarely comes that close and, as a result, birds are rarely seen at any closer quarters than we saw them. WWF do have plans afoot to deal with this problem, which is going to mean the removal of large amounts of mud from the bay – quite an expensive project and a headache for the conservation aspects, by all accounts.

Taking the shorter path back to our bus we saw tufted ducks and then – finally! – a group of spoonbills in the distance (*right*). Due to the distance and the low light, and the fact that spoonbills tuck their bills under their wings ("*poor things*") we did not get a clear view of this most distinguishing feature for some time, but patience finally paid off, and some of them turned around.



Already feeling satisfied with a good day's twitching, it was a bonus to see a group of 4 or 5 azure-winged magpies on a rooftop as we neared the end of our path, and a rufous-backed shrike atop a fence post. I have certainly not mentioned every species we saw in this narrative, but a full list (I think!) of the day's sightings is included on the next page.

Talking of which (numbers of species) – each member of our group was eligible to enter the Big Bird Race 2012 Guessing Game, to guess the number of species seen by the winning team during the race which takes place on 11–12 February. Results from recent years have all been around the 200 mark, so that is where most of us pitched our guesses. It would be lovely if I could let one of you know that you have won the camera! Meanwhile, I pass on Andy Leung's thanks to the day's participants for sponsoring the Mai Po Interpreter Team in the race. We all felt glad that our money would go directly to the upkeep of spoonbill habitat, rather than to the 'general coffers' of the WWF!



So, with thanks to John Morgan for the photographs, it's goodbye from me (Jan Campbell) and it's goodbye from him! (*left*).

LIST OF SPECIES SEEN BY NHS GROUP ON 29 JANUARY 2012

Black-faced spoonbill
Little egret
Great egret
Cormorant
Greenshank
Plover
Avocet
Curlew
Sandpiper
? gull
Grey heron
Chinese pond heron
Common kingfisher
Black-capped kingfisher

Eurasian wigeon
Tufted duck
Shoveller
Little grebe
Moorhen

Osprey
Black kite

Azure-winged magpie
Magpie robin
Rufous-backed shrike
Coucal
Chinese bulbul
Spotted dove
Reed? Warbler
Wagtail
Common mynah
Jackdaw
Plain prinia

32 species