



Black-faced Spoonbill

HONGKONG BIRDS APRIL 2019

Mai Po Marshes

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We had found a guide for our birding day in Hongkong and Dave picked us up from our hotel in the northern suburbs at 7.00 am sharp and told us we would only bird the marshes in the afternoon when we would benefit from the incoming tide. That gave us the morning to bird Tai Po forest reserve, a stretch of forest in the middle of suburban Hongkong. The weather was pretty murky and with rain threatening the light was less than ideal.

I had not done a lot of homework on Hongkong birds and did not know really what to expect at that time of year. Well it turned into an interesting morning despite the weather as we wandered up a fairly steep forest track.. First up was a Blue Whistling Thrush followed by a string of woodland passerines- Fork-tailed Sunbird was new, there were Bulbuls aplenty- Red-whiskered, Chinese, (IOC call it Light-vented) and Mountain. Mountain and Common Tailorbird showed well and Cinerous and Yellow-cheeked Tit put in an appearance. Further up the trail Crested Goshawk and Crested Serpent-Eagle were both heard before they were seen.



Silver-eared Mesia

Hainan Blue Flycatcher had just arrived for the summer and a Speckled Piculet gave brief views. A small bird party included Blue-winged Minla, Silver-eared Mesia and Black-throated Laughing Thrush, while Oriental Magpie-robin was fairly common along the trail. Back down on the road we picked up Japanese White-eye and both Grey-chinned and Scarlet Minivets. We finished off the morning with White-rumped Munia and Plain Flowerpecker.

It was half an hours' drive out to Mai Po marshes situated along the Chinese border with the concrete jungle of Shengzen showing in the distance. We needed to pick up a couple of permits at the reserve entrance and were told we had to be back by 5.00pm when the reserve closed. High tide was around 3.00pm so we did not have a lot of time. It was now only 12.30 so we planned to eat our picnic lunch in one of the smaller hides closer to the mangroves before embarking on a one hour walk across a floating boardwalk (supported by oil-drums) out to the hide overlooking the estuary and mud flats.

There were Azure-winged Magpies around the centre and several Black-collared and White-shouldered Starlings. Walking past the shrimp pans we had nice views of a Yellow Bittern and lots of Yellow-bellied Prinias. A Flock of Masked Laughingthrush also passed through. Our first stop where



Terek Sandpiper

we sat for half an hour for our lunch produced a new bird for me- a Collared Crow- apparently an endangered bird with a limited distribution. There was not too much else to interrupt our lunch- just a few egrets.

Then we were off on our long trek out to the mud flats. Asian Koels called loudly and a White-breasted Waterhen shot across the track and we had time to watch an Olive-backed Pipit quietly going about his business. The first boardwalk started on terra firma. -we

then passed through a long heavily barb-wired fence- (to keep the Chinese out) and out on to our floating boardwalk (which actually was not floating as the tide had not come in far enough yet) We trudged on through the mangroves—it was a long hike but eventually we arrived at the hide around 2.00pm to find half a dozen long lenses already in place.

Then over the next hour and a half we had a procession of birds- 33 different species coming within camera range. Some of the waders were in full breeding plumage, some getting there, and others as we see them in South Africa. The mud was fairly dry on our arrival but as the tide pushed in it brought many birds which were not even there at the outset. Chinese Pond Heron, Eastern Cattle, Great, Little and Intermediate Egrets, Grey and Purple Herons all put in an appearance as did two Black-faced Spoonbills- the bird I missed photographing in Japan. Gull-billed and Caspian Terns as well as Black-headed and Vega Gulls were present while a Black Kite caused a stir every so often.

Our first birds 3 metres away were Terek Sandpipers, followed closely by many Red-necked Stints. Greater Sand-Plovers were almost in breeding plumage while Pied Avocets, Whimbrels and Curlews patrolled the shoreline still some distance away. Grey Plovers were still in non-breeding plumage but the Curlew Sandpipers were nearly there. Common Sandpipers never really look any different but the Marsh Sandpipers and Common Redshanks looked great in breeding plumage.

We spotted a distant Kentish Plover and the Black-tailed Godwits were also a long way off and a Long-toed Stint put in a very brief appearance. And finally just before it was time for us to leave Common Greenshanks arrived, still a fair distance out and yes- there was at least half a dozen Nordmann's Greenshanks amongst them.

It was 4.00pm and time to leave but not without a few parting shots at an eastern Yellow Wagtail- what a magical couple of hours which seemed to have passed in a flash. Had I been a week earlier I could have had Oriental Pratincole and Oriental Plover as well I was told. Ever greedy- what about Oriental Stork I asked?

The long trudge back did not seem to take that long and by 6.00pm we were back at the hotel saying farewell to Dave. No rest for the wicked - the MTR station was just down the road and by 8.00pm were on the Hongkong waterfront watching the splendid laser light show lighting up the harbour.

