

In my country, or I should say region, there are a total number of 2 IBAs¹, namely, Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Tai Mo Shan Area and Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River Catchment Area.

In this passage, I would like to introduce the latter one.

Before describing the IBA, it is important to first well define what is meant by IBA. IBA means Important Birds Area, which is well defined by the Birdlife International. These areas are significant for birds' living so that their high population is made feasible in long-term, especially for those which their habitats and living are being or expected to be threatened. ²

The IBA is located in the northwest of Hong Kong, with an area of 3150 hectares and next to Hong Kong Wetland Park. The IBA includes four major habitats of birds: Nam Sang Wai, Tsim Bei Tsui, Mai Po Nature Reserve and Long Valley.

Nam Sang Wai is in the northern part of Yuen Long New Town, surrounded by Kam Tin River and Shan Pui River. It is an island consists of many fish ponds and reedbeds. Moreover there is a mudbank, which favours the waterbirds such as black-faced spoonbill and black-headed gull.

Tsim Bei Tsui is located at the west of Lau Fau Shan and the south of Deep Bay. As it is very close to Mai Po Nature Reserve, it is also a place for birds to stay during winter. Tsim Bei Tsui egretty is listed by the government as a site of special scientific interest,³ proving that Tsim Bei Tsui plays a significant role on the conservation and study of egrets.

Mai Po Nature Reserve, located at the north of Mai Po Village, has been being protected since 1979, as Britain, the Suzerain of Hong Kong, extended the pledge of Ramsar Convention

¹ <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sitesearchresults.php?cty=96&fam=0&gen=0> Birdlife Data Zone

² <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/site> Birdlife Data Zone

³ http://web.archive.org/web/20091027031339/http://www.epd.gov.hk/epd/english/environmentinhk/eia_planning/sea/annex_b.html

Site of special scientific interest, EPD, Hong Kong

to Hong Kong. Mai Po Reserve is a restricted zone, protected by the Wild Animals Protection Ordinance, for its importance in the nature. If people wish to enter Mai Po Nature Reserve, they have to first get permission from the AFCD, the Agriculture, Farmland and Conservation Department, through the WWF Hong Kong. It is also regarded as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. This vast piece of wetland has been administrated by WWF Hong Kong since 1983. In the area of Mai Po Reserve, there are many types of habitats, including 46 hectares of reedbeds, 270 hectares of intertidal mudflats and 380 hectares of mangrove forest. Some of them are natural occurrence while some of them are man-made.⁴ This characteristics of Mai Po Reserve prompts itself become one of the best place for birds to stay in Far East. According to data from AFCD⁵, there are a total number of 380 species and 100 thousand birds have once stayed in the Reserve each year.

Long Valley is another place which is also a habitat of plenty of kind of birds. It is a fresh water wetland locating at the northwest of Sheung Shui and between Sheung Yue River and Shek Sheung River, where some farmers in Hong Kong plough. This feature of Long Valley favours the living of birds as the farmlands provide them with adequate food. Therefore there are abundant species of water birds and land birds, for example, Chinese Pond Heron, Yellow Wagtail and Common Tailorbird.⁶

As the IBA is located at the route of East Asian-Australian Flyway, many birds treat Mai Po Reserve, the best place in the whole IBA, as a midway stop between the North Asia and Oceania. Therefore During winter there are many birds staying in the area of Mai Po Reserve for their winter. During mid-winter, there are a total of 70-80 thousand birds and 70 species

⁴ <http://www.wwf.org.hk/en/whatwedo/conservation/wetlands/managemaipo/maipowildlife/birds/> Birds, WWF Hong Kong

⁵ Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site, AFCD, 2011

⁶ Birding watching map of Hong Kong, HKBWS, 2015 (Traditional Chinese)

recorded. Among these species, some of them are already classified as endangered species, or even critically endangered. The most famous one is Black-faced Spoonbill, which is an endangered species. The other examples are Siberian Crane and Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The most significant function of Mai Po Reserve is the conservation of Black-faced Spoonbill. During December 2010 to February 2011, 386 were recorded in Mai Po Reserve, which is 21% of the whole population of Black-faced Spoonbills in the world. This benefits the conservation of such endangered species as Mai Po Reserve provides a stable and appropriate environment for them to perch on, proved by the large number of black-faced spoonbills and Nordmann's Greenshanks during winter. The conservation of black-faced spoonbills by the WWF Hong Kong in Mai Po Reserve was awarded conservation achievement in 2013 by Birdlife International, paying compliments to the effort WWF Hong Kong has done to make Mai Po Reserve as such a perfect habitat for birds. Moreover, Mai Po Reserve has become the place where there is the largest quantity of collared crows inhabiting. It is because of the pollution in wetlands and farmlands in mainland China. Therefore the collared crows migrate to Mai Po, an adequate wetland for their living. The number of collared crows is increasing since 2000 steadily. It is expected to be the most important place for collared crows, which is classified as near threatened in 2008.⁷

It is also an area for residential water birds to perch. Throughout the whole year, it is not hard to see residential water birds such as cattle egret, common moorhen and black-crowned night heron. There are also some land birds, such as Asian Azure-winged Magpies, which are introduced to Hong Kong 41 years ago (1975)⁸, and long-tailed shrike. Some residential

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<http://www.wwf.org.hk/en/whatwedo/conservation/wetlands/managemaiipo/maipoupdates/?2121/Deep-Bay--A-global-stronghold-for-Collared-Crow> 'Deep Bay – A global stronghold for Collared Crow?', WWF Hong Kong, 2010

⁸ The Birds of Hong Kong and South China, Clive Viney, Karen Phillipps and C.Y. Lam, 2005

species which are scarce in quantity in scattering in Hong Kong, such as greater painted snipe, live and breed in Mai Po Reserve.⁹ This helps maintain the diversity of species of birds in Hong Kong by providing them a suitable habitat.

Another area in the IBA playing a significant role on local and global conservation of birds is Long Valley.

On local conservation, similar to Mai Po Reserve, Long Valley provides home or shelter to locally important species, which refers to the birds which always appear in the area, for instance, common quail, Richard's Pipit, etc. This proves that Long Valley plays an important role on providing birds an adequate environment. Also, some species of birds which are now declining in amount in Hong Kong, such as watercock and black-naped oriole, has been found in Long Valley. This demonstrates that Long Valley is actually protecting these birds and maintaining the ecology system of birds in Hong Kong.¹⁰

On international conservation of birds, since there are more farmlands in Long Valley, there are much more songbirds in Long Valley than which in Mai Po Reserve. It supports the living of many endangered songbird species, such as yellow-breasted bunting, and some vulnerable species, for instance Greater spotted eagle.¹¹

It is government's responsibility to protect these areas though implementing different protective policies so that Hong Kong's environment is well protected. In Hong Kong, the government invites different NGOs to protect these areas by offering them funds. Mai Po Reserve has been being administrated by WWF Hong Kong since 1983.¹² Throughout these

⁹ A Photographic guide to the Birds of Hong Kong, HKBWS, 2009 (Traditional Chinese)

¹⁰ <http://www.hkbws.org.hk/archive/lvalley/importc.html> Importance of Long Valley, HKBWS (Traditional Chinese)

¹¹ http://www.hkbws.org.hk/lv_website/ecology02.html Importance of Long Valley, HKBWS (Traditional Chinese, new edition)

¹² <http://www.wwf.org.hk/en/whatwedo/conservation/wetlands/managemaipo/> Managing Mai Po Nature Reserve, WWF HK

years, WWF Hong Kong has built many facilities to facilitate citizens' visit in Mai Po Reserve, such as bird watching cottages and floating bridges. There is also an education centre about the Reserve which is also run by WWF Hong Kong. In order to effectively observe the migration, living condition and routines, each day workers will observe around the Reserve to record the amount of different species of birds.¹³

Long Valley is now jointly administrated by HKBWS¹⁴ and the Conservancy Association.

These two organizations co-operate with the local farmers to maintain a suitable environment for the living and breeding of birds. The latter will even get some of the farmlands and volunteers will plough to provide enough food for the birds.¹⁵ HKBWS has recovered some of the abandoned farmlands so that birds can have a more favourable environment of living.

From the above two instances, we can see that NGOs in Hong Kong have assisted Hong Kong government to protect the birds' habitat. Hong Kong government has also partially taken her responsibility to protect these areas by establishing laws to protect endangered and critically endangered species.

In Hong Kong there are varies of activities held by the government and NGOs to raise the public awareness on birds' conservation. For instance, WWF Hong Kong will hold the Big Bird Race annually in Mai Po Reserve, which is for professional teams around the world to participate. Hong Kong Wetland Park and HKBWS has also organized inter-school bird race since 1990s and 2016 respectively, which I have once participated. These races help us know more about birds in Hong Kong and nurture our awareness on protecting the environment.

¹³ <http://www.wwf.org.hk/en/whatwedo/conservation/wetlands/managemaipo/maipowildlife/birds/> birds, WWF Hong Kong

¹⁴ Abbreviation of Hong Kong Bird Watching Society

¹⁵ 【為何還耕種】塋原不收割稻田 為餵瀕危禾花雀, HK01 (Traditional Chinese)

<http://www.hk01.com/%E7%A4%BE%E5%8D%80/16885/-%E7%82%BA%E4%BD%95%E9%82%84%E8%80%95%E7%A8%AE-%E5%A1%B1%E5%8E%9F%E4%B8%8D%E6%94%B6%E5%89%B2%E7%A8%BB%E7%94%B0-%E7%82%BA%E9%A4%B5%E7%80%95%E5%8D%B1%E7%A6%BE%E8%8A%B1%E9%9B%80>

In Hong Kong such a small place, there are abundant species of birds, virtually because of the two IBAs. Therefore it is necessary for us to well protect the two IBAs so that no matter internationally or locally, birds can be well protected and precluded from the danger of extinct.

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