

SOUTHERN CHINA TRIP REPORT

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MAY 24, 2016 – JUNE 12, 2016

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, our major overseas trip was to Corsica and the south of France in May and, although enjoyable, it did not really classify as a birding trip – we had three lifers in four weeks even though we birded every day! A series of medical interruptions to our normal life in the second half of 2015 delayed our making a decision on travel in 2016 and it was not until February 2016 that we made the decision to visit southern China. Two years ago, we birded in Japan and were guided by an excellent guide recommended by my friend Dion Hobcroft – we had a great trip. Dion had also recommended a guide in Shanghai at that same time and that was a big factor in coming to the conclusion that we would be wise to contact this guide in Shanghai and organise a trip to southern China. The guide's name is Zhang Lin (zhanglinastro@163.com) and he operates a tour company called ShanghaiBirdingTour (www.shanghaibirdingtour.com). In our initial contacts with Lin, we discussed by e-mail the type of birding we wanted to do and the duration of the tour that we wanted him to organise. As we had no shorebird target species and wanted to see rural China rather than coastal mud flats, it was established that it would be better for summer migrants to time the trip from mid to late May knowing that winter migrants and passage shorebirds would largely be gone by then. We had told Lin that we had no particular target species and were happy to tour the countryside and pick up whatever birds were special for the region. This resulted in Lin developing an itinerary which focussed on rare and speciality birds rather than visiting a range of more general habitats and thus resulted in seeing less total species and lifers than we might otherwise have done. Having said that, it reflected precisely what we had asked for and we certainly were successful in finding most of the special birds of the region. Lin's itinerary was for a tour of almost two weeks which started in Shanghai and finished in the southern coastal city of Fuzhou as shown on the very poor mud map below.

As stated above, the tour was designed to focus on rare and specialty birds and started with looking for Reed Parrotbill in the coastal reed beds near Shanghai. We then spent two days in Nanjing where the target was Fairy Pitta followed by a stop in Deqing to visit the Crested Ibis breeding centre. Slaty Bunting was the next major target on Huangshan Mountain and then Pied Falconet and Blue-crowned (Courtois's) Laughingthrush around Wu Yuan. The next targets were the pheasants of Emeifeng Mountain near Taining where we spent three days searching for Silver Pheasant, Elliot's Pheasant, Koklass Pheasant and Cabot's Tragopan. From there we made the long journey over to the coastal city of Fuzhou where the major target was Chinese Crested Tern, one of the most endangered species in the world which was rediscovered 15 years ago and has a total population of about 100 individuals.

We used **A Field Guide to the Birds of China** by MacKinnon and Phillipps which we found to be very good although, because it covers the whole of China (1329 species), only about 25% of the species actually were relevant to our location. This guide adopts Sibley and Monroe taxonomy which I later converted to IOC World Bird List version 6.2, this latter taxonomy being the standard for Birdlife Australia's various rarities committees. We heard a lot of birds on this trip which would have been

lifers had we seen them but we adopt the convention that a life bird must be seen to be added to the life list. We finished the trip with a total of 176 species of which 49 were life birds which we were a little disappointed with, but the weather was consistently bad and I had set the ground rules that we had no particular targets and, at no time during the trip did we discuss what or would not be a lifer

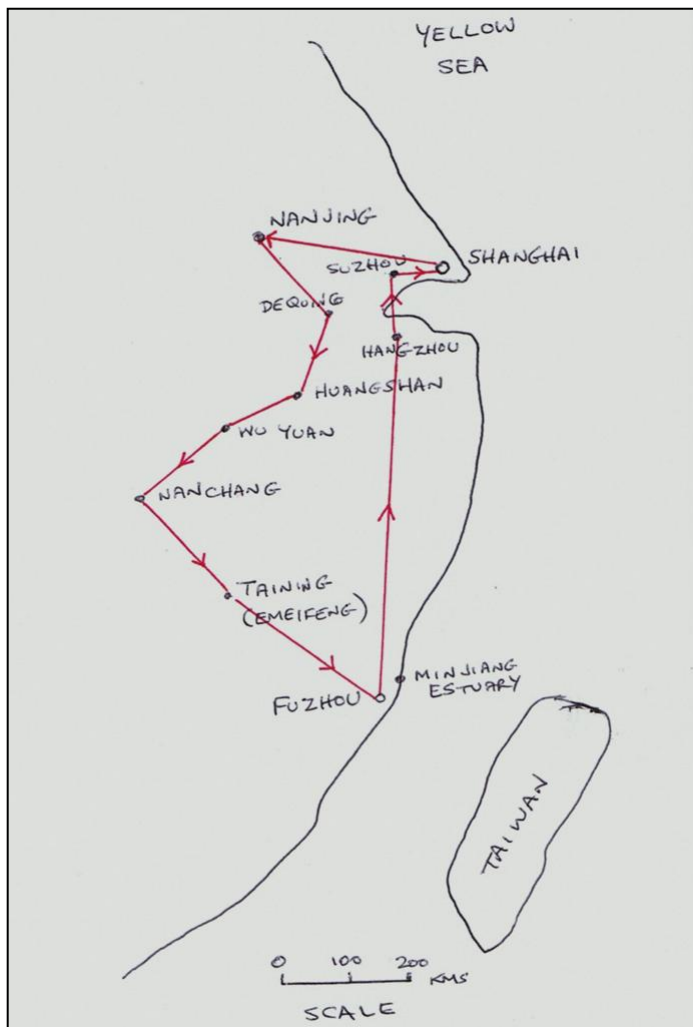


Figure 1 - our itinerary

In summary, we found the trip to be absorbing although not always totally enjoyable because the consistent dark rainy weather (it rained on every day of the tour) became a bit depressing and also made it difficult to see the birds as we would have liked – dark silhouettes are never very satisfying! The quality of the photographs in this report is very poor since I had to use slow shutter speeds and very high ISO settings for much of the time. We also lost a fair amount of birding time sheltering from heavy rain and this affected our success rate in finding new species. Lin did a fantastic job of organising the tour- all arrangements including transport, accommodation, drivers, permits and local guides went without a hitch. Although he is best known for his shorebird expertise (he discovered the largest staging site for Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China) his knowledge extends far beyond that. His identification skills were excellent and his eye sight was remarkable – he could spot and identify small birds in thick cover and in gloomy light without using binoculars. We would certainly recommend him as a guide to anyone visiting southern China.

Having never before visited China, we found it a fascinating place which left lasting impressions on all of the senses. There were many things that we had to get accustomed to including the number of people everywhere, the cultivation of every last square metre of space in the country by very industrious people, the traffic in the cities, the noise of people and car/truck horns, the incredibly hard beds in hotels, and the knowledge that very few westerners visit these locations outside of the major cities and there is very little English spoken. The infrastructure that we encountered was very modern with an extensive network of very efficient and punctual super fast trains and high quality motorways linking all the main centres. All the people we met were unfailingly friendly and helpful, the food was varied and excellent, and we thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience.

ITINERARY

May 24, 2016 – flew from Sydney to Shanghai with Qantas which was an eleven hour flight arriving at 6.30pm and checked into the Minya Hotel on the Pudong side of Shanghai. (overnight at the Minya Hotel)

May 25, 2016 – met up with Lin to pick up some tickets for future super high speed train trips and then we visited the centre of Shanghai for some sightseeing. (overnight at the Minya Hotel)

May 26, 2016 – we birded some sites around Shanghai with Lin visiting the island of Xiao Yangshan in the morning and then coastal wetlands around Nanhuiziu Park (south of the international airport) in the afternoon. (overnight at the Minya Hotel)

May 27, 2016 – early morning (6.02am) high speed train from Shanghai to Nanjing, picked up by driver and spent the day at Lansham Hill to the north of the city before visiting marshland along the Yangtze River for the last hour. (overnight at the Days International Hotel)

May 28, 2016 – went back to Lansham Hill in the morning and then birded around the touristy area of Plum Blossom Hill in the afternoon. (overnight at the Days International Hotel)

May 29, 2016 – departed Nanjing by high speed train to Deqing at 6.50am, picked up by driver and visited the Crested Ibis breeding centre. Drove 2 hours to the town of Mache and birded for over 2 hours and then drove for 3 hours to Tangkou adjacent to Huang Mountain. (overnight at the Haizhou International Hotel)

May 30, 2016 – checked out of hotel and took the cable car up Huang Mountain and birded until 2.30pm. Cable car back down and drove for two hours to Wu Yuan stopping at Xiao Qi for Pied Falconet en route. (overnight at the Xing Jiangshan Holiday Hotel)

May 31, 2016 – birded all day at various sites around Wu Yuan (overnight at the Xing Jiangshan Holiday Hotel)

June 1, 2016 – checked out of hotel and birded around Wu Yuan for most of the day and then took a late afternoon high speed train to Nanchang. (overnight at the Vienna Hotel)

June 2, 2016 – checked out of hotel and drove to the town of Taining arriving at lunchtime and spent the afternoon birding up Emeifeng Mountain, the fabled pheasant location. (overnight at the Jinhu Hotel)

June 3, 2016 – birded Emeifeng Mountain all day. (overnight at the Jinhu Hotel)

June 4, 2016 – checked out of hotel and drove up Emeifeng Mountain again in the morning. Moved to an area further north for the afternoon due to the rain and then took the 4.57pm high speed train to Fuzhou. (overnight at the Golden Hotel)

June 5, 2016 – birded Fuzhou National Forest Park all day but dogged by heavy rain and abandoned birding at 3.00pm. (overnight at the Golden Hotel)

June 6, 2016 – birded the Chinese Crested Tern location on the Fujiang River estuary at Minjiang, dropped Lin at Fuzhou Airport in the mid-afternoon and then birded Fuzhou National Forest Park for an hour late in the afternoon with the local guide.

This was the completion of the birding tour with Zhang Lin. We took the high speed train to Hangzhou on the morning of June 7, 2016 and spent two nights there. We then travelled by inter-city bus from Hangzhou to Suzhou on June 9, 2016 and spent two nights there.

June 11, 2016 – hotel limo to Shanghai's Pudong International Airport for an overnight Qantas flight to Sydney arriving at 8.30am on June 12, 2016.

CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT

Tuesday 24 May, 2016

We departed from Sydney Airport on Qantas flight QF129 at 9.35am and had a comfortable eleven hour flight to Shanghai's Pudong Airport arriving at 6.30pm. Our guide Lin had been doing a shorebird count today and arranged for a friend to pick us up and take us to our hotel in Shanghai. We found the driving on the expressways quite worrying at first as there is a lot of speed variation between old trucks and the fast moving Porsches, Mercedes and Audis along with a lot of lane changing and horn blasting. However, as the days went on, we recognised that there was a pattern to this apparent mayhem and we became more relaxed as time went on. (It was notable that we did not see a traffic accident during our three weeks in China) We had a simple meal in the hotel restaurant and slept well.

Wednesday 25 May, 2016

We had intended to sightsee all day alone as the birding tour was not starting until tomorrow but Lin had contacted us to say that we had to obtain some tickets for the high speed train journeys later in the trip and that they needed to see our passports to issue the tickets. We spent most of the morning with him going to the main Shanghai Railway Station before having some time for a quick look at central Shanghai. We started at the famous walking area on the Huangpu River called The Bund with old colonial style buildings along The Bund side and incredible skyscrapers on the other side of the river. One of the first bird species that we recorded was **Black-crowned Night Heron** which were abundant along the river (and elsewhere on our tour) and which glided along close to the water, dipping in occasionally to pick up some food fragment. It was such different behaviour from what we are used to in this species that we were beginning to doubt our ID skills! As we walked around the area we picked up **Spotted Turtle Dove**, **Crested Myna**, **Light-vented (Chinese) Bulbul** and **Eurasian Tree Sparrow**. In parkland near the Shanghai Museum, we came across some birds

which resembled Common Blackbirds on steroids (30 cm) which our field guide described as race *mandarinus* – but the IOC has split this race into a full species, **Chinese Blackbird**, and so we had the first lifer of the trip.

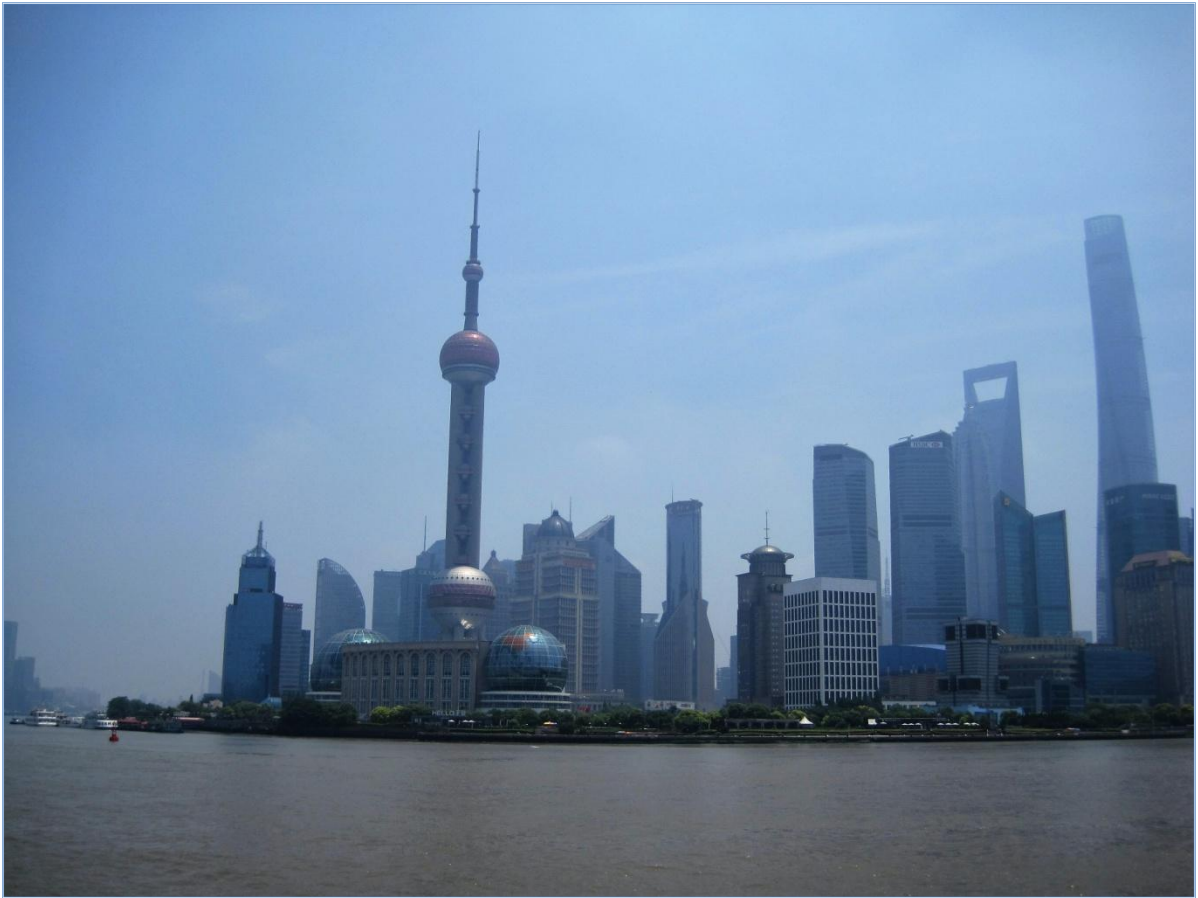


Figure 2 - across the river from The Bund

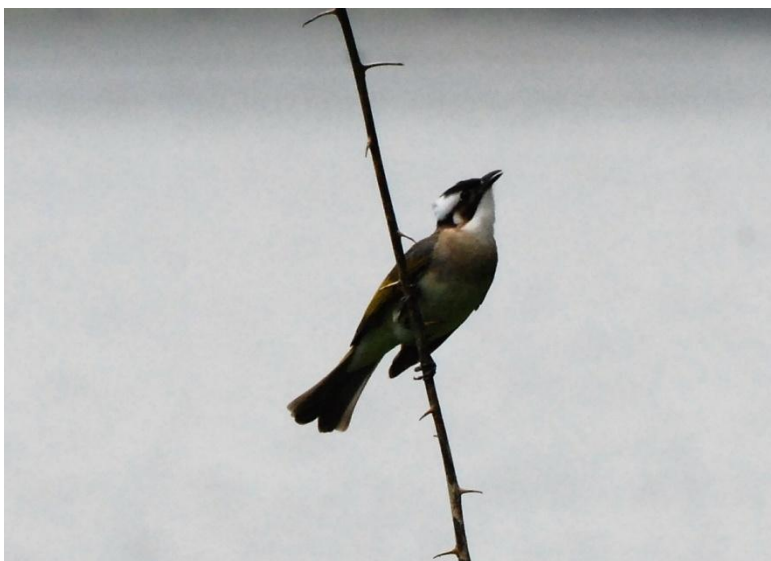


Figure 3 - Light-vented Bulbul

Thursday 26 May, 2016

Our bird tour commenced with Lin picking us up from the hotel at 7.00am in light rain and a very heavy overcast sky – we would soon find that this was to be the norm for most days. We headed south from the city along the coast and, after a couple of hours, crossed a 32km bridge over the mouth of Hangzhou Bay to the island of Xiao Yangshan which is a good migrant trap in the spring. The terrain was quite bizarre with the site being a rock knoll very close to the largest container port that I have ever seen – our birding there was accompanied by crane klaxons, loudspeakers and the crash of containers being stacked. The knoll was punctuated with small stands of bushes and low trees and it was in these that we searched for birds and they were surprisingly productive even though it was quite late in the migration season. Most of the birds that we picked up were familiar to us such as **Large-billed Crow**, **Barn Swallow**, **Pale Martin** (split from Sand Martin), **Red Turtle Dove**, **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Brown Shrike**, **Black-naped Oriole** and a couple of very smart **Meadow Bunting**. As we climbed higher up the knoll, we added **Asian Brown Flycatcher**, **Japanese Bush Warbler** (formerly Manchurian Bush Warbler but now lumped), **Plain Prinia**, **Chestnut Bulbul** and **Eurasian Magpie**.



Figure 4- Chestnut Bulbul

We returned to the vehicle and drove a short distance across the main road away from the container terminal and continued birding for another hour in similar but more level habitat. Here we added **Grey-streaked Flycatcher**, **Dark-sided Flycatcher**, **Japanese Tit** (split from Great Tit) and **Eurasian Hobby** to the list. Just as we were walking back to the vehicle, we heard the noisy call of a **Brown-flanked Bush Warbler** and, after a lot of effort had some very fleeting glimpses of this skulker. It was a bird that we heard and saw everywhere on our trip in a great variety of habitats and it became our first lifer for today!

We drove back over the long bridge and went into a town called Nanhui on the coast about 30 km south of Pudong Airport where we had lunch. In the afternoon, we spent the whole time exploring an area around Nanhuiziu Park which comprised an immense area of reclaimed coastal mud flats which had been planted out to reed beds very much in the style of the Dutch polders. The area was prolific in birds and new trip species were seen every few minutes. These included **White-cheeked Starling**, **Oriental Skylark**, **Long-tailed Shrike** (a bird seen often throughout our travels), **Oriental Reed Warbler**, **Chinese Grosbeak**, **Black Drongo**, **Tiger Shrike**, **Red-billed Starling**, **Eurasian Cuckoo**, **Common Pheasant**, **Yellow Bittern** and **Chinese Pond Heron**.



Figure 5 - Common Pheasant

In the increasingly dark and gloomy weather, we saw some large groups of migrating **Red-rumped Swallow**, **Pacific Swift** and **White-throated Needletail** and a passage **Pechora Pipit** was a notable sighting. After some frustrating unsuccessful attempts to see our main target species, we finally had great views of a **Reed Parrotbill** which came out and posed on a vertical reed stalk – but the camera was in the car! We also had several long range views of **Vinous-throated Parrotbill** but we had several more encounters with this species later in the trip. We then came across a passage *Acrocephalus* warbler singing in the reeds which Lin initially called as a Manchurian Reed Warbler as he had recorded it at this site in previous years. However, the song was not right and with the help of playback, we quickly realised that it was a **Blunt-winged Warbler** which was a lifer for Lin and for us. The final excitement of the day occurred when we stopped by a couple of very isolated trees to scope the reed beds below and there, right in front of us, was a passage **Brown Hawk-Owl**. By now the rain had set in and we called it a day and headed back to our Shanghai hotel.



Figure 6 - Blunt-winged Warbler

Friday 27 May, 2016

We checked out of our hotel at 5.00am and went with Lin by taxi to the main railway station in very heavy rain to catch the 6.02am super fast train to Nanjing. We were very impressed by the super fast train system. You have to pass security to enter the departure concourse (only travellers allowed there), wait until 10 minutes from departure time when the gate to your platform is activated, proceed to the car number shown on the platform edge and enter the car to your pre-assigned seat number. It works very smoothly, every train was on time, comfortable and reached cruising speed of 300kph very quickly. We arrived in dark drizzly weather and proceeded directly to our birding site for the next two days, Lanshan Hill to the north of the city, to look for our target bird Fairy Pitta. We drove to the top of the hill where there was a Buddhist temple which provided shelter for us under its eaves as we looked for birds in the rain. Despite the poor visibility, the birds were moving around in the forest and we slowly built up the numbers with **Azure-winged Magpie**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Grey-capped Greenfinch**, **Indian Cuckoo**, **Swinhoe's Minivet**, **Blue Whistling Thrush**, **Black Bulbul** (all dark form) and **Black-throated Bush-tit**.

When the rain eased off somewhat, we went for a walk through the forest playing the call of Fairy Pitta but with no response – in the two days that we spent on Lanshan Hill, we did not hear a pitta call at any time. Lin was not sure whether they were late arriving from migration or whether they were not using this site this year. However, we continued to see more birds including **Lesser Cuckoo**, **Black-winged Cuckooshrike**, **Forest Wagtail**, **Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker** and an exquisite **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher**.



Figure 7 - Black Bulbul (all dark form)

With the rain returning even heavier, we headed down the hill to the nearby village of Gaowang where we had a delicious lunch which include soup, steamed vegetables, beef and goose albeit in a very basic restaurant. When we headed back up the hill, the rain had eased off and we walked around a tea plantation near the Buddhist temple.



Figure 8 - Lin and Louise in the tea plantation

After walking for about two hours, we had added **Ashy Drongo**, **Large Hawk Cuckoo**, **Collared Finchbill**, **Chinese Hwamei**, **Hair-crested Drongo** and **Masked Laughingthrush** to the trip list but, but this time the light was fading and bird activity was becoming very quiet. Lin decided to head to a boardwalk along the marshland adjacent to the Yangtze River where we might pick up a few new species. Arriving there, we saw our first **Grey-headed Lapwing** of the trip, followed by **Common Moorhen**, **Little Grebe**, **Pied Kingfisher** and our only **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** of the trip.



Figure 9 - Grey-headed Lapwing

Nanjing is arguably China's most historic city and, until the 1930's, was the capital of China. The old part of the city is closed in by a massive wall 33 km in length and we headed to this area for dinner and found it absolutely buzzing with life – families everywhere having a good time and restaurants and light shows adding to the atmosphere. For dinner, we went to a restaurant serving tasting plates of which we had about 15 each – served simultaneously which made for an overflowing table. Some we found delicious but others we decided to pass on (cooked duck blood, bullfrog chunks and whole black egg for example!).

Saturday 28 May, 2016

Although we were enjoying the food that we had for lunch and dinner in China, we found breakfast a bit of a problem since neither of us are keen on rice, noodles, steamed vegetables etc. for breakfast (which was all there was on offer) and coffee was not available at most of the places we stayed as the Chinese are not coffee drinkers. Lin had foreseen the coffee problem and carried with him a big box of Nescafe sachets which contained premixed powdered coffee and milk – all we had to do was to find some hot water! For our carbohydrate requirements, we soon got into the habit of stopping at a bakery on the way to our first birding of the day and buying pastries, fruit loaf and the like which we ate in the vehicle.

We headed back up to Lanshan Hill again in our vain quest for a Fairy Pitta and had a very quiet few hours birding in the rain which became steadily heavier. Our only new birds for the morning were **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Japanese White-eye**, **Black Kite**, **Asian Koel** and **Grey Treepie** (which was the only lifer of the morning). We headed back into the city for lunch and then went to a very historical area called Plum Blossom Hill (or Purple Mountain) which is a picturesque area of gentle hills shaded by woodland and bamboo groves containing mausoleums and temples from the Ming period. With it being Saturday, there were large numbers of people visiting the sites. We had a pleasant couple of hours visiting sites and picking up a few new birds along the way including **Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush**, **Red-billed Blue Magpie**, **Silver-throated Bushtit** (which Lin and our field guide described as a race of Long-tailed Tit but which has been split by the IOC) and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**.



Figure 10 - Red-billed Blue Magpie

Sunday 29 May, 2016

We had an early start to the day, taking the 6.50am super fast train from Nanjing south to the city of Deqing. The destination was the breeding centre for Crested Ibis, a species which almost became extinct in China. The centre is located in a large wetland with a massive rookery of Great Egrets, Little Egrets, Chinese Pond Herons, Black-crowned Night Herons and some established breeding Crested Ibis. We rather bizarrely did not go to the centre itself, but installed ourselves on the balcony of someone's house in the local village from where we had a panoramic view of the wetlands. Needless to say, it was raining again but we had good scope views of **Crested Ibis** and also added **Intermediate Egret** and **Black Bittern** to the trip list. It is not really possible to know whether the Crested Ibis that you see are birds which have been long established in the wild colony or

whether they were released from the breeding centre last year. We saw several individuals so the probabilities are that some of them are established wild birds.



Figure 11 - Chinese Pond Heron

We returned to the vehicle and set off on a two hour drive southwards to the town of Mache where the target bird in the area was the scarce and difficult Short-tailed Parrotbill – although Lin heard the bird at one location, we never actually set eyes on one. However, there were a few other good sightings including a **Long-billed Plover** (which we had dipped on in Japan and which Louise picked up at 80kph from the vehicle), **Oriental Magpie Robin**, **Common Kingfisher**, **White-crowned Forktail**, **Asian Barred Owlet** and the exquisite **Plumbeous Water Redstart**.



Figure 12 - Plumbeous Water Redstart

We stopped birding at about 2.30pm as we had a three hour drive south to our destination for this evening at Tangkou near the fabled mountain known as Huang Shan reputedly the most scenic mountain range in the whole of China.

Monday 30 May, 2016

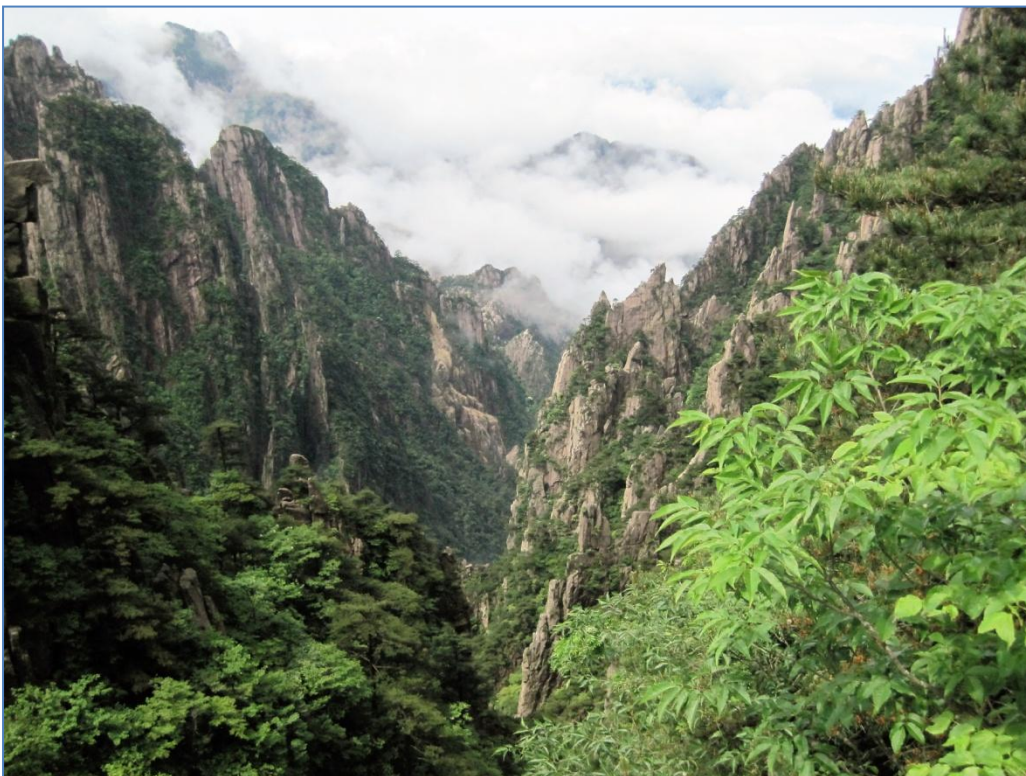


Figure 13 - Huang Shan Mountain

We awoke to a very light overcast sky and no rain which lifted our spirits immensely particularly as we were ascending the 1800m mountain to look for a few special birds. There are three separate cable cars or gondolas which leave from different locations and arrive at different parts of the mountain top. Lin wanted to take the cable car which would bring us closest to the stake-out area for our main target species, Slaty Bunting and this involved a 90 minute drive to reach the departure point. An advantage of this long drive was that we came across a **Brown Crake** in a newly planted rice paddy next to the road – the only one that we saw on the trip. We set off in the cable car in cloudy conditions but, as we got higher, we broke through into sunshine and spectacular mountain scenery. Shortly after reaching the top and setting off along the pathways, we quickly began to realise that this was not going to be the idyllic day that we had imagined – the paths were just jam packed with hundreds of tourists. Worse, the tourists were in groups, each of which had a tour guide with a fixed face microphone screaming unintelligible instructions and information to their group at extremely high decibels. After seeing a few **Asian House Martin** hawking around the cliff faces, we came across the first of several **Hartert's Leaf Warbler** (a split from Blyth's Leaf Warbler) which characteristically flicks each wing up alternately as it sings.



Figure 14 - Hartert's Leaf Warbler

One small advantage of the large numbers of noisy people was that the few species found on the mountain had become inured to the disturbance and were not too skittish. **Buffy Laughingthrush** (split from Rusty Laughingthrush) and **Red-billed Leiothrix** were the more frequently seen species but, in reality the birding was quite slow. Before lunch, we managed to add a passage **Daurian Redstart**, **Coal Tit**, **Eurasian Jay** and **Himalayan Cuckoo** to the list. We also saw a Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel and a Tibetan Macaque – two of only four mammal species for the trip.



Figure 15 - Red-billed Leiothrix

Although we were looking forward to heading down the mountain and getting away from the crowds, we had still not yet found our main target species and so, after some lunch, we continued to search in the forest fringes along the pathways. Finally, we came across a pair of **Slaty Bunting** and also had good views of a bird that we had been hearing on several occasions, a **Chestnut-crowned Warbler**. We headed off down the mountain at 2.30pm for a two hour drive to our destination for tonight, WuYuan.

We had one more birding location en route at a village near WuYuan called Xiao Qi which has been a known stake-out for the scarce Pied Falconet – a pair has nested in the same tree cavity for many years. We walked into a terraced guest house on the main street, walked past the family playing cards who didn't glance at us and went up several flights of stairs onto the roof. The 'usual' falconet roost tree was overlooked by a rudimentary viewing platform on the roof but the falconets were not there. After seeing our first **Oriental Dollarbird** of the trip, we eventually discovered the pair of **Pied Falconet** perched on a distant power line. On arrival at our hotel in WuYuan we were horrified to find that there was a regional junior football carnival being held in town and that the hotel was full of very noisy 14 year old boys who spent their time running up and down the corridors shouting at each other. It was a surprisingly restful night but only because of the ear plugs!

Tuesday 31 May, 2016

We woke up to quite a bright warm day which was a pleasant change with the target today being a very rare and endangered species which Lin and all the locals refer to as Courtois's Laughingthrush but which the IOC call the Blue-crowned Laughingthrush. It is unusual in that it breeds in small colonies and the non-breeding immature birds assist with feeding nestlings of the adult birds. On the way to the Raoheyuan National Wetland Park to see the Laughingthrush, we stopped on the roadside and picked up **Blue-throated Bee-eater**, **Black-collared Starling** and **White-rumped Munia**. As an aside, Lin had told us on several occasions about the scourge of Chinese bird photographers who are people who know little about birds but compete to put the most amazing pictures they can

on the internet. They have no interest in the welfare of the birds and will cut down vegetation to photograph birds on their nests and even catch live birds and use wire to manipulate them into an unrealistic pose! So, when we arrived at the Laughingthrush colony which was on an island inside the bend of a river, two old fellows sitting on the little bridge spied my camera and refused to let us pass. Fortunately, we were able to solve the problem by having the driver take my camera back to the vehicle but it was good to see the local people being so protective. We walked around the small island though the colony of about 50 pairs of **Blue-crowned Laughingthrush** but, of course, did not get any photographs.

We then drove to a location called Dazhang Mountain where we drove a long way up through lovely scenery to a high level forest where it actually felt quite cold. On the way there, we saw **Chinese Sparrowhawk** and **Black-capped Kingfisher** and then, on the mountain, we saw **Grey-cheeked Fulvetta**, **Green Shrike Babbler** (uncommon in this part of China), **Grey-headed Parrotbill**, **Rufous-faced Warbler** (a bird that we had heard many times over the past few days) and **Rufous-capped Babbler**.



Figure 16 - Green Shrike Babbler

After lunch in a local village, we birded along some riverine habitat in the afternoon but the heat was intense and the birds were not active. However, we did find some new species along the way including **Grey-chinned Minivet**, **Yellow-bellied Prinia**, **Crested Goshawk**, **Scaly-breasted Munia**, **White-browed Laughingthrush** and **White-breasted Waterhen**.

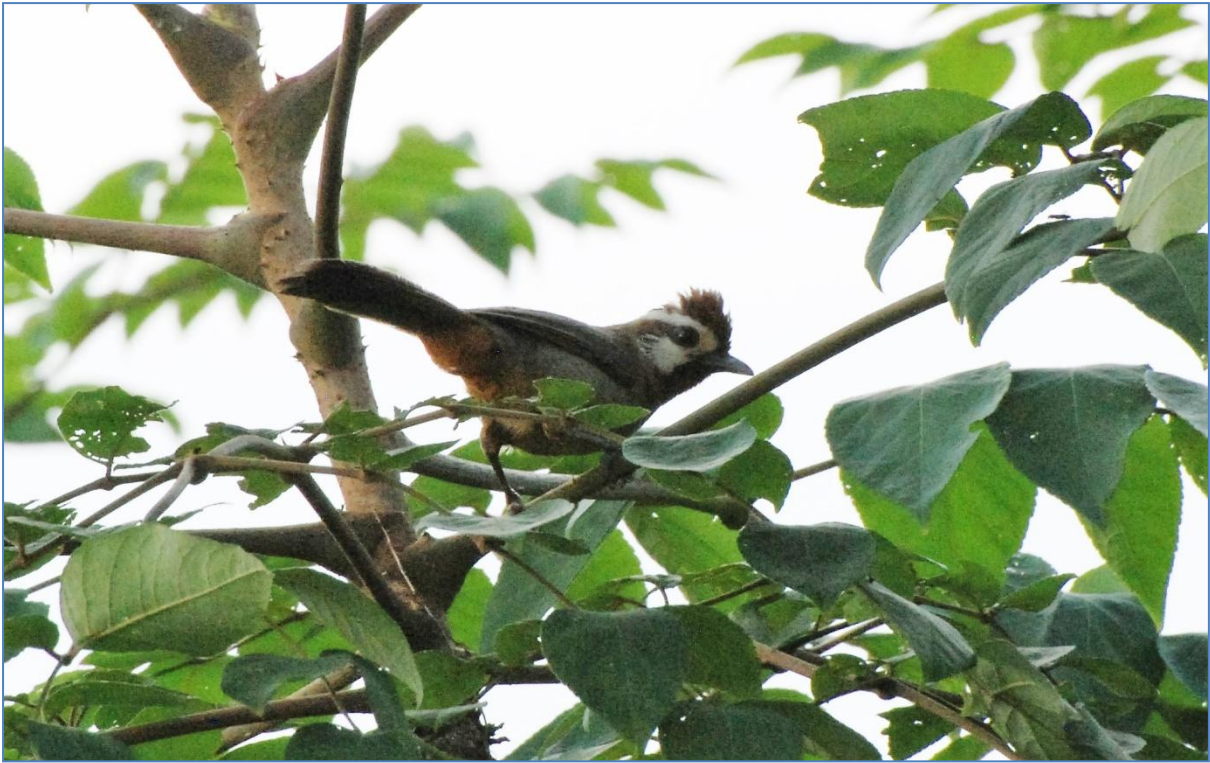


Figure 17 - White-browed Laughingthrush

While we had been out today, the hotel had called Lin to say that they were upgrading us to a quieter section of the hotel to avoid the footballers which was good of them. We had an excellent meal in the main square of WuYuan which was full of people enjoying themselves, promenading, line dancing to music from a bandstand, etc – we were impressed by the fact that everyone we saw seemed to be pretty happy with their life and there was no sign of any aggression from anyone.

Wednesday 1 June, 2016

This was certainly the least productive and interesting day of the trip. We went to a couple of sites around WuYuan in very humid conditions which deteriorated into rain in the late morning. We had only three new trip birds, **Grey-sided Scimitar Babbler**, **White-throated Kingfisher** and **Mountain Bulbul**. After lunch in a small village, we went out to try again but the heavy rain saw us sheltering under the eaves of a historic emperor's residence in the forest hoping for better weather. We eventually gave up and drove to the railway station where we took the 4.30pm super fast train to Nanchang, a journey of about three hours. With Lin's sat nav playing up, we had a lot of trouble locating our hotel in the torrential rain but eventually got there at 8.00pm, had a quick dinner and off to bed.

Thursday 2 June, 2016

Today was to be the beginning of the most anticipated part of the trip, the quest for pheasants and tragopans. Our driver for this leg of the journey, Lau Lin, was also a very good birder who knows the birds of Emeifeng Mountain very well. First we had a very long drive with it taking 90 minutes to get out of Nanchang and then another three hours on the motorway to our destination town of Taining, the base for birding Emeifeng. We checked into our hotel and had lunch in the town and then it was off on our first of several forays to the mountain. Emeifeng is technically a reserve and has an

entrance gate and guard post at the bottom – however, there are farms within the reserve and harvesting of the bamboo forests and so there is still some trapping of pheasants happening there. Fortunately the terrain is precipitous in most areas which would make access quite difficult. The drive to the summit (the site of a large Buddhist monastery) from the guard post takes about 90 minutes at bird watching speed and, on our full days there, we would do the round trip twice. Today, we had the excitement early on of a quick glimpse of a **Cabot's Tragopan** followed a little later by much better views of a female with a chick. For all the time that we were at Emeifeng, the light was awful and it made photography very difficult – hence the poor quality of my pictures.



Figure 18 - female Cabot's Tragopan

We reached the top without further sightings and had a walk around the semi-open woodland there adding **Grey Bushchat**, **Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler** and **White-spectacled Warbler** to our tally. The drive down, although in showers and thunderstorms, was more productive as we saw our first **Silver Pheasant** of the trip followed by a pair of the elusive **Koklass Pheasant**, although only the female was well seen. The male Silver Pheasant (large at 1.0m or so) is an odd looking bird having black plumage covered in a silver cape and when seen in poor light, does not have a bird-like shape, as all you see is the silver 'cape'. At the bottom of the hill, we stopped for a walk around the rice paddies and found **Mandarin Duck**, my first countable sighting of this species. Also, I had a strange experience with a recently fledged Barn Swallow which posed well for a photo and, when I got home and looked at the pictures, I found that the adult was in the act of feeding it and I wasn't at all aware of it at the time. It started raining again, so it was back to dinner in the hotel and a good night's sleep.



Figure 19 - male Silver Pheasant in poor light



Figure 20 - Barn Swallow feeding young

Friday 3 June, 2016

We headed back up the mountain this morning in what was, at first, brighter conditions but with strong winds. On the way there, a **Chinese Bamboo Partridge** ran across the road in front of us, the only one that we saw on the trip – we heard many more though. During the morning, we drove up to the summit, back down to the bottom and then back to the top seeing good numbers of Silver Pheasants, a male Cabot's Tragopan and a pair of Koklass Pheasants but were unable to get a decent photograph of any of them. It started to pour with rain again and we sat in the vehicle to eat our lunch in the hope that it would pass. It eased off somewhat and we headed back down the mountain in very gloomy conditions. Surprisingly, on this trip, there was a lot of bird activity which made the trip down quite lengthy. Trip species seen on this one drive included **Striated Yuhina**, **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush**, **Yellow-cheeked Tit**, **White-bellied Erpornis**, a heard **Great Barbet**, **Little Forktail** and **Sultan Tit**.



Figure 21 - Yellow-cheeked Tit

As we reached the bamboo forests at the bottom of the hill, we had fleeting looks at a female **Elliot's Pheasant** which is the scarcest of the pheasants in this area – but we were to get much better views of a female with chicks tomorrow. We enjoyed the day despite the abysmal weather and we stayed in the hotel for dinner again to avoid the rain.

Saturday 4 June, 2016



Figure 22 - harvesting bamboo on Emeifeng Mountain



Figure 23 - Lau Lin and Lin looking for pheasants

We drove up and down the mountain twice in the morning delayed a little by the bamboo harvesting operations blocking the road and we found no new birds although we saw the white-headed form of Black Bulbul which was nice. With the weather deteriorating again, it was decided to drive to another less mountainous area across the valley where the weather seemed clearer. On the way, we picked up **Black Baza**, **Brown Dipper**, **Slaty-backed Forktail**, **Black Eagle** and **Grey Wagtail** along with quite a few other species that we had already seen. The highlight of the early afternoon was seeing a female Elliot's Pheasant herding her young and even managing to take passable photographs!



Figure 24 - female Elliot's Pheasant

We finished birding in mid-afternoon and headed to the station in Taining to take the 16.57 super fast train to the large coastal city of Fuzhou, a journey of about two hours. We checked into a modern hotel right next to the station (chosen by Lin to make it simple for us when we left Fuzhou on our own) and even organised to get some laundry done.

Sunday 5 June 2016

The principal reason for coming to Fuzhou was to search for Chinese Crested Terns in the Fujiang River Estuary and we would do that tomorrow as the tides are more favourable. So today we headed to the Fuzhou National Forest Park, a large natural and hilly forested area on the outskirts of the city. It being Sunday there were large numbers of people there but we took a long path which climbed up a few hundred metres and down again and there were only a few people walking the same circuit. Although the habitat looked good, it was extremely hot and humid and we saw very few birds, none of them new for the trip. Arriving back at the bottom, we found our first new trip bird of the day, a **Red-whiskered Bulbul** and, in the stream flowing through the park, we found a lovely Slaty-backed Forktail which we had seen previously but not as well.



Figure 25 - Slaty-backed Forktail

After an excellent lunch of rice noodles we set off on another walk and encountered a **Large Woodshrike** and a **Crested Serpent Eagle** soaring high up the escarpment. Once again the rain set in very heavily and we took shelter under the overhang of a building from where we saw a group of **Scarlet Minivet** working their way through the trees. At 3.30pm there was no sign of the rain easing so we gave up and headed back to the hotel.

Monday 6 June, 2016

We awoke to the last day of our birding tour in appropriately dark and gloomy conditions but at least it wasn't actually raining! We drove out of the city along the coast in a north easterly direction for an hour to the Fujiang River estuary at the town of Minjiang. Access to the roosting site of the Chinese Crested Terns is strictly controlled and Lin had obtained permits for us in advance that were plastic cards with our names and photographs on them – very impressive for a three hour visit. We arrived in a small village near the coast and went to the house of the duck farmer who farms the area through which you have to pass to reach the site. He arrived at the wharf in a very old wooden boat with two big panniers of blue duck eggs which he had just collected from the duck pen and we got in rather gingerly for the drive down the tidal channel to reach the river mouth. We tallied a couple of new species on the way out, these being **white-shouldered Starling** and **Greater Coucal**. The going was very slow as his old diesel engine could only just overcome the speed of the incoming tide – you can only get there either side of high tide. When we arrived, we had to exit the boat on a plank of wood that was balanced across to the shore – a somewhat hairy exercise. We immediately found that there were heaps of birds out there including shorebirds, gulls and terns and we proceeded to have a great time walking along the rubbish-filled shoreline picking up new birds along the way.

It didn't take Lin very long to find our first **Chinese Crested Tern** among the many **Greater Crested Tern** – they stood out quite clearly in the scope as being smaller and whiter with an obvious black tip to their yellow bill, and we saw four in all.



Figure 26 - our transportation arrives to collect us



Figure 27 - Lin and our local guide Forest on the right



Figure 28 - scoping the Chinese Crested Terns

In addition to the crested terns, we also recorded **White-winged Tern**, **Common Tern**, **Caspian Tern**, **Whiskered Tern** and **Black-tailed Gull**. There were good numbers of shorebirds, either late migrants or non breeders, all of which are familiar species to us in Australia. The only land bird to visit us was a smart **Eurasian Hoopoe**.



Figure 29 - Eurasian Hoopoe

While we were busy birding, the boatman opened the wire pen that housed his 3000 or so ducks and let them head off into the sea for some R&R. It was interesting to see them walking quite close to the Chinese Crested Terns (which didn't seem bothered by them) but we wondered what the dangers were of spreading bird flu to a critically endangered species. Since we had left it late to return to shore, the boatman informed us that the water was too shallow now to get back to his wharf and he would drop us in the muddy marshes. Again we had to negotiate the long plank to a very wet and muddy shore but we eventually made it and headed back to the vehicle.

At this stage, we took Lin to the nearby Fuzhou Airport for his flight home to Shanghai and then went with local guide Forest back to the Fuzhou National Forest Park for a last couple of hours of birding. However, it was very quiet there and other than a **Common Tailorbird**, we saw no more new trip species and headed back to the hotel at 4.30pm.

Tuesday 7 June, 2016 to Sunday 12 June, 2016

We checked out of the Fuzhou hotel on Tuesday morning and took the super fast train to Hangzhou where we stayed for two nights close to the scenic West Lake. On the Thursday morning, we took an inter-city bus to Suzhou where we stayed for two nights also – we didn't get the binoculars out at either of these cities. We departed from Shanghai's Pudong Airport at 7.55pm on Qantas flight QF130 and arrived in Sydney the next morning on time at 8.30am.

Roger McGovern (roglou@bigpond.net.au)

July 2016

LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

(Note that this list follows the nomenclature and taxonomy of the IOC World Bird List version 6.2)

(Heard birds were included on the list if they had previously been seen elsewhere but were not included on the list if they would have been life birds)

* indicates that the species was a life bird

*	Chinese Bamboo Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracica</i>
*	Cabot's Tragopan	<i>Tragopan caboti (caboti)</i>
*	Koklass Pheasant	<i>Pucrasia macrolopha (darwini)</i>
*	Silver Pheasant	<i>Lophura nycthemera (fokiensis)</i>
*	Elliot's Pheasant	<i>Syrnaticus ellioti</i>
	Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus (torquatus)</i>
	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
	Eastern Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>

*	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>
*	Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus canicappilus (kaleensis)</i>
	Great -spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major (mandarinus)</i>
	Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus (sobrinus)</i>
	Great Barbet (heard)	<i>Psilopogon virens (virens)</i>
	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis (bengalensis)</i>
	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrmensis (fokiensis)</i>
	Black-capped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon pileata</i>
	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis (insignis)</i>
	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops (longirostris)</i>
	Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis (cyanocollis)</i>
	Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis (viridis)</i>
	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus (chinensis)</i>
	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis (sinensis)</i>
	Large Hawk Cuckoo (heard)	<i>Hierococcyx sparveriodes</i>
	Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus (micropterus)</i>
	Eurasian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus (bakeri)</i>
	Himalayan Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus saturatus</i>
	Lesser Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus poliocephalus</i>
	White-throated Needletail	<i>Hirundapus caudacutus (caudacutus)</i>
	Pacific Swift	<i>Apus pacificus (kanoi)</i>
	House Swift	<i>Apus nipalensis (nipalensis)</i>
	Brown Hawk-Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata (burmanica)</i>
	Asian Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides (whiteleyi)</i>
	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis (orientalis)</i>
	Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis (chinensis)</i>
	Red Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>

*	Brown Crake	<i>Amaurornis akool (coccineipes)</i>
	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
	Grey-headed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus cinereus</i>
	Eastern Curlew	<i>Mumenius madagascariensis</i>
	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
	Great Knot	<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>
	Red Knot	<i>Calidris canutus</i>
	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>
	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
*	Long-billed Plover	<i>Charadrius placidus</i>
	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus (dealbatus)</i>
		Previously Swinhoe's Plover but now lumped with Kentish Plover
	Lesser Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultia</i>
	Black-tailed Gull	<i>Larus crassirostris</i>
	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo (longipennis)</i>
	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons (sinensis)</i>
	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida (hybrida)</i>
	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
	Greater Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bergii (cristatus)</i>
*	Chinese Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus bernsteini</i>
	Black Baza	<i>Aviceda leuphotes (syama)</i>
	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans (lineatus)</i>

	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela (ricketti)</i>
	Crested Goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivergatus (indicus)</i>
	Chinese Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter soloensis</i>
	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis (malayiensis)</i>
*	Pied Falconet	<i>Microhierax melanoleucos</i>
	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo (streichi)</i>
	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis (poggei)</i>
	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta (garzetta)</i>
	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba (alba)</i>
	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia (intermedia)</i>
	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
	Chinese Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>
	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax (nycticorax)</i>
	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
	Black Bittern	<i>Dupetor flavicollis (flavicollis)</i>
*	Crested Ibis	<i>Nipponia nippon</i>
	Tiger Shrike	<i>Lanius tigrinus</i>
	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus (lucionensis)</i>
	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach (schach)</i>
*	Large Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis virgatus (jugans)</i>
	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius (sinensis)</i>
	Red-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa erythrorhyncha (erythrorhyncha)</i>
	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus (cyanus)</i>
*	Grey Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta formosae (sinica)</i>
	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica (serica)</i>
	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos (colonorum)</i>
	Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis (diffusus)</i>

*	Black-winged Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melaschistos (intermedia)</i>
*	Swinhoe's Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus cantonensis</i>
	Grey-chinned Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus solaris (grisogularis)</i>
	Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus (fohkiensis)</i>
	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus (cathoecus)</i>
	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus (salangensis)</i>
	Hair-crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus (brevirostris)</i>
	Brown Dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii (pallasii)</i>
*	Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola rufiventris</i>
	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitaries (pandoo)</i>
*	Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus (eugenei)</i>
*	Chinese Blackbird	<i>Turdus mandarinus (mandarinus)</i>
	Split from Common Blackbird	
*	Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus (aureus)</i>
*	Plumbeous Water Redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus (fuliginosus)</i>
	Grey-streaked Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa griseisticta</i>
	Dark-sided Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa sibirica (rothschildi)</i>
	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica (dauurica)</i>
*	Yellow-rumped Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula zanthopygia</i>
	Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis (prosthopellus)</i>
*	Little Forktail	<i>Enicurus scouleri</i>
	Slaty-backed Forktail	<i>Enicurus schistaceus</i>
	White-crowned Forktail	<i>Enicurus leschenaultia (indicus)</i>
*	Grey Bushchat	<i>Saxicola ferrea</i>
*	Red-billed Starling	<i>Spodiopsar sericeus</i>
	White-shouldered Starling	<i>Sturnia sinensis</i>
	White-cheeked Starling	<i>Spodiopsar cineraceus</i>

	Black-collared Starling	<i>Gracupica nigricollis</i>
	Crested Myna	<i>Acridotheres cristatellus (cristatellus)</i>
	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater (kuatunensis)</i>
	Japanese Tit	<i>Parus minor (commixtus)</i>
	Split from Great Tit	
	Yellow-cheeked Tit	<i>Macrolophus spilonotus (rex)</i>
	Sultan Tit	<i>Melanochlora sultanea (seossa)</i>
*	Silver-throated Bushtit	<i>Aegithalos glaucogularis (glaucogularis)</i>
	Split from Long-tailed Tit	
	Black-throated Bushtit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus (concinnus)</i>
*	Pale Martin	<i>Riparia diluta (fohkienensis)</i>
	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica (gutturialis)</i>
	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica (japonica)</i>
	Asian House Martin	<i>Delichon dasypus (nigrimentale)</i>
	Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus (jacosus)</i>
*	Brown-breasted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthorrous (andersoni)</i>
	Light-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis (hainanus)</i>
*	Collared Finchbill	<i>Spizixos semitorques (semitorques)</i>
	Chestnut Bulbul	<i>Hemixos castanonotus (canipennis)</i>
	Mountain Bulbul	<i>Ixos mcclellandii (holtii)</i>
*	Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus (leucocephalus)</i>
	Both forms (all black and white-headed) seen	
	Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flaviventris (sonitans)</i>
	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata (extensicauda)</i>
*	Brown-flanked Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis fortipes (davidianus)</i>
	Japanese Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis diphone (canturians)</i>
	Formerly Manchurian Bush Warbler now lumped	

*	Blunt-winged Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus concinens (concinens)</i>
	Oriental Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>
	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius (longicauda)</i>
*	Hartert's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus goodsoni (fokiensis)</i>
	Split from Blyth's Leaf Warbler	
	Chestnut-crowned Warbler	<i>Seicercus castaniceps (sinensis)</i>
*	Rufous-faced Warbler	<i>Abroscopus albogularis (fulvifacies)</i>
*	White-spectacled Warbler	<i>Seicercus affinis (intermedius)</i>
	Masked Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax perspicillatus</i>
*	Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax pectoralis (picticollis)</i>
*	Blue-crowned Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax courtoisi (couthouisi)</i>
	Locally called Courtois's Laughingthrush	
*	Buffy Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax berthemyi</i>
	Split from Rusty Laughingthrush	
	Chinese Hwamei	<i>Garrulax canorus (canorus)</i>
*	White-browed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax sannio</i>
	Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus ruficollis (hunanensis)</i>
*	Grey-sided Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus swinhoi</i>
*	Rufous-capped Babbler	<i>Stachyris ruficeps (davidi)</i>
	Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea (kwangtungensis)</i>
*	Green Shrike Babbler	<i>Pteruthius xanthochlorus (pallidus)</i>
*	Grey-cheeked Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe morrisonia (hueti)</i>
*	Striated Yuhina	<i>Yuhina castaniceps</i>
	White-bellied Erpornis	<i>Erpornis zantholeuca (griseiloris)</i>
	Formerly White-bellied Yuhina	
*	Grey-headed Parrotbill	<i>Psittiparus gularis (fokiensis)</i>
*	Reed Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis heudei (heudei)</i>

*	Vinous-throated Parrotbill	<i>Sinusuthora webbiana (suffuse)</i>
	Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula (coelivox)</i>
	Japanese White-eye	<i>Zosterops japonicas (simplex)</i>
	White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata (swinhoei)</i>
	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata (topela)</i>
*	Russet Sparrow	<i>Passer rutilans (intensior)</i>
	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus (malaccensis)</i>
	Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba (alboides)</i>
	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea (cinera)</i>
	Pechora Pipit	<i>Anthus gustavi (menzbien)</i>
	Grey-capped Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis sinica (sinica)</i>
	Chinese Grosbeak	<i>Eophona migratoria (sowerbyi)</i>
*	Japanese Grosbeak	<i>Eophona personata (magnirostris)</i>
*	Slaty Bunting	<i>Emberizasiemsseni</i>
	Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides (castaneiceps)</i>

Total species recorded **176**

Total number of life birds **49**

MAMMALS

Tibetan Macaque	<i>Macaca thibetana</i>
Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel	<i>Dremomys pernyi</i>
Maritime Striped Squirrel	<i>Tamiops maritimus</i>
Pallas's Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus erthraeus</i>

