

Songshan Beijing, China

May 31 – June 1, 2003

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General

Myself, Steve Bale and his wife, Johan Ställberg, Måns Grundsten and Mattias Gerdin spent one and a half day birding on this mountain which is about 100 km northwest of Beijing city. None of us had been before and we knew very little of what to expect so in principle it could be called an exploratory visit. As it turned out it was a successful weekend when we saw many of the birds typical of the Beijing/Hebei mountains.

The aim of the trip was, among others, to find the locally breeding endemic Elisa Flycatcher. This species was formerly regarded as a subspecies of Narcissus Flycatcher. To add complexity, what is most likely the firstsummer males of Elisa Flycatcher have recently been described as Beijing Flycatcher. Furthermore we were interested in finding out if the localized Grey-sided Thrush occurred on this mountain [well, at least we did not find any.]

Another reason for visiting Songshan was as simple as it was one of only two nature reserves in Beijing province that allowed visitors, due to risk of spreading SARS.

Highlights

Songshan offers some really beautiful scenery and could be worth visiting only for some good mountain trekking. When it comes to our birding, no doubt the highlight was the Elisa Flycatchers that we were able to study at length. We also noted a number of interesting birds like Koklass Pheasant (heard only), Chinese Song Thrush (heard only), Blyth's Leaf and Eastern Crowned Warblers, White-browed Hill Warbler, Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Pere David's Laughingthrush, Vinous-throated Parrotbill, Yellow-bellied Tit, Songar Tit, Snowy-browed Nuthatch, Daurian Jackdaw, Godlewski's, Meadow and Yellow-throated Buntings.

Itinerary

31 May

We gathered in central Beijing at 5.00 and drove with the minibus to the northwest out of Beijing along the Badaling Expressway. After a two hour drive we arrived at the reserve entrance and soon had arranged with the hotel. Continued for another kilometer, with a photostop at a Daurian Jackdaw, to the end of the road where we bought some snacks at a small restaurant. Found the start of the trail and began birding from the altitude of 800 m. The trail lead us slowly uphill to a point at 1250 m where a steeper climb began. Here we heard our first Elisa Flycatcher which we studied for a couple of hours.

In the early afternoon we climbed one trail up to 1450 m, but without adding anything special apart from some very nice vistas. Eventually returned along the trail back to the restaurant for drinks.

The remaining part of the day was spent along the road that leads west of the hotel.

Added some birds along a stream that flows through the gorge.

In the evening we had dinner at one of the two hotels.

1 June

Up before dawn so that we would reach the high altitudes at dawn in order to look for Grey-sided Thrush. Heard a few thrushes at around 1500 m, but could not locate them as they were across the big valley or far above us. As it later turned out, they were Chinese Song Thrushes as we had several at Wulingshan one week later. At dawn two Koklass Pheasants called briefly but were too far away to allow any efficient attack.

At about noon we all returned to the restaurant area and did some birding along the stream and hillsides. After a quick lunch at the hotel restaurant we boarded the minibus and went back towards Beijing.

Along the way we stopped for some regular sightseeing at the Great Wall at Badaling where we took the chairlift up on the wall and walked down. It was rather hot and the hoped for Père David's Laughingthrush did not put in any appearance and the only bird of some interest was a Meadow Bunting.

Coming back to Beijing we went straight to the 3BC (Beijing Bird & Beer Club) waterhole at Frank's and stayed there for the remaining part of the afternoon enjoying its services as a fitting end to some enjoyable birding weekend.

Weather

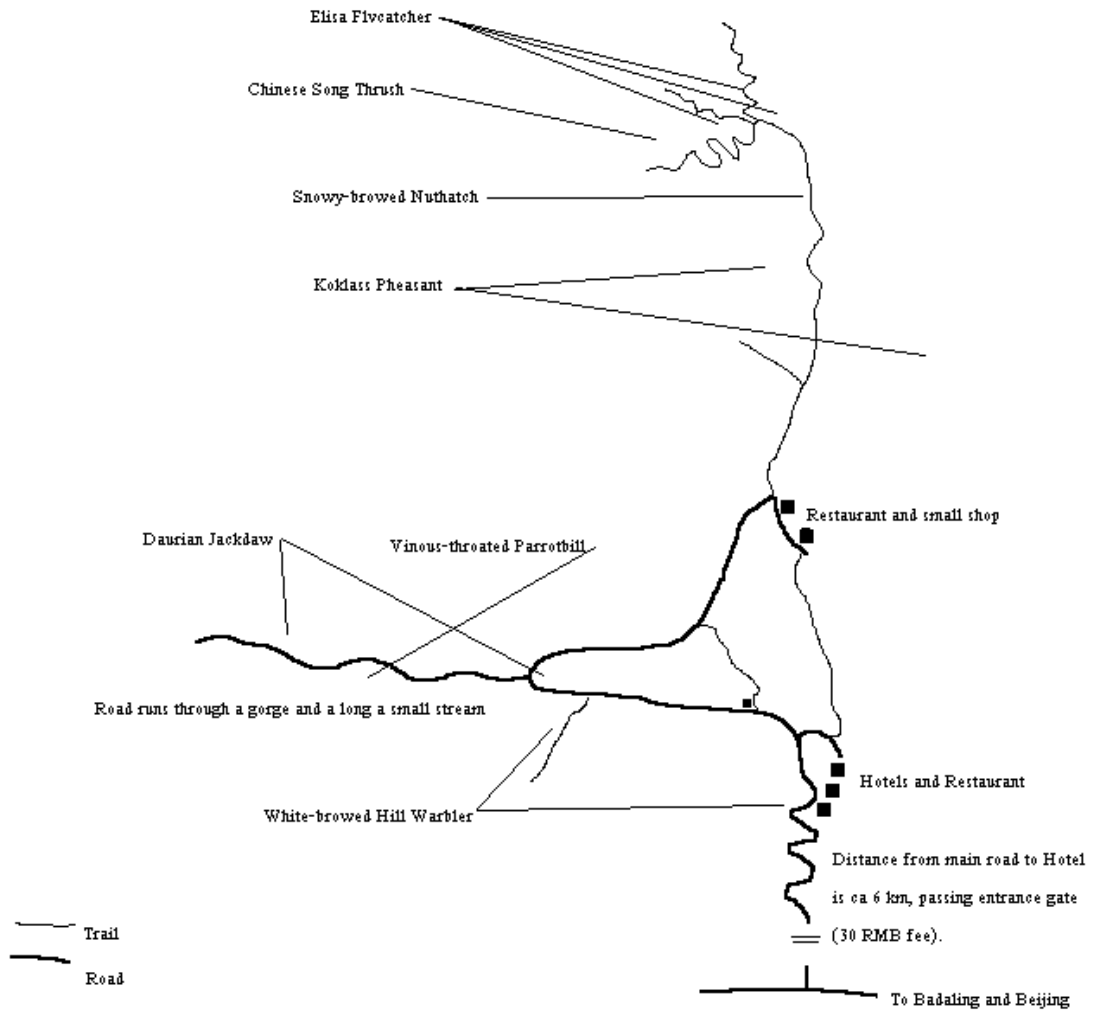
The weather was sunny both days, with pleasant temperatures.

Logistics

We arranged a minibus to take us all to the mountain very early Saturday morning and then get us back Sunday afternoon. There are two hotels available and we made arrangements in advance. This was probably not necessary at the time of our visit, but would certainly be recommended in the summer months, had there not been any SARS travel restrictions. There are a couple of places where you can eat and the hotel has a decent restaurant. Everything within walking distance from where the main trail starts.

Site descriptions

Songshan is a mountain that is easily accessible from Beijing, situated in the northwest part of the municipality. It takes about two hours to get there, starting with the Badaling Expressroad. The entry road ends at 700m altitude. From there, it is an easy walk along one of the few trails up to 1350 m and thereafter a choice of three steeper climbs that probably goes up to close to 2000 m.



Birds

Golden Eagle 1 pair
Northern Sparrowhawk 2
Eurasian Kestrel 2
Eurasian Hobby 1 pair
Koklass Pheasant 2 heard early morning at 1100 m.
Ring-necked Pheasant ca 10
Oriental Turtle Dove 1
Large Hawk-Cuckoo 2-3 heard
Horsfield's Cuckoo 1-2 heard
Scops-Owl sp 1 heard at the hotel in the evening
Grey-faced Woodpecker 1
Great Spotted Woodpecker 1
Long-tailed Minivet ca 10
Winter Wren 1
Chinese Song Thrush 3 heard at ca 1500-1600 m
White-browed Hill Warbler ca 5
Asian Stubtail ca 10 heard
Eastern Crowned Warbler common singing
Blyth's Leaf Warbler common singing
Elisa Flycatcher 1 adult male trapped and another seen, 1 firstsummer male and also two females seen by the others but not by me. All birds within a limited area at 1200-1300 m.
Yellow-rumped Flycatcher 2-3 at 800-900 m
Daurian Redstart ca 5
Vinous-throated Parrotbill 2 along the road at 700 m
Long-tailed Tit 3
Songar Tit common
Great Tit common
Snowy-browed Nuthatch ca 5 at 1100-1300 m
White-eye sp 1
Hair-crested Drongo 2
Eurasian Jay 1
Blue Magpie 2
Eurasian Nutcracker ca 5
Red-billed Chough 2
Daurian Jackdaw 2
Large-billed Crow 4
Godlewski's Bunting 10-15
Meadow Bunting 1
Yellow-throated Bunting 3

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