

## Hong Kong, March 29-April 3, 2019

VLADIMIR DINETS

Hong Kong is an expensive but friendly city. Much of its wildlife disappeared when the quazi-country was totally deforested in the 19th century, and never recolonized (although today Hong Kong has some remarkably good forest habitat, the adjacent part of mainland China is almost completely built over). Only about 50 species of land mammals and 2 cetaceans occur more or less regularly. Still, it's a good place to see some species, including, reportedly, **Chinese pangolin** (I wasn't that lucky). A brief overview of local mammal fauna can be found at [https://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/hkbiodiversity/speciesgroup/speciesgroup\\_mammals.html](https://www.afcd.gov.hk/english/conservation/hkbiodiversity/speciesgroup/speciesgroup_mammals.html).

Public transportation is excellent, but driving is costly. Free parking can be found at the entrances to nature reserves mentioned below, but elsewhere it is ridiculously expensive and you can often pay only with Octopus card that is very inconvenient for visitors. Highway tolls are also high. There's only a handful of rental companies and they all charge a lot. Some places such as much of Lantau Island can't be accessed in a private car without a permit (although if you get caught, the police will likely let you go if you have a foreign driving license) and/or have no parking at all. If there is no bus access, take a taxi.

I visited Hong Kong with my family to see its famous pink morph of **Indochinese humpback dolphin**. The tours are organized by Hong Kong Dolphin Watch (<http://www.hkdolphinwatch.com/>) on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays and are said to have 97% success rate, but we dipped due to strong wind. Later I got very close views from **Tai O Viewing Point** (22.260930N 113.862295E, legally accessible only by public transportation).



Chinese humpback dolphins and leopard cat

The best forest reserve is **Tai Po Kau** (22.432525N 114.185945E, free parking is available at night); see <https://www.birdinghongkong.com/tai-po-kau.html> for site info. Walk up the entry road past the Nature Trail trailhead, and to another trailhead where a few color-coded loop trails begin. Red Trail is the best because much of it is in a shady ravine; I walked it once after midnight and saw a rather tame **leopard cat**, an **East Asian porcupine**, a band of **rhesus macaques** (including two of the rare golden morph), a **small-toothed ferret-badger**, a **greater bandicoot rat**, and a very cute juvenile **Indochinese forest rat**. All of them except the bandicoot rat were along the first half of the trail; I'd miss them all except the porcupine if I didn't have a thermal imager. The dam at 22.428471N 114.180332E has a big hole near the base where a **Rickett's myotis** was night-roosting. Numerous **greater short-nosed fruit bats**, **Pomona roundleaf bats**, and **lesser bamboo bats** were flying along the trail. I also saw an **Asian grey shrew** just 20 m up the entry road.

**Plover Cove Country Park** (22.507568N 114.242896E) is the best place for bats, including a yet-**undescribed pipistrelle** (possibly a sprite, *Arielulus*) that can be seen feeding around electric lights together with **rufous horseshoe bats**. It is a mid-size bat with a broad, shiny golden collar well visible when it flies close to a light source. I didn't have time to explore the trails well, but saw a **chestnut white-bellied rat**. Locally rare **greater bamboo bat** and **crab-eating mongoose** have been recorded here.

**Lantau Island** has a network of forest trails; I walked from **Nam Shan trailhead** (22.256864N 113.985781E) towards Crescent Peak during the day and didn't see any mammals, but there were **red muntjac** and **masked palm civet** droppings and a few **wild boar** digs.



Malay porcupine and rhesus macaques

Victoria Peak has a nice circular trail starting near the cable car station (22.271205N 114.149486E); it is good for introduced **Pallas's squirrel** during the day and for the two "hillside rats" (**Indochinese forest rat** and **chestnut white-bellied rat**) at night. See <https://www.birdinghongkong.com/the-peak.html> for site description and trail map.

Mai Po Nature Reserve (22.495408N 114.049009E) is a world-famous birding site. To get there, go at least a week in advance to <https://www.wwf.org.hk/en/reslib/resources/forms/> and file an application for Visiting Naturalist Permit, then email the reserve and ask for after-hours access (I didn't, so I was there only in daytime). See <https://www.birdinghongkong.com/mai-po.html> for site info. **Small Asian mongoose** is common during the day, while **leopard cat** and **small Indian civet** are reportedly common at night. There are also **Eurasian otters**. The only mammal I saw there was a **Japanese pipistrelle** roosting in one of the bat boxes near the Education Center (22.487964N 114.041836E).

Hong Kong Wetland Park is mostly of interest for birders, but one road (starting at a free parking lot at 22.486062N 114.008600E; don't drive past that point without a permit because there's a police station just 100 m down the road) is good for night walks; I saw a **yellow-bellied weasel** there. **Mainland finless porpoises** are reportedly seen from the viewpoint near that parking lot sometimes.

Long Valley (access from 22.510826N 114.110937E) is good for **ricefield mouse** and **lesser ricefield rat** (beware of dogs). See <https://www.birdinghongkong.com/long-valley.html> for site info, and [https://www.birdinghongkong.com/uploads/6/5/4/1/6541207/long\\_valley\\_map.jpg](https://www.birdinghongkong.com/uploads/6/5/4/1/6541207/long_valley_map.jpg) for a map.

### Species seen

1. Asian grey shrew *Crocidura attenuata*
2. Greater short-nosed fruit bat *Cynopterus sphinx*
3. Lesser bamboo bat *Tylonycteris pachypus*
4. Japanese pipistrelle *Pipistrellus abramus*
5. Undescribed pipistrelle
6. Rufous horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus rouxi*
7. Pomona roundleaf bat *Hipposideros pomona*
8. Rickett's myotis *Myotis pilosus*
9. Rhesus macaque *Macaca mulatta littoralis*
10. Small-toothed ferret badger *Melogale moschata*
11. Yellow-bellied weasel *Mustela kathiah*
12. Leopard cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*
13. Indochinese humpback dolphin *Sousa chinensis chinensis*
14. Pallas's squirrel *Callosciurus erythraeus thai* (note: ssp. *styani* occurs in the northern part of Hong Kong)
15. Greater bandicoot rat *Bandicota bengalensis*
16. Lesser ricefield rat *Rattus losea*
17. Indochinese forest rat *R. andamanensis*
18. Chestnut white-bellied rat *Niviventer fulvescens*
19. Ricefield mouse *Mus caroli*
20. Malay porcupine *Hystrix brachyura*