

# Yiyang & Poyang Hu Jiangxi, China

21-23 Nov 2003

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*Scaly-sided Mergansers. Copyright: Bjorn Anderson*

## General

This was a privately organized trip with 3BC, with the very kind assistance of local and professional birdwatchers from Beijing and Nanchang. We were a total of five birders from Beijing, Shanghai and Beidaihe that were especially keen on seeing Scaly-sided Merganser. Besides that, only one of us had previously been to Poyang Hu, so that was another major reason for going.

## Highlights

Without doubt, the highlight of the trip was the absolutely brilliant views we had of Scaly-sided Mergansers near Yiyang. The sight of these rare, declining and charismatic birds will long be remembered. To add to the experience we were treated with excellent weather and viewing conditions.

At Poyang Hu we did see interesting stuff like Hooded Cranes, Oriental Storks, Baer's Pochards, Baikal Teal, Falcated Ducks and Japanese Marsh Warblers, but a disappointment was that we did not see my target Swan Goose nor any Siberian White Cranes.

## **Itinerary**

### 21/11

Left Beijing with the 16.55 flight for Nanchang in Jiangxi province, where we were met by the other participants coming from Beidaihe and Shanghai. Soon we set off along the expressroad to the east and after three hours arrived at Yiyang (Yijiang) late in the evening. After having checked in at the hotel we went straight to bed.

### 22/11

Had breakfast at the hotel at 6.30 and soon we were on our way to the target bird of the trip, the Scaly-sided Merganser. It took us almost an hour on small dirt-roads before we reached the site. The river is fast-flowing with a number of flat gravel banks and it did not take us more than a minute to locate the first mergansers. They were very active and fed in pairs or small groups and even mated once. Some groups were roosting on the banks and a few pairs were seen flying along the river. All in all we counted at least 31 birds, but the locals had counted 40 just a few days earlier. The light was brilliant and we enjoyed these rare ducks for a couple of hours. In the nearby woodland scrub we did a little bit of birding before returning back towards Yiyang. The trip back took us most of the day as we stopped at several places along the road and birded scrubby riversides and woodland patches. This was good birding and we saw lots of wintering (or were they migrants?) passerines like thrushes and buntings. In the evening we eventually came back to Yiyang for a dinner and later returned to Nanchang for the hotel.

### 23/11

Woke up early and set off for Poyang Hu at 5.30. After driving for about an hour we started birding along a dirt road with scrubs, ditches and fields. Lots of birds and it was hard to leave this place, but we were eager to come into the wetlands, which was just a few kilometers away. Large flocks of Bewick's Swans, Bean and Greater White-fronted Geese were flying from their roosting sites to the feeding areas and it was spectacular to see and hear them in such numbers. We continued further towards the lake and passed through extensive grasslands, reedbeds and shallow lakes. After having been ferried across a small river, we came to a lake where there were thousands and thousands of ducks and geese. We managed to find Falcated Ducks, a single Baikal Teal and best of all, four Baer's Pochards among the huge flocks of mixed ducks. Unfortunately there were no Swan Geese to be seen, so we continued to other sites. Common Cranes and a few small groups of Hooded Cranes were seen. Eventually we reached the end of the road where we climbed a small hill. From this overlook we found 33 Oriental Storks feeding in the distance, but still no Swan Geese and by now it became painfully apparent that this part of Poyang Hu was not especially good for neither the goose nor for Siberian White Cranes. The guides had seen very small numbers a few weeks earlier, but not in the numbers for which the lake is famous. It was now 14.00 and too late to drive all the way to the primary area, so we decided to keep looking where we were. Needless to say, we did not find any of these target birds and had to be content with better views of the Storks and some more Hooded Cranes. The day was rounded off with brief looks at Japanese Marsh Warblers and the evening flight of the swans and geese. At dusk we went back to the hotel in Nanchang for a nice dinner.

The following morning we went straight to the airport for the return flight to Beijing.

### **Weather**

Very good, with sunny and clear weather during both days. At Poyang Hu it was slightly foggy in the early morning and fog is sometimes a problem at this site, especially during the winter. This could also affect the Merganser site apparently.

### **Logistics**

The whole trip was set up by our Chinese birding friends and thanks to their local knowledge we had all local transportation and accomodation arranged in advance.

### **Site descriptions**

The site for the mergansers is near Yiyang along the Xin Jiang river. Apparently the mergansers favour a specific stretch of this river where there are extensive gravel banks.

Poyang Hu is well described in many reports. We went to an area called Nanjishan Provincial Nature Reserve, which is located in the southern end of Poyang Hu. The site where we saw the Oriental Storks has the coordinates: 28.53.814 N, 116.19.30 E.

### **Birds**

(Species and numbers are my personal observations)

Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Common at Poyang Hu.

Great Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*

Common at Poyang Hu.

Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea*

Common at Poyang Hu. Actually some huge concentrations seen.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba*

Five at Poyang Hu.

Great Bittern, *Botaurus stellatus*

Two at Poyang Hu.

Oriental Stork, *Ciconia boyciana*

One flock of 33 and another loose flock of 30+ at Poyang Hu.

Eurasian Spoonbill, *Platalea leucorodia*

20 at Poyang Hu.

Bewick's Swan, *Cygnus columbianus*

Common (1000+) at Poyang Hu.

Bean Goose, *Anser fabalis*

Six at Merganser site. Common (thousands) at Poyang Hu.

Greater White-fronted Goose, *Anser albifrons*

Common (1000+) at Poyang Hu.

Greylag Goose, *Anser anser*

Fairly common (100+) at Poyang Hu.  
Eurasian Wigeon, *Anas penelope*  
Common (thousands) at Poyang Hu.  
Falcated Duck, *Anas falcata*  
10 at Poyang Hu. Several males in nice breeding plumage.  
Gadwall, *Anas strepera*  
At least one at the Merganser site. Six at Poyang Hu,  
Baikal Teal, *Anas formosa*  
One female at Poyang Hu.  
Eurasian Teal, *Anas crecca*  
At least five at the Merganser site. Common (thousands) at Poyang Hu.  
Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*  
Common at the Merganser site. Common at Poyang Hu.  
Spot-billed Duck, *Anas poecilorhyncha*  
200 at the Merganser site. Common (hundreds) at Poyang Hu.  
Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*  
At least five at the Merganser site. Fairly common (100+) at Poyang Hu.  
Garganey, *Anas querquedula*  
Two females at Poyang Hu.  
Northern Shoveler, *Anas clypeata*  
Small numbers (tens) at Poyang Hu.  
Common Pochard, *Aythya ferruginea*  
Small numbers (100+) at Poyang Hu.  
Baer's Pochard, *Aythya baeri*  
One adult male, two males in eclipse (or immature) and one female together at Poyang Hu.  
Tufted Duck, *Aythya fuligula*  
Common (1000+) at Poyang Hu.  
Greater Scaup, *Aythya marila*  
One male at Poyang Hu.  
Scaly-sided Merganser, *Mergus squamatus*  
31 at the Merganser site (where else!).  
Black-shouldered Kite, *Elanus caeruleus*  
Two at Poyang Hu.  
Eastern Marsh-Harrier, *Circus spilonotus*  
Three at Poyang Hu.  
Hen Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*  
Two at Poyang Hu.  
Eurasian Buzzard, *Buteo buteo*  
Four between the Merganser site and Yiyang. One at Poyang Hu.  
Bonelli's Eagle, *Hieraetus fasciatus*  
One juvenile between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus*  
One at Poyang Hu.  
Eurasian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*  
Five in the Yiyang area. Two at Poyang Hu.

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus*  
One at Poyang Hu.

Common Crane, *Grus grus*  
Common (100+) at Poyang Hu.

Hooded Crane, *Grus monacha*  
Three family parties of four each at Poyang Hu. Said to be the more difficult of the cranes, it was the only odd species we saw...

Brown Crake, *Amaurornis akool*  
Three at Poyang Hu showing well and even made it to the video.

Crake sp  
Three heard calling at Poyang Hu in the evening, the typical falling accelerating trill. Ruddy-breasted Crake??

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra*  
Common (1000+) at Poyang Hu.

Pied Avocet, *Recurvirostra avocetta*  
50+ at Poyang Hu.

Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*  
15 between the Merganser site and Yiyang. 10+ at Poyang Hu.

Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*  
5+ at Poyang Hu.

Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata*  
One heard at Poyang Hu.

Spotted Redshank, *Tringa erythropus*  
Common (10.000+) at Poyang Hu. One really had to be impressed by the huge numbers!

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia*  
One at the Merganser site. A few at Poyang Hu.

Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*  
Two near Yiyang. One at Poyang Hu.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*  
One heard at Poyang Hu.

Vega Gull, *Larus argentatus vegae/mongolicus*  
One 3<sup>rd</sup> winter at Poyang Hu.

Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*  
100+ at Poyang Hu.

Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis*  
15+ in the Yiyang area. Fairly common at Poyang Hu.

Spotted Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis*  
Fairly common at Poyang Hu.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis*  
Five at and near the Merganser site. Five at Poyang Hu.

White-throated Kingfisher, *Halcyon smyrnensis*  
Five at and near the Merganser site. Three at Poyang Hu.

Pied Kingfisher, *Ceryle rudis*  
Five at the Merganser site and five between there and Yiyang. 10+ at Poyang Hu.

Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops*

One at Poyang Hu.  
Eurasian Wryneck, *Jynx torquilla*  
One between the Merganser site and Yiyang.

Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*  
Fairly common at the Merganser site and between there and Yiyang. Fairly common at Poyang Hu.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba ocularis*  
A few at the Merganser site and between there and Yiyang. Fairly common at Poyang Hu.

Richard's Pipit, *Anthus richardi*  
Three at the Merganser site. Two at Poyang Hu.

Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni*  
10 at the Merganser site and a few near Yiyang. One at Poyang Hu.

Red-throated Pipit, *Anthus cervinus*  
Four fly-overs at Poyang Hu.

Buff-bellied Pipit, *Anthus rubescens*  
Five at the Merganser site and 10+ between there and Yiyang. Common at Poyang Hu.

Water Pipit, *Anthus spinoletta*  
A few at Poyang Hu.

Light-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus sinensis*  
Fairly common in the Yiyang area and at Poyang Hu.

Chestnut Bulbul, *Hemixos castanonotus*  
One flock of 20+ between the Merganser site and Yiyang and a small flock seen briefly near Yiyang.

Grey-backed Thrush, *Turdus hortulorum*  
Three between the Merganser site and Yiyang.

Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula mandarinus*  
Five between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Fairly common at Poyang Hu.

Dusky Thrush, *Turdus naumanni eunomus*  
Fairly common in the Yiyang area and large flocks flying around. A few at Poyang Hu.

Plain Prinia, *Prinia inornata*  
A total of ten between the Merganser site and Yiyang. 10+ at Poyang Hu.

Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler, *Cettia fortipes*  
Three in scrubby woodland edge between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Eventually we all had fantastic views of this little brown job.

Dusky Warbler, *Phylloscopus fuscatus*  
One between the Merganser site and Yiyang.

Pallas's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus proregulus*  
10 between the Merganser site and Yiyang. One at Poyang Hu.

Yellow-browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*  
20-30 between the Merganser site and Yiyang. One at Poyang Hu.

Rufous-faced Warbler, *Abroscopus albogularis*  
One near Yiyang.

Marsh Grassbird, *Megalurus pryeri*

One seen and two heard at Poyang Hu.  
Blue-and-white Flycatcher, *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*  
One immature male between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Red-flanked Bluntail, *Tarsiger cyanurus*  
Adult male and female-type between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Daurian Redstart, *Phoenicurus aureus*  
20 between the Merganser site and Yiyang. 10 at Poyang Hu.  
Common Stonechat, *Saxicola torquata*  
One between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus*  
Two between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Red-billed Leiothrix, *Leiothrix lutea*  
One near Yiyang. The others saw six more birds.  
Black-throated Tit, *Aegithalos concinnus*  
Three at the Merganser site and five between there and Yiyang. Stunning bird!  
Yellow-bellied Tit, *Pardaliparus venustulus*  
One at the Merganser site.  
Great Tit, *Parus major*  
A total of 10 in the Yiyang area. 10 at Poyang Hu.  
Chinese Penduline Tit, *Remiz consobrinus*  
Fairly common at Poyang Hu.  
Long-tailed Shrike, *Lanius schach*  
Common between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Common at Poyang Hu.  
Crested Myna, *Acridotheres cristatellus*  
Two between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Black-collared Starling, *Gracupica nigricollis*  
Two between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Common at Poyang Hu.  
Red-billed Starling, *Sturnus sericeus*  
15 between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Fairly common at Poyang Hu.  
White-cheeked Starling, *Sturnus cineraceus*  
Small flocks between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Common at Poyang Hu.  
Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus*  
Common in the villages.  
White-rumped Munia, *Lonchura striata*  
10 between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Scaly-breasted Munia, *Lonchura punctulata*  
Small flocks between the Merganser site and Yiyang.  
Brambling, *Fringilla montifringilla*  
Several flocks, some numbering hundreds of birds, between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Small flocks at Poyang Hu.  
Oriental Greenfinch, *Carduelis sinica*  
Common in the Yiyang area.  
Yellow-billed Grosbeak, *Eophona migratoria*  
5+ between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Fairly common at Poyang Hu.  
Tristram's Bunting, *Emberiza tristrami*  
Two near Yiyang.

Chestnut-eared Bunting, *Emberiza fucata*

One at the Merganser site and one between there and Yiyang. Five at Poyang Hu.

Little Bunting, *Emberiza pusilla*

10+ between the Merganser site and Yiyang. Five at Poyang Hu.

Yellow-browed Bunting, *Emberiza chrysophrys*

Three between the Merganser site and Yiyang.

Rustic Bunting, *Emberiza rustica*

Two between the Merganser site and Yiyang. One at Poyang Hu.

Yellow-throated Bunting, *Emberiza elegans*

Two between the Merganser site and Yiyang.

Black-faced Bunting, *Emberiza spodocephala*

Fairly common in the Yiyang area. Fairly common at Poyang Hu.