

Directory of Important Bird Areas in China (Mainland): Key Sites for Conservation

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IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN HONG KONG

- LAND AREA: 1,091 km²
- HUMAN POPULATION: 6,843,000 (6,272 per km²)
- NUMBER OF IBAS: 2
- TOTAL AREA OF IBAS: 65 km²
- STATUS OF IBAS: 1 protected; 1 partially protected



The Inner Deep Bay area, including Mai Po marshes, is an important wintering and stop-over site for waterbirds. Shenzhen, a city in mainland China, can be seen in the background. (PHOTO: YU YAT-TUNG)

KEY HABITATS AND BIRDS

- Hong Kong lies on the Pearl River delta, the largest intertidal area in southern China, and the extensive inter-tidal wetlands around Deep Bay in north-west Hong Kong support large numbers of waterbirds on passage and in winter. They include the threatened Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* (Inner Deep Bay is the only regular wintering site in East Asia), Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*, Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*, Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* and Styan's Grasshopper-warbler *Locustella pleskei*.
- From the 1960s to 1980s a few pairs of Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* bred at Yim Tso Ha, Starling Inlet, north-east Hong Kong, the only known breeding population in the world until colonies were found in Korea and northern China in the 1980s. The colony at Yim Tso Ha was affected by development and disturbance as border traffic between Hong Kong and mainland China increased in the 1980s, and the last breeding record there was in 1985; it is therefore not listed as an IBA.
- Almost all of the original forest in Hong Kong had been cleared by the mid-nineteenth century. Although subsequent reforestation allowed a reasonable forest cover to develop, most of this secondary forest was destroyed during the Second World War. Since then, areas of forest have regenerated, with the most extensive in the central New Territories (including Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Tai Mo Shan). Some of these secondary forests have not been seriously disturbed for more than 50 years, and there is almost no hunting pressure as most species of wild animals are protected by law. The forests of Hong Kong therefore support healthy populations of many of the typical forest birds of south-east China (*Biome AS08: Sino-Himalayan subtropical forest*).

CONSERVATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROTECTED AREAS SYSTEM

The Wild Animals Protection Ordinance (Chapter 170, enacted in 1976, revised in 1980), prohibits hunting or possession of protected animals (including all wild birds) in Hong Kong. The Country Park Ordinance (Chapter 208, enacted in 1976, revised in 1995) provides for the designation, control and management of country parks and special areas, and the establishment of the Country and Marine Parks Board; the country parks designated under this ordinance cover c.40% of the area of Hong Kong. Both ordinances are enforced by Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) Government. The Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (Chapter 499, enacted in 1998) requires proponents of designated projects to avoid, minimise and control adverse impacts as far as practicable. If total avoidance is not practicable, the project proponents are required to mitigate the adverse impact to an acceptable level, or compensate for the impact caused.

Inner Deep Bay area was designated as a Ramsar Site in 1995. The core part of Inner Deep Bay, Mai Po Marshes, was declared as a restricted area in 1976, and has been managed in the form of a nature reserve by WWF Hong Kong since 1984. All of Inner Deep Bay was declared as a restricted area in 1996.

OVERVIEW OF THE INVENTORY

- Two IBAs have been identified in Hong Kong (covering c.6% of the land area of the territory): Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River catchment area (IBA 1) is a globally important wetland site that supports very large numbers of passage and wintering waterbirds including several threatened species; Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Tai Mo Shan (IBA 2) is a forested area that supports many of the characteristic species of the Sino-Himalayan subtropical forest biome.

CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Tai Mo Shan (IBA 2) is entirely within protected areas, and Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River catchment area (IBA 1) is partially protected.
- The most important threats to Inner Deep Bay and Shenzhen River catchment area are development (industrial, urban and infrastructure), filling in of wetlands, pollution and disturbance to birds, and other threats include aquaculture intensification, abandonment / reduction of land management, dredging and canalization, introduction of exotic plant species and recreation / tourism. The wetland ecosystems in Deep Bay and the surrounding region are generally under great pressure because of the rapid industrial development around the Pearl River delta.
- The Tai Po Kau, Shing Mun and Tai Mo Shan IBA has over 40% forest cover, as well as secondary scrubland, wooded grassland and other habitats. There is no development or hunting pressure in this IBA, and its conservation importance is likely to increase because the remnant forests in adjacent parts of southern China are threatened by development and human disturbance.

SOURCES OF IBA DATA

The IBA data presented here was compiled by Carrie K. W. Ma of the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, with contributions from the following HKBWS members: Geoff Carey, Cheung Ho-fai, Lam Chiu-ying, Ng Cho-nam, Llewellyn Young, Yu Yat-tung, and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department of The Hong Kong SAR Government.