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Mai Po Wetland Habitats

Fact sheet

Reedbed

Introduction

Common Reed *Phragmites australis* is a perennial herb occurring widely throughout the world. Stands of reed (called Reedbed) can dominate areas of shallow water or inter-tidal zones with limited tidal ranges.

Reedbeds are an important habitat for wildlife, providing both feeding and roosting habitat. Commercially, reed rhizomes (roots) are used as an ingredient in Chinese medicine whilst other parts of the reed plant can be used to make paper, roofs and even furniture.

At Mai Po, the area of reedbed is some 46ha. Located inside the *gei wai* it is the largest stand in Hong Kong and probably one of the largest remaining stands in Guangdong Province. In the early 1980s, a change of farming practices from *gei wai* shrimp to commercial fish, resulted in the expansion of reedbeds at the expense of mangrove areas which were drowned out.

Ecological Value

Reedbed habitat has a surprisingly high biodiversity value. Nearly 400 species of invertebrates have been recorded in the Mai Po reedbed with at least 4 being new to science, including the moth species *Thalassodes maipoensis* which has so far not been recorded anywhere else in the world. Also the globally vulnerable damselfly, Four-spot Midget *Mortonagrion hirosei*, is found in the Mai Po reedbed.

These invertebrates are an important food source for many migratory birds to build up their body fat storage to continue migrating. Common migratory birds found in the reedbed include: Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*, Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* and Chinese Penduline Tit *Remiz consobrinus*.

Reedbed also provides roosting habitat for birds. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* and Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* roost overnight in reedbed and larger sized birds such as Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*, Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* and Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* are also associated with reedbed. Resident birds such as Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* and Yellow-bellied Prinia *Prinia Flaviventris* nest and breed in the reedbed.



Common Reed © WWF-HK



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A - Research shows Siberian Rubythroat uses reedbed only in winter.



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B - Plain Prinia, a warbler which nests in reedbed.

Our Management

Reedbed is the early stage of natural succession from wetland to dry land. Overtime reed encroaches into the *gei wai* water channels, causing an eventual loss of open water, thus, lowering the diversity of habitats and wildlife. The area of reedbed has increased inside Mai Po by some 60-70% in the last 30 years. In order to keep a balance between reedbed and other types of habitat, WWF-HK carries out management work on reeds.

The spread of reed is controlled by a combination of dredging and chemical control. Each summer at least one *gei wai* is dredged on a rotation basis to remove reeds from the water channels, and in other *gei wai* herbicide is sprayed to prevent reed growing in the water channels.

In order to develop a long-term strategy to manage the reedbed areas, WWF-HK is co-operating with the Hong Kong Bird Ringing Group to carry out research projects on bird usage in different reed types. WWF is also studying bird roosting usage of the reedbeds to facilitate the strategy.