

Wolong Sichuan, China

7-10 November 2003

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Panorama over Wolong village facing south.

General

Having no idea about what Wolong would be like at this time of the year, I decided to spend an extended weekend in this well-known reserve. Anticipations were maybe not too high, but I was anyway hopeful that there would be some gamebirds and passerines roaming the forests. As it turned out, it was actually very quite in the forest. The odd birds showed well and there were a few mixed species flocks. Generally the birds were hard to come by as they were extremely quite. Nevertheless, with some perseverance there were still a number of really good birds recorded.

Highlights

One prize goes to the absolutely brilliant views of several Temminck's Tragopans. This was one of the target birds and I had lengthy close-up views of both males and females. Another highlight was the Bar-winged Wren-Babbler that entertained me at close range for a while. Three female Golden Pheasants shall of course also make it to this list. However, pride of the place was undoubtedly the Sichuan Treecreeper that was seen in a mixed species flock at Wujipung, which is a new locality for this very recently described species.

Itinerary

7/11

I took the afternoon flight from Beijing, or rather I was supposed to. It was cancelled, but I was fortunate to get onto another flight less than one hour later. At Chengdu airport I was picked up by the Wolong Tourist Hotel staff and we were soon on our way. However, the hotel-car had broken down when they were going to the airport, so we started the journey in a regular taxi until we came to a city less than half-way. There we changed to another of the hotel's cars and eventually we arrived Wolong at 23.15. The drive from the airport is normally less than three hours.

8/11

Departed the hotel at 6.00 and headed for Wujipung. As it is a mere 10 minutes drive from Wolong, I found out that I was well ahead of dawn, which turned out to be at 7.00 this time of the year. Nevertheless I started the walk up the mountain in the dark in order to reach the ridge as early as possible. Fortunately I had done the same trek in July this year so it was no problem to find the trail. After about one hour I reached the ridge and started birding, although there were not an overwhelming amount of birds. However, it did not take me long before I stumbled on a female Temminck's Tragopan feeding on the trail only ten meters in front of me! It continued to feed while I approached it with my camera, but eventually slowly walked away. Next was a Bar-winged Wren-Babbler that kept feeding close to me for quite a while. Close to the research station I found two male Tragopans and were able to film them at close range. A pair of Barred Laughingthrushes had my attention for a while.

For most of the day I walked back and forth along the ridge trail and encountered a few more birds. At 14.00 I started the descent and saw a couple of laughingthrush flocks along the way, one of which contained a pair of Black-faced Laughingthrushes and a pair of Great Parrotbills.

Around 17.00 I was back at the hotel and rounded off the day with a climb up the hillside behind the village. Super views of Chinese Babaxes and later a pair of Moupinias. Dinner at a restaurant in the village after a long well-deserved hot shower.

9/11

Up at 6.30 and walked through the village to the starting point of the trail that should lead up to the mountain behind Wolong village. I had scouted the initial part of this trail the day before and it looked OK. However, after having followed the trail for some time, it painfully became obvious that there were a number of small trails leading parallel with the slope and a few tracks leading uphill. I picked the most apparent trail leading uphill, but soon realized that it vanished into a mammal trail. After a few unsuccessful attempts, I decided to just head straight up the hill. It was very dense and wet and I found myself crawling through the bushes. After gaining ca 200 m altitude, I surrendered as it was pretty obvious that I would not find any Golden Pheasants with this tactic. No doubt the dense fog with slight snow in the air helped taking the decision to retreat and instead try for the Buckthorne site further along the mountain.

As sometimes happens, luck strikes on the way back, and I was all of a sudden happily admiring three female Golden Pheasants slowly strolling past me at close range. Much better than the male I had seen in Norfolk!

When climbing uphill to the Buckthorne site it again became apparent that my only map was not that accurate, so after having tried a few different sites, but none with the preferred buckthorne, I eventually found it or another site and spent most of the afternoon on this part of the slope. Around 16.00 I returned back down to the village and then spent a birdless hour walking along the river east of the village, before returning to the restaurant for dinner.

10/11

Left the hotel at 5.50 in the morning in order to go to Balanshan. During the night it had been snowing even in Wolong village. Nevertheless, we started off heading up the mountain and the layer of snow got thicker as we gained altitude. My intention was to get to 3300+ m and hopefully be able to scan for Chinese Monals. The visibility was surprisingly good, although the Monals were nowhere to be found. To be honest, very few birds at all were around! The mountains were white of snow and the scenery stunning. Walked down from the White Monument at 3350 m to 3250 m and saw a few birds in the snow. Later in the morning I spent almost an hour at Deng Sheng at 2800 m. Back at the hotel at 11.30 and packed up and left for Chengdu, which I arrived at 15.30. After a quick bite I took a taxi from the hotel to Du Fu Cottage, which is supposed to be a decent park for birding. I spent 1.5 hours in the late afternoon. As a change the park is live with birds, especially Bulbuls, but a nice assortment of passerines occur. Best of all was a large flock of Black-throated Tits, which was my third lifer within the genus *Aegithalos* over two days. At 18.00 I returned to the hotel and started the business part of this trip.



View from 3300 meter at Balanshan.

Weather

The first day was overcast with fairly low clouds covering the ridge at Wujipung. Temperatures were around 10 degrees. The second day was fairly similar. The third day was much colder and snow had fallen overnight, making the mountains looking completely white, especially at higher altitudes at Balanshan. Very beautiful indeed.

Logistics

I did a repeat of a trip that I did in July this year, i.e. booked through a travel agent in Beidaihe. Included in the package was an airport pickup and hotel drop-off in Chengdu as well as three nights at the Tourist Hotel in Wolong. All in all this was 1760 RMB. Additional costs were the local transportation which was 100 RMB for a delivery/pickup for Wujipung (expensive given the short time it takes to go there) and 150 RMB for half a day trip to Balanshan. There is a guide at the hotel that speaks good english, which can be useful ☺.

Site descriptions

Wolong

Wolong village is sometimes called Sawan or Sawaun, but is the only major village in the area. It holds several hotels and restaurants. From here it takes 10 minutes to drive to the Wujipung trail-head and 1.5 hours to 3500 m at Balanshan.

The slopes above Wolong village can be very good for birding with specialities like Golden Pheasant and Moupinia (Rufous-tailed Babbler). I followed the map in an Ornifolks report but found the map rather useless (contrary to my July report), although principally OK, as there are so many trails over the whole area. Unfortunately some of the trails are rather small and sometimes deteriorates in thick scrub! Your best bet is to ask someone for directions. The key thing is to find the trail-head which is easy: 40 m east of the Si Tong Yuan Hotel which is in the northeast part of the village.

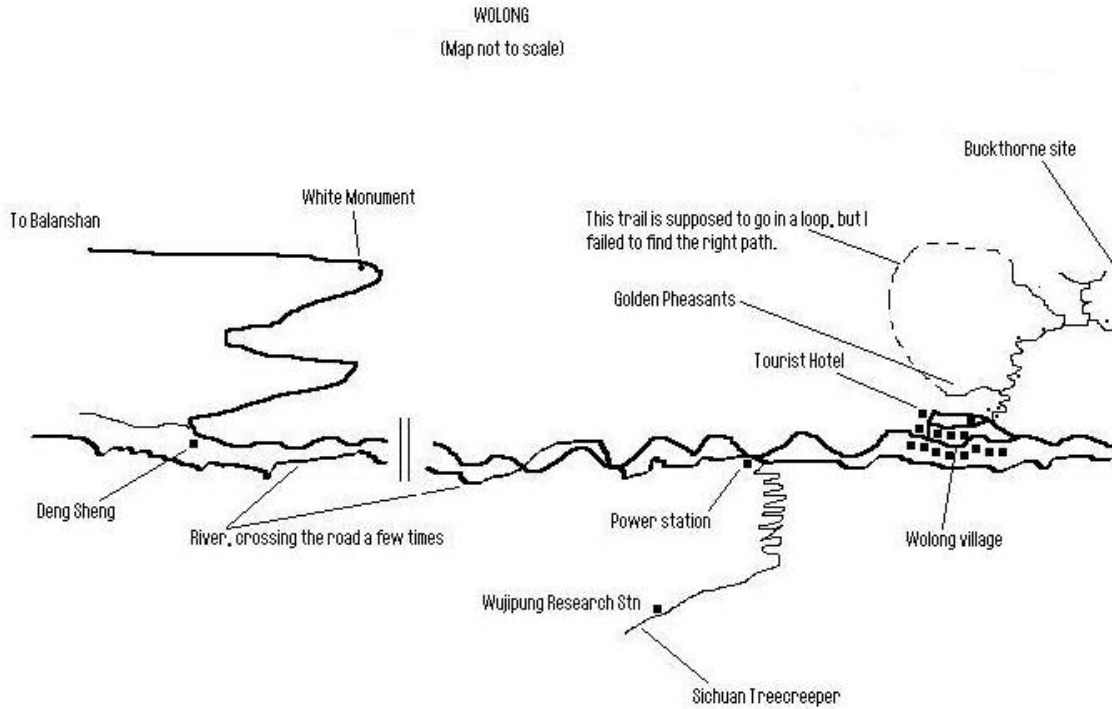
Wujipung

Excellent forest birding with nice patches of bamboo. The trail starts at 2000 m and climbs steeply to 2550 m where it levels out and leads a further 1-1.5 km to the research station/guesthouse at Wujipung. From there it continues at least a few hundred meters and possibly even further. It may be a little bit difficult to find the trailhead so you are better off asking someone who can show you. Basically it is a 10 minutes drive west from Wolong village in a very small village. There is one larger bridge across the river to an obvious power station. Park there and ask the people at the power station for the trail to Wujipung and better ask them to accompany you to the trail-head. Otherwise try walking back east on a small path along the river in between some small farm-houses. After about 200 m you come to a smaller suspension bridge. Above this there is a fairly large creek coming down from the mountain. Walk up this creek-bed and about 200 m up from the main river you can find a small trail taking off up and left. This winding trail basically follows the power line that goes to the ridge. If you walk in the dark or has nothing else

to think about, you can always count the number of turns: 17 righthand turns and you are at the ridge! The walk can be done in about one hour without pushing too hard.

Balanshan

The major mountain if you want to see high altitude birds. This visit I only went to 3350 m, i.e. the White Monument. Another area that could be worth visiting is Deng Sheng at 2800 m. Just at the bend of the road there is an obvious trail that runs due west along the river. It leads through the valley bottom in some nice habitat. The noise from the river can be disturbing, especially after rain.



Du Fu Cottage

A rather small park some 4 km west of the city centre in Chengdu. Certainly a good place to kill a few hours if in town, but not really worth the extra effort. It seems however to be a reliable place for birds like Vinous-throated Parrotbill, Black-throated Tit and White-browed Laughingthrush.

Birds

Himalayan Griffon, *Gyps himalayansis*

One immature seen twice gliding high over the slopes above Wolong village.

Northern Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis*

One coming back down from Wujipung, one soaring over the slopes above Wolong village and one at Deng Sheng.

Blood Pheasant, *Ithaginis cruentus*

Two plus six at 3300 m below the White Monument at Balanshan.

Temminck's Tragopan, *Tragopan temminckii*

One female, two males together, one female and one male. All seen in the morning along the ridge trail.

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*

Two separate males flushed on the slopes above Wolong village.

Golden Pheasant, *Chrysolophus pictus*

Three females together on the lower slopes above the Tourist Hotel in Wolong village.

Spotted Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis*

10+ at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Short-eared Owl, *Asio flammeus*

One soaring high over the slopes above Wolong village.

Owl sp

One medium-sized owl chased by Elliot's Laughingthrushes on the ridge trail at Wujipung.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*

One at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Crimson-breasted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos cathpharius*

One in a flock of nuthatches and treecreepers on the ridge trail at Wujipung.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba leucopsis*

One in the river below Wujipung. One heard in Wolong village. One at at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni*

Seven in a flock flying over behind Wolong and three at at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Water Pipit, *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni*

One at 3200 m below the White Monument at Balanshan.

Collared Finchbill, *Spizixos semitorques*

Five at 2300 m at the "Buckthorne site" above Wolong village.

Light-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus sinensis*

Common at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Rufous-breasted Accentor, *Prunella strophiatea*

One at 2200 m on the slopes above Wolong village.

Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula*

One at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Dusky (Naumann's) Thrush, *Turdus n. naumanni*
Seven feeding on berries on the slopes above Wolong village. Some of them were most likely intermediates between *naumanni* and *eunomus*.

Grey-sided Bush-Warbler, *Cettia brunnifrons*
One at 2100 m on the slopes above Wolong village.

Lemon-rumped Warbler, *Phylloscopus proregulus*
5+ at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Rufous-faced Warbler, *Abroscopus albogularis*
One at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Golden Bush-Robin, *Tarsiger chrysaeus*
One female at 2300 m on the slopes above Wolong village. Called very much like a R-f Bluetail.

Oriental Magpie-Robin, *Copsychus saularis*
Two at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Hodgson's Redstart, *Phoenicuroides hodgsoni*
One female at the river below Wujipung.

White-throated Redstart, *Phoenicurus schisticeps*
One female at 2100 m on the slopes above Wolong village and male at 2850 m at Deng Sheng.

Blue-fronted Redstart, *Phoenicurus frontalis*
10+ on the slopes above Wolong village.

White-capped Water-Redstart, *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*
Three at the river below Wujipung.

Grandala, *Grandala coelicolor*
One flock of ca 50 birds flying along the slope at 2400 m above Wolong village. Flock and flight fairly similar to starlings!

Little Forktail, *Enicurus scouleri*
One adult and one juvenile at the river below Wujipung.

Spotted Forktail, *Enicurus maculatus*
One heard and seen briefly beyond the research station at Wujipung.

Giant Laughingthrush, *Garrulax maximus*
Five between Deng Sheng and the White Monument at Balanshan.

White-browed Laughingthrush, *Garrulax sannio*
10 at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Barred Laughingthrush, *Garrulax lunulatus*
One pair near the research station at Wujipung. One seen at 2300 m on the slopes above Wolong village and one just near Wolong village.

Elliot's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax elliotii*
A handful of sightings of pairs or small flocks at Wujipung. On the slopes above Wolong village it was one of the commonest birds and several were seen and heard between Deng Sheng and the White Monument at Balanshan.

Black-faced Laughingthrush, *Garrulax affinis*
One pair in a babbler flock on the way down from Wujipung.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis*
One in a mixed species flock below Wujipung and one on the slopes above Wolong village.

Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, *Spelaeornis troglodytoides*
One near the research station at Wujipung.

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps*
One in a mixed species flock below Wujipung and one on the slopes above Wolong village.

Rufous-tailed Babbler (Moupinia), *Chrysomma poecilotis*
6-8 on the scrubby hillsides above Wolong village.

Chinese Babax, *Babax lanceolatus*
3-4 in a flock at 2100 m above Wolong village on two consecutive days.

Streak-throated Fulvetta, *Alcippe cinereiceps*
One flock with five birds on the ridge at Wujipung and one in a mixed species flock below Wujipung. Two small flocks on the slopes above Wolong village and three at Deng Sheng.

White-collared Yuhina, *Yuhina diademata*
Two small flocks at 2200 on the slopes above Wolong village and two at Deng Sheng.

Great Parrotbill, *Conostoma oemodium*
One pair together with laughingthrushes on the way down from Wujipung.

Spectacled Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis conspicillatus*
12-15 in a flock at 3300 m below the White Monument at Balanshan.

Vinous-throated Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis webbianus*
40 in one flock at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Black-throated Tit, *Aegithalos concinnus*
30 in one flock at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Black-browed Tit, *Aegithalos iouschistos*
Five in a flock at Deng Sheng.

Sooty Tit, *Aegithalos fuliginosus*
A flock of ca five birds at the "Buckthorne site" at 2300 m above Wolong village.

Songar Tit, *Periparus songara*
Five at 3200 m below the White Monument at Balanshan.

Coal Tit, *Periparus ater*
A few in a tit-flock at Wujipung.

Rufous-vented Tit, *Periparus rubidiventris*
Small numbers in the occasional tit-flocks on the slopes above Wolong village and between Deng Sheng and the White Monument at Balanshan.

Grey-crested Tit, *Lophophanes dichrous*
Two flocks at Wujipung and ca five in tit-flocks on the slopes above Wolong village. Two at Deng Sheng.

Great Tit, *Parus major*
One at Du Fu Cottage, Chengdu.

Yellow-browed Tit, *Sylviparus modestus*
One in a babbler flock at 2200 m on the slopes above Wolong village.

Eurasian Nuthatch, *Sitta europaea*
One flock with 6-7 birds at Wujipung, seen at two occasions.

Wallcreeper, *Tichodroma muraria*
Two flying together high up over the valley below Wujipung.

Eurasian Treecreeper, *Certhia familiaris*

One or two birds in the nuthatch flock at Wujipung and one at Deng Sheng.

Sichuan Treecreeper, *Certhia tianchuanensis*

One in the nuthatch flock beyond the research station at Wujipung was a most surprising find! The species was described as recently as last year, although it had been described as a subspecies of *C familiaris* in 1995. Perhaps this record is after all not so surprising, given that the nearest of the only four known sites is only ca 30 km south of Wolong and basically in the same mountain range. Striking features were the short bill, long unicoloured tail and dusky underparts becoming paler on the throat. This bird was seen in the same flock as a Eurasian Treecreeper and was easily distinguished.

Red-billed Blue Magpie, *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*

One pair at Wolong village and one west of Wolong.

Eurasian Nutcracker, *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Heard and one pair seen at Wujipung. Also one above Wolong village.

Brambling, *Fringilla montifringilla*

One above Wolong village.

Three-banded Rosefinch, *Carpodacus trifasciatus*

One female at 3300 m below the White Monument at Balanshan.

White-browed Rosefinch, *Carpodacus thura*

15 near the White Monument at Balanshan.

Red Crossbill, *Loxia curvirostra*

Three in flight at 2300 m above Wolong village.

Tibetan Serin, *Serinus thibetanus*

Three plus two flying over several times at 2300 m above Wolong village.

Grey-headed Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula erythaca*

A few heard and a flock of seven seen at Wujipung. Singles seen and heard several times above Wolong village.

White-winged Grosbeak, *Mycerobas carnipes*

Four at 3200 m below the White Monument at Balanshan.

Mammals

Deer sp. 3 small deer-like creatures opposite Balanshan.

Mammal sp. Size about 60-80 cm, short-legged, whitish body, long fluffy dark tail and probably dark head. One east of Wolong in the evening.