

Report on Walk from Shing Mun Reservoir to Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve

February 19th 2017

A large contingent of 24 joined this easy walk on a sunny day perfect for hiking. The walk commenced at Shing Mun Reservoir, which is one of a complex of reservoirs built



Start of the walk

between 1923 and 1939 and the first reservoir to supply water from the Kowloon Peninsula to Hong Kong Island. It was officially re-named the Jubilee Reservoir to celebrate King George's Silver Jubilee, but the older name continued to be used. The reservoir has a total storage capacity of 3 billion gallons. We followed the road along the west side of the reservoir, until reaching the Pineapple Dam country trail where we encountered a few of the monkeys for which this country park is renowned. The Pineapple Dam is a smaller dam of the Reservoir. Its name comes from the pineapples that many Hakka villagers grew here when they settled in the area.



The monkeys belong to two similar species, the rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) and long-tailed macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*). The former is more common. These monkeys are not native to Hong Kong - Hong Kong's indigenous rhesus macaques became extinct in the 1950s. The monkeys we see today are descendants of monkeys imported in 1910 and released near the reservoir to eat plants that were poisonous to humans. Some members also saw squirrels and lizards.

The park is one of the few habitats in HK of the crested goshawk (*Accipiter trivirgatus*). Other birds frequently seen in the park include the black-eared kite (*Milvus migrans lineatus*), house swift (*Apus (affinis) nipalensis*), greater coucal (*Centropus s.sinensis*), common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), rufous-backed shrike (*Lanius schach*) and common tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*).

Several non-native trees are found in the park including the Brisbane box, eucalyptus the paper-bark tree. It was noted that the Tiger Claw tree was already in bloom, perhaps as a reaction to the exceptionally mild winter. We also noted a bush with beautiful blue berries – identity unknown.



Can anyone identify these berries?

We took our first break in a rather overgrown picnic area where trees were coming into spring foliage. It was debated whether the beautiful light green foliage above us was



that of the red Machilus, a bay tree native to Japan.

We then began a gradual climb up to Leadmine Pass. Our leader was somewhat surprised at the ability of the group as we reached the barbeque site and pavilion much earlier than expected and had an early lunch. The name of the pass goes back to a map produced by missionaries around 1866, before the New Territories became part of Hong Kong. In the first report of the Director of Public Works in 1898, it was stated that the mine had closed around 1892. The site of the mine seems to be approximately that of the Hong Kong arboretum.

Suitably refreshed, we moved on to the Tai Po Kau Nature reserve which has four well-marked trails designated red, blue, brown and yellow in increasing order of distance. At this point it was clearly time to sort the sheep from the goats! Two routes were offered, an easier one with a water feature, or a longer one with views over Tolo Harbour. The former involved mostly the Blue trail whilst the latter was to follow the yellow or the brown. There was a plan for the groups to meet again on the downhill path to the bus. In order to ensure all were present and correct at the rendezvous the second group were further sub-divided on the way. The water features were found to be charming but sadly views over Tolo Harbour were too misty. However, with amazing military

skills, the three groups mustered perfectly at the Nature trail entrance from where we made our final descent to the park entrance to meet the bus.

Thank you Malcolm for another well-planned hike!

Photos by Rose Godfrey