

**BIRDS AND HUMANS IN HARMONY:  
A SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT SCHEME IN LONG VALLEY**

**BIRD MONITORING PROGRAMME**

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Programme 2005/06

Winter

December 2005- February 2006

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**Summary Report - Winter 2005-2006 (December to February)**

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for the Long Valley bird monitoring programme

**Background**

The Environment and Conservation Fund (ECF) supported a Hong Kong Bird Watching Society's project: Birds and Humans in Harmony - A Sustainable Management Scheme in Long Valley which aims to enhance conservation value of Long Valley, especially for birds through a public-private partnership (PPP) scheme between the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and a local farming community. This project was approved by ECF in December 2005 and several aspects of this project have been started since then. This section of report presents data collected at the bird monitoring programme at Long Valley of this project.

**Methodology**

Survey area is mainly confined by a drainage channel lying on west, north and east, and Yin Kong Village on the south. Bird monitoring work is conducted once per week. In this winter, the surveys were scheduled on December 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, January 5, 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16 and 23. The survey was conducted by following a standard transect in order to obtain comparable results and complete coverage of all farmlands in the shortest time. Total surveying time of one survey maintains at about 3.5 hours in the mornings of the scheduled dates. A accredited surveyor appointed by the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society conducts this weekly survey. This surveyor was also closely monitored by the project coordinator in order to maintain the quality of the survey as well as the data collected. Main habitat type within the survey area is farmlands that are either actively managed or temporary

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abandoned. All the fields in the survey area are also given a specific number. Bird species and numbers are recorded with the field number.

## Results

A total of 13 surveys were conducted during the winter. The total number of species recorded in Dec to Feb is 71. The highest and lowest counts of all wild bird species are 623 birds on 8 December 2005 and 200 birds on 1 December 2005 respectively. (Note: Feral Pigeons were recorded during the survey but not included in this analysis because they are presumably free-flying pets from nearby area.) Monthly average numbers of birds decreased from December to February, this also indicates that the number of birds at Long Valley was at a decreasing trend in the winter (Table 1). In addition to this, there are large variations of counts within a week, indicating that the birds could move in and out from this area over the winter.

Table 1. Numbers in each counts and monthly average figure of birds counted at Long Valley, December 2005 to February 2006.

	Dec 2005	Jan 2006	Feb 2006
Number of birds counted	200, 623, 423, 589, 245	259, 401, 492, 329	280, 388, 211, 383
Mean (SD)	416 (193)	370 (100)	316 (86)

Several bird species/groups with relatively higher abundances and conspicuous for counting are selected for further analysis below. Their numbers and trends not only relate to their arrival and departure on the site, but also reflect availability and suitability of the habitats to the birds. Some habitat enhancement work in Long Valley have started to increase its capacity to the birds, this includes pumping water into dry field and cultivate some food plants for the birds. Comparison of these numbers could verify the effectiveness of these proactive habitat management measures. Sequence of each species or species group accounts below follows the order of species accounts in Carey *et al.* (2001).

### Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*

A resident ardeid species regularly occurs in Long Valley area and the breeding colony of this species in Hong Kong locates at nearby Ho Sheung Heung (Anon. 2005). Some individuals could utilize this area in a whole year basis and so it could be a key species in this freshwater agricultural habitat. Table 2 shows that the monthly mean number of Chinese Pond Heron in Long Valley. The number was generally decreasing over the winter, the highest count winter was 15 individuals on

15 and 22 December 2005.

Table 2. Counts and monthly mean number (and SD) of Chinese Pond Heron.

Month	December 2005	January 2006	February 2006
Counts	1, 11, 15, 15, 6	9, 7, 13, 6	4, 3, 5, 10
Mean number (and SD)	10 (6)	9 (3)	6 (3)

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

A shorebird species is favour to freshwater habitats, especially at Long Valley (Carey *et al.* 2001). Monthly mean number of this species at Long Valley is shown in Table 3. Although counts were fluctuated in each weeks, monthly mean numbers are similar over the winter. Peak count was recorded at 37 birds on 22 December 2005.

Table 3. Counts and monthly mean number (and SD) of Wood Sandpiper.

Month	December 2005	January 2006	February 2006
Counts	1, 31, 11, 37, 25	26, 23, 14, 10	34, 12, 9, 36
Mean number (and SD)	21 (15)	18 (8)	23 (14)

*Gallinago* snipes including Common, Pintail and Swinhoe's *Gallinago gallinago*, *G. stenura* and *G. megala*

These *Gallinago* snipes are known favour to both active and fallow wet agricultural lands for feeding and roosting respectively and Long Valley is the stronghold for these species (Carey *et al.* 2001). They could only be identified with some prolong observations in the field and hence the counts of all these snipes are grouped for this analysis. Table 4 shows that weekly counts are high varied from only three birds to a maximum of 76 birds. In general, the monthly mean numbers are similar in December and February and slightly higher in January.

Table 4. Counts and monthly mean number (and SD) of all *gallinago* snipes.

Month	December 2005	January 2006	February 2006
Counts	21, 75, 43, 39, 3	16, 76, 37, 67	24, 62, 18, 50
Mean number (and SD)	36 (27)	49 (28)	39 (21)

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Yellow Wagtail is mainly found in lowlying marshy area in Hong Kong (Carey *et al.* 2001) and it is known to feed intensively on active wet agricultural lands. Weekly counts shown in Table 5 are fluctuated from the minimum of 13 birds to a maximum of 129 birds. However, the monthly mean numbers show an increase from December

to February.

Table 5. Counts and monthly mean number (and SD) of Yellow Wagtail.

Month	December 2005	January 2006	February 2006
Counts	17, 58, 36, 68, 52	44, 13, 129, 67	107, 89, 26, 70
Mean number (and SD)	46 (20)	63 (49)	73 (35)

*Anthus* pipits including Richard's, Olive-backed and Red-throated *Anthus richardi*, *A.hodgsoni* and *A.cervinus*

Although pipits are usually inconspicuous in the field, they actually present in relatively high number. They prefer dry agricultural lands and margins of farmland. Their abundances at Long Valley represent the availability and quality of these habitats. The highest and lowest counts of all these pipits are 82 on 22 December and 14 on 15 December 2005 respectively and monthly mean numbers peaked at January (Table 6).

Table 6. Counts and monthly mean number (and SD) of Richard's, Olive-backed and Red-throated Pipits.

Month	December 2005	January 2006	February 2006
Counts	24, 40, 14, 82, 36	56, 37, 58, 64	39, 50, 40, 33
Mean number (and SD)	39 (26)	54 (12)	41 (7)

Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*

This species favours open cultivation and lowland scrub (Carey *et al.* 2001). It perches conspicuously at open area which gives a comparatively more accurate observation results. Table 7 shows that highest count was 16 individuals on 22 and 29 December 2005. The numbers were generally higher in December than in January, and at the later part of the survey period, stable numbers were obtained.

Table 7. Counts and monthly mean number (and SD) of Common Stonechat.

Month	December 2005	January 2006	February 2006
Counts	8, 13, 7, 16, 16	8, 8, 5, 11	7, 7, 7, 10
Mean number (and SD)	12 (4)	8 (2)	8 (2)

#### Other notable observations

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

One recorded at 8 December 2005. It is an unusual inland record for this coastal

waterbird species.

Northern Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

A scarce winter visitor to Hong Kong and mostly recorded at Long Valley. Single bird was recorded at 15 December 2005 and 26 January 2006.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

A rare winter visitor to Hong Kong and mostly recorded at Long Valley. Single bird was recorded at 8, 29 December 2005, 19, 26 January, 9 February 2006.

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

A scarce winter visitor to Hong Kong. One bird and seven birds were recorded on 5 January and 16 February 2006 respectively.

#### Habitat enhancement

This project has just begun in December 2005 and the first habitat enhancement works were firstly undertaken in early February 2006. This includes removal of a portion of weed and pumping water into several selected field on 9 February (field number 224, 225 and 226). It is yet to come any conclusion whether the work is effective or not but a flock of 36 *Gallinago* snipes were recorded on 23 February and no snipes had been recorded there in December and January. It gives a hint that pumping water into the field during the dry season would attract some waterbirds utilizing the area.

#### **References**

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