

REPORT ON HONG KONG NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY OUTING
Sunday March 15th
Pak Tam Au - to Hoi Ha

The mini bus got 15 of us from Central to the entrance to Sai Kung Country Park where Frank picked up all the necessary Permits to allow the bus both in and out of the Park. On entering the park we passed crowds of wildlife that provided much discussion as to whether they were of the species Local Hongkongius or Mainlander Chinesius– guide books need to be provided in future.

We started our hike from Pak Tam Au and walked for about 11km for the day, finishing at Hoi Ha to catch the bus again at 5pm. Weather wise it was a very pleasant day for walking but fog blocked most of the distant views across the water to the other peninsulas and islands. The fog made some of the track very slippery with only one member managing to slip and fall – he shall remain nameless as he is doing this writing.

When walking close to the sea shore there were several areas of mangroves providing feeding and breeding for crustacea and fish. Inland on the wooded trackside Jan managed to spot these few *mucuna birdwoodiana* blooms (below left), a lucky preview of the following week's activity to see more of this vine on Lantau.



During the hike there were continual bird calls and it was one of the noisiest hikes I have been on. Usually the bush is very quiet. Maybe it was due to the fog and the birds were lost (or felt secure), or maybe it was the mild spring weather, or maybe they were singing on the way back from church!!! Super Bird Man Ted was able to identify many of them by their calls but few were actually seen. Swallows were observed overhead at our mid-morning break and Ted identified a Coucal that had a deep honking hooting call.

Evidence of pigs rooting around for food was noted and resting village cattle were entertained by us walking past. Yellow ID tags in their ears were not of the insect repellent type as there were many flies having a drink around their eyes.

There were several lengthy discussions about identifying plants. Jan's new book of trees (with its super-handly photo chart that is not heavy to take on hikes) was helpful most of the time, and comes highly recommended. If you are interested in purchasing the book, "A Photographic Guide to Common Urban Trees of Hong Kong" by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Dept., published in 2014, it can be purchased very easily online from the Government Bookstore at <http://www.isd.gov.hk/eng/bookorder.htm> for the princely sum of \$108. (Thanks Jan.)

'Progress' or 'human intervention' was evident at Tai Tan Village where modern three story residences were being constructed. Signs about 'lost heritage' were close by.

The Marine Research Centre near Hoi Ha was locked up and uninviting unfortunately. This structure and the management thereof have never been favourites of the Society's, sorry to say, since past Chairman Dave announced the former ugly, and we were refused a group visit as we posed too much of bureaucratic challenge to the latter, not fitting into any of their "categories" of intended visitors! So much for education for all...

The hike finished at the Sea View Cafe in Hoi Ha with various amber refreshments being consumed. Many thanks to Frank and Malcolm for organizing and leading the hike. It was a very pleasant low stress day especially watching Chairman Ken return to another era when he skipped stones from the beach at lunch time. All agreed it was worth the \$100 for the private minibus when we saw the lineup of people waiting for the public bus.



Later in the year there will be a relaxed day of kayaking, snorkeling, and eating at Hoi Ha Marine Park. Watch this space for details. ■

Report by Rob Irwin (so now you know who fell over....) Photos by Frank Bradley