

Trip Report Beidaihe/China 22.8-3.9. 1999

By Gerd Rotzoll

This birding trip was undertaken after attending a conference in Beijing. Therefore the timing could not be freely chosen and turned out to be somewhat too early for much of the passerine migration. Nevertheless, shorebird migration was in full swing and a lot of other interesting birds were seen, too.

Logistics

Travel. Travelling alone as a westerner in China is still not very easy. Most people don't speak English and you need some help to get along. Getting from Beijing to Beidaihe is straightforward since several trains go daily. The ticket for this journey was obtained for me by the conference staff. For getting from one place to another in Beijing or Beidaihe, taking a taxi is the most convenient way. They are much cheaper than in Europe, but one should approximately know the price level in order to avoid getting cheated. To tell the taxi driver where you want to go, it is very helpful to have your destination written down by someone in Chinese. In Beijing, I used a rough sketch of the city with the most important locations (airport, train station etc.). In Beidaihe, I simply showed the taxi driver a brochure of the hotel.

Hotel. I stayed at the Friendship hotel in Beidaihe. I had a reservation that was made by Jesper Hornskov, a Danish birder/tourleader living in Beidaihe whom I had contacted before by email. Unfortunately, Jesper was in Denmark during my stay but had named an English speaking contact in Beidaihe. The Friendship hotel consists of a main building and about 30 additional buildings situated in a large park. I was put up in the main building in an air-conditioned (important because of the heat!) room with essentially western standard (and western price). The hotel park is quite nice with many trees, bushes and also some more remote weedy areas. This park attracted quite some birds and I birded it regularly.

Food. Getting food in the hotel turned out to be a bit problematic. Of the 3 restaurants listed in the hotel brochure, only the Chinese one was open and the western restaurant closed or even non-existent. My Chinese contact suggested that I go to a nearby small restaurant instead. I told her what I wanted for breakfast and supper and she negotiated a price with the restaurant for the whole time that I paid as a lump sum. I thus didn't have to bother with ordering and paying every time but otherwise was at the mercy of the restaurant people. Apart from some misunderstandings, this arrangement worked out quite well and the food was generally good. During the day I relied on biscuits, fruit and mineral water bought on the streets.

Weather, getting around. Being used to a moderate climate, the weather in Beidaihe was hard to bear. It was hot (above 30°C), very humid and usually hazy with southerly winds. Only on two days the wind shifted to a northerly direction with drier air and much better visibility. Not a single drop of rain fell during my stay. To get around it is essential to rent a bike in Beidaihe. My Chinese contact got one for me that was somewhat rusty but served its purpose. To find the places I wanted to visit I bought a map of Beidaihe from the hotel shop. I was the only birder for miles around. The only

other birdwatcher I met once was Zhiyong Wang who is the secretary of the Beidaihe Birdwatching Society and who had started birding only a couple of months ago!

Places visited

The birding spots at Beidaihe have been described by Geoff Carey in an article in *Birding World* (Vol. 4, No. 7, 1991, p. 242). Since then the town has changed a lot through development but the birding places are essentially the same. In particular, I visited the following sites:

- Sand flats at Eagle Rock (SF) on 23./25./27./29./30.8. and 1.9.
- Reservoir opposite the sand flats (R) on 24./27./29./30.8. and 1.9.
(large pond surrounded by trees and bushes)
- Lotus Hills (LH), or more correctly, Lianfeng Hill Park on 28. and 31.8.
- Yang Ho (YH), estuary southwest of Beidaihe on 2.9.
- Friendship hotel park (HP) every day from 22.8.-3.9.

I used the following two field guides:

- *Birds of Hong Kong and South China* (Viney, Phillips, Lam)
- *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan* (Wild Bird Society of Japan)

Overview

Shorebirds had a high priority for me and so the sand flats and the reservoir (which has areas with mud and shallow water) were the places I visited most often. The sand flats are apparently not used as a staging area by most birds but as a short stopover site during migration. Thus there was often much change even during one visit. A good way to follow this was to stand in the middle of the flats (there is a boat wreck), preferably during high tide, and watch the birds coming in and flying out. I saw 34 species of shorebirds in total. In addition, gulls (5 species) and terns (6 species) were regularly present and/or migrating.

Passerine migration was dominated by a limited number of species all the time. Very obvious were Brown Shrikes, Flycatchers (5 species) and Arctic Warblers. After a temporary weather change a small fall of Siberian Stone Chats, Siberian Blue Robins and *Locustella* warblers occurred in the hotel park. Other groups of birds like large thrushes, pipits or finches were almost completely absent.

For raptors, the Lotus Hills are the recommended lookout. This worked quite well during the morning hours on my two visits. But again, only a small number of species was seen, mostly Pied Harriers and Japanese Sparrowhawks.

Species seen

1. Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)
Common at (R)
2. Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)
1-4 at (SF) on 23.-29.8.
3. Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*)
1 in front of the reservoir dam wall on 23. and 27.8.
4. Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)
1-5 around (R) on 27.8-1.9.
5. Chinese Pond Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*)
Common at (R), also at (SF) and (YH)
6. Great Egret (*Egretta alba*)
Regular with up to 15 at (R)
7. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
Common (up to 100) at (R), also at (SF) and (YH)
8. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
Up to 40 at (R)
9. Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)
1 juv. at (R) on 27./30.8. and 1.9.
10. Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)
2 ad. + 1 juv. at (SF) on 30.8.
11. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
Only 3 sightings at (R)
12. Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)
4 on 29./30.8. and 5 on 1.9. at (R)
13. White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*)
1 flyby over the sea at (SF) on 23.8.
14. Black-eared Kite (*Milvus lineatus*)
1 over (R) on 27.8.
15. Pied Harrier (*Circus melanoleucos*)
1 juv. over a rice field at (R) on 27.8. From the (LH), 7 were seen migrating on 28.8. and at least 20 on 31.8.

16. Eastern Marsh Harrier (*Circus spilonotus*)
1 at (R) on 24.8. and 1.9. 3-4 were seen migrating from the (LH) on 28. and 31.8.
17. Japanese Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter gularis*)
From the (LH), 10 migrating small Accipiters were seen on 23.8. and at least 20 on 31.8. Most or all were this species.
18. Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
1 on 28.8. and 3 on 31.8. from the (LH)
19. Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)
2 (resident) birds at (LH) on 28./31.8.
20. Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*)
1-3 around (R) 27.8.-1.9.
21. Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)
Fairly common at (R)
22. Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*)
Up to 20+ at (SF) all the time
23. Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*)
3 flying over (SF) on 27.8.
24. Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*)
Mostly single birds at (R). 10 at (SF) on 25.8.
25. Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)
Very common at (SF) all the time
26. Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*)
1 juv. at (SF) on 30.8.-1.9.
27. Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*)
1 at (SF) 23. and 27.8.
28. Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*)
Common at (SF) all the time. Highest count 55+ on 27.8., also at (YH) on 2.9.
29. Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)
In strongly variable numbers and not daily at (SF), highest number 50 on 25.8., also 3 at (YH) on 2.9.
30. Far Eastern Curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*)
2 at (SF) on 29.8. and 2-3 on 30.8.; 15 at (YH) on 2.9.

31. Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)
1 at (SF) on 23.8.
32. Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)
Only 1 ad. at (SF) 23.-27.8.
33. Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*)
Variable numbers both at (SF) and (R), usually between 10 and 20
34. Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)
Rather small numbers (up to 5) at (SF) and (R). Also 5 at (YH) on 2.9.
35. Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)
1-3 at (R) on 24.8-1.9.
36. Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)
Fairly common at (SF) and (R), highest number 30 at (R) on 30.8.
37. Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*)
10+ at (SF) on 25.8., but only 1-2 on later dates
38. Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*)
Around 15 at (SF) all the time, also 2 at (YH) on 2.9.
39. Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)
Only a few at (SF) and (R)
40. Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
2 on 25.8., 1 on 29.8. and 3 on 1.9. at (SF)
41. Pintail Snipe (*Gallinago stenura*)
2 flying over the (SF) on 25.8. 2-5 at (R) between 29.8. and 1.9.
Excellent close views of birds sitting in the open!
42. Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)
Up to 10 regularly at (R)
43. Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*)
2 on 25.8. and 5 on 29.8. at (SF)
44. Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*)
2 on 23.8., 1 on 25.8., 5 on 30.8. and 2 on 1.9. at (SF), also 2 at (YH) on 2.9.
45. Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)
1 ad. on 23.-27.8. and 1 ad. + 2-3 juv. on 29./30.8. at (SF)
46. Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)
1 ad. in worn breeding plumage at (SF) on 25.8.

47. Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*)
The most common small sandpiper at (SF). Highest number about 100 on 25.8. Mostly juveniles, but also some adults in worn breeding plumage. I didn't find any individual that looked like a juv. Little Stint. Also, the call is clearly different: „chit-chit“, already described in the Japanese fieldguide almost 20 years ago!
48. Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*)
2 at (SF) on 25.8., 1 at (R) on 27.8. and 1 at (SF) on 29.8.
49. Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*)
1 juv. at (R) on 29./30.8.
50. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*)
4+ at (SF) on 25.8.
51. Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*)
Small numbers only: 1-4 at (SF) between 23.8. and 1.9.
52. Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)
Highest number 15 at (SF) on 25.8., only 1-2 on 23./29.8. and 1.9.
53. Broad-billed Sandpiper (*Limicola falcinellus*)
An impressive flock of 53 at (SF) on 25.8., 8 on 27.8. and singles on 29.8. and 1.9.
54. Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
Variable numbers (up to 20) both at (SF) and (R)
55. Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)
A flock of 25 at (SF) on 25.8. and 30.8.
56. Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*)
Several (up to 20) at (SF) on every visit; plumage from juv. to ad.; also at (YH) on 2.9.
57. Common Gull (*Larus canus kamschatschensis*)
Only 1 ad. at (SF) from 27.8.-1.9.
58. Vega Gull (*Larus vegae*)
10-30 at (SF) all the time, also at (YH) on 2.9.
59. Relict Gull (*Larus relictus*)
3 ad. dropped in at (SF) on 29.8. and stayed for about 1 hour before moving on.
60. Common Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*)
The most common gull at (SF), smaller numbers also at (R); also at (YH)

61. Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*)
5+ on 25.8. and 15 on 27.8. roosting/migrating at (SF). At (R), about 25 on 29.8., 15 on 30.8. and 150+ on 1.9.
62. White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucoptera*)
Very common migrant! For example, several 100 were migrating and/or roosting at (SF) on 25.8. Somewhat smaller numbers on other dates. Also noticed migrating over the (LH) (200+ on 28.8.) and roosting at (R) (20 on 1.9.)
63. Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)
12+ at (SF) on 25.8. and 1 on 29.8.; 2 at (YH) on 2.9.
64. Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*)
About 10 at (SF) on 23.8., 2 on 29.8. and 3 on 30.8.
65. Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
Common at (SF) all the time, also at (YH)
66. Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons*)
2-3 at (SF) between 23.8. and 1.9.; 20 at (YH) on 2.9.
67. Oriental Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*)
Fairly common in (HP) and around (R)
68. Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
Only 1 in (HP) on 1.9.
69. Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)
One large, light Cuckoo in (HP) on 24.8. certainly was this species. Many other cuckoos had to be left unidentified because of too distant or short views, including one brown morph individual migrating over (LH) on 31.8.
70. Pacific Swift (*Apus pacificus*)
Small numbers (up to 5+) over (HP) and (LH) between 22.8. and 2.9.
71. Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)
Encountered every time at (R) with up to 5
72. Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*)
1 at (R) on 24./29.8. and 1.9. Also 1 in completely dry pine forest at (LH) on 28.8.
73. Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)
Regularly in small numbers (1-3) in (HP). Also 1-2 around (R) on 24./29./30.8.
74. European Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*)
2 in (HP) on 26.8. and 1 on 31.8. and 1./3.9. 1 at (R) on 29./30.8. and 1.9.

75. Grey-headed Woodpecker (*Picus canus*)
1 in (HP) on 4 days. 1 at (R) on 24.8.
76. Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major*)
1-2 occasionally in (HP), at (R) and once at (LH)
77. Rufous-bellied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus hyperythrus*)
1 in (HP) on 31.8. and 1 at (R) on 1.9.
78. Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)
Common at all places visited
79. Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*)
Occasionally fairly common at (HP) and (R)
80. Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)
Only 1 at (SF) on 25.8. and at (R) on 30.8.
81. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
1 at (R) on 27.8.
82. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
Only 1 of the race *leucopsis* at (R) on 24. and 29.8. Several on the way to (YH) on 2.9.
83. Richard's Pipit (*Anthus novaeseelandiae*)
2 migrating over the (LH) on 28.8., 1 over the (HP) on 29.8. and 1+ at (SF) on 1.9.
84. Chinese Bulbul (*Pycnonotus sinensis*)
2 flew over the road on the way to (YH) on 2.9.
85. Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*)
One of the most conspicuous migrants. Good numbers (5-10+) both at (HP) and around (R) all the time. Also at (YH).
86. Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*)
Fairly common (10+) both at (HP) and around (R)
87. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)
Singles at (HP) on 23.8. and 1.9., at (R) on 24.8. and 3 at (HP) on 26.8.
88. Blue Magpie (*Urocissa erythrorhyncha*)
Occasionally in the (HP) with a maximum of 7 on 3.9. Also 10 at (LH) on 31.8.
89. Black-billed Magpie (*Pica pica*)
Common and conspicuous at (HP) and (R)

90. Crested Myna (*Acridotheres cristatellus*)
Regularly in the (HP) with up to 4 on 1.9.
91. Siberian Blue Robin (*Erithacus cyane*)
A 1st year male in the (HP) on 27.8. was the first bird. Singles were also present on the following days, but a „fall“ had probably occurred on 1.9. when about 10 of these skulking and difficult to observe birds were estimated.
92. Siberian Stonechat (*Saxicola maura stejnegeri*)
Varying numbers (1-5) were encountered all the time at the edge of (SF), around (R) and in the (HP). Also many in fields before (YH) on 2.9. Only juveniles were seen.
93. Eye-browed Thrush (*Turdus obscurus*)
1 at (R) on 27.8 was the only large thrush of the whole trip!
94. Vinous-throated Parrotbill (*Paradoxornis webbianus*)
A flock of 7 of these curious birds was seen at (R) on 24.8.
95. Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella certhiola*)
From a weedy field in the (HP), I heard weak „tik-tik“ calls on 31.8. By a combination of cautious flushing and patient waiting I managed to discover about 4 birds. 2+ were still present on the following day and 1 on 2.9.
96. Lanceolated Warbler (*Locustella lanceolata*)
Convinced that this species should also be present, I flushed at least 1 on 1.9. that sat very briefly but long enough in the open to be identified. In contrast to the previous species, I was unable to flush this one more than once. They apparently run away very quickly on the ground after landing.
97. Streaked Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus sorgophilus*)
1 at the edge of (SF) on 25.8.
98. Thick-billed Warbler (*Acrocephalus aedon*)
Singles were seen at (HP) and (R) on many days. Numbers increased to 4-5 at (HP) on 31.8. and 1.9.
99. Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*)
The first was heard in the (HP) on 25.8. Numbers steadily increased up to about 10 on 2.9.
100. Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*)
Small numbers were seen at (HP), (R) and (LH) on most days.
101. Yellow-rumped Flycatcher (*Ficedula zanthopygia*)
1 in basic plumage at (R) on 24.8. and 2 the next day in the (HP). A splendid male in breeding plumage in the (HP) on 27.8.

102. Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva albicilla*)
Small numbers regularly seen at (HP) and (R) between 24.8. and 1.9.
103. Sooty Flycatcher (*Muscicapa sibirica*)
The most common of the „brown“ flycatchers. Regularly seen at (HP) and (R) with numbers up to about 10.
104. Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*)
Also regularly encountered, but in somewhat smaller numbers.
105. Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)
Singles were seen at (HP) on 28./31.8. and 1./3.9., at (LH) on 31.8. and at (R) on 1.9.
106. Marsh Tit (*Parus palustris*)
Singles and small flocks at (HP), (LH) and (R) between 25.8. and 1.9.
107. Great Tit (*Parus major commixtus*)
Noticed only at (HP) on 25.8., but probably overlooked.
108. European Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*)
Very common in many places
109. Common Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*)
1 male at the edge of (SF) on 1.9.

Mystery bird: the following bird, migrating over the (LH) on 31.8., could not be identified. Plumage all dark greyish-brown, with approximate size of an oriole or large thrush and an oriole-like flight. Any suggestions as to the birds identity are most welcome!

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