

Dongzhai Nature Reserve

Henan, China

With notes on Reeves's Pheasant

February 28-29, 2004

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General

This trip was organized by 3BC in Beijing, as a dedicated effort to see the Reeves's Pheasant. Altogether there were six of us, five from Beijing and one from Shanghai.

Apart from seeing the target bird, there were actually rather few other avian highlights. On the mammal side, it is worth mentioning the two wild boars that were "flushed" in the forest and seen well by myself.

Itinerary

We set out on the Friday evening with the 20.10 southbound train from Beijing West Station. After a comfortable night on the train, we arrived at Xinyang at 8.40. Western train companies certainly have something to learn about punctuality, as the train was bang on time, as is the norm in China!

At the station we were greeted by the staff from the nature reserve and we swiftly loaded two cars and continued to Dongzhai. After a mere hour drive, we arrived at the reserve headquarters and quickly installed ourselves in the simple, but adequate, accomodation. Then it was pheasant-quest on the programme.

We spent almost three hours in the forest without seeing any pheasants, except for one that one of us briefly saw before it vanished. A quick lunch-break and then back in the forest again. This time we tried some smaller ridge trails and soon located a flock of pheasants. Unfortunately we could only see them in flight as they quickly took to their wings. After some chasing and repeated flushing, we decided to try to find another flock instead. We were not so lucky with that strategy either and only one of us managed to briefly see two birds walking away in the forest just before dusk. Somewhat frustrated with the flight views, we returned to the headquarters for a dinner together with the reserve staff.

Next morning saw us well before dawn at the site where the birds were seen the evening before. Not a sniff, so again we spread out on the forest trails in the valleys and along the ridges. At about 8.30 I could hear something moving amongst the leaf litter just over a ridge and of course flushed a flock of pheasants. As they seemed to land in a gully a bit further away, I quietly crept through the forest and were able to see three females at very

close range. After a while, they slowly walked away over the next ridge, although I could hear that more birds remained in the gully. Unfortunately they saw me first and quickly got up and away. Altogether this flock contained about ten birds, but no adult male could be seen. Several birds had longer tails than the females and were presumably young males, which make me believe that it was a family party still keeping together before the breeding season.

After having phoned the other birders to come and follow this flock, we tried to locate them in a dense patch of thorny spruce trees. The only result of that was that we flushed a splendid adult male that could be seen reasonably well in flight. We then spread out again and I saw one female well in flight as she glided past me at close range. The others flushed another small flock respectively a single male.

Soon it was time to return for a quick lunch before leaving the reserve at 12.30. One car took three of us to Wuhan airport, which was two hours drive away and another car went back to Xinyang for an overnight train ride to Beijing. The flight was slightly delayed and we arrived Beijing at 20.30.



Part of the group in front of the headquarters and accomodation.

Weather

We were treated to very pleasant weather, with clear or semi-clear skies. Temperaturewise it was enough with a light fleece jacket.

Site descriptions and comments on Reeves's Pheasant



View from the ridge trail.

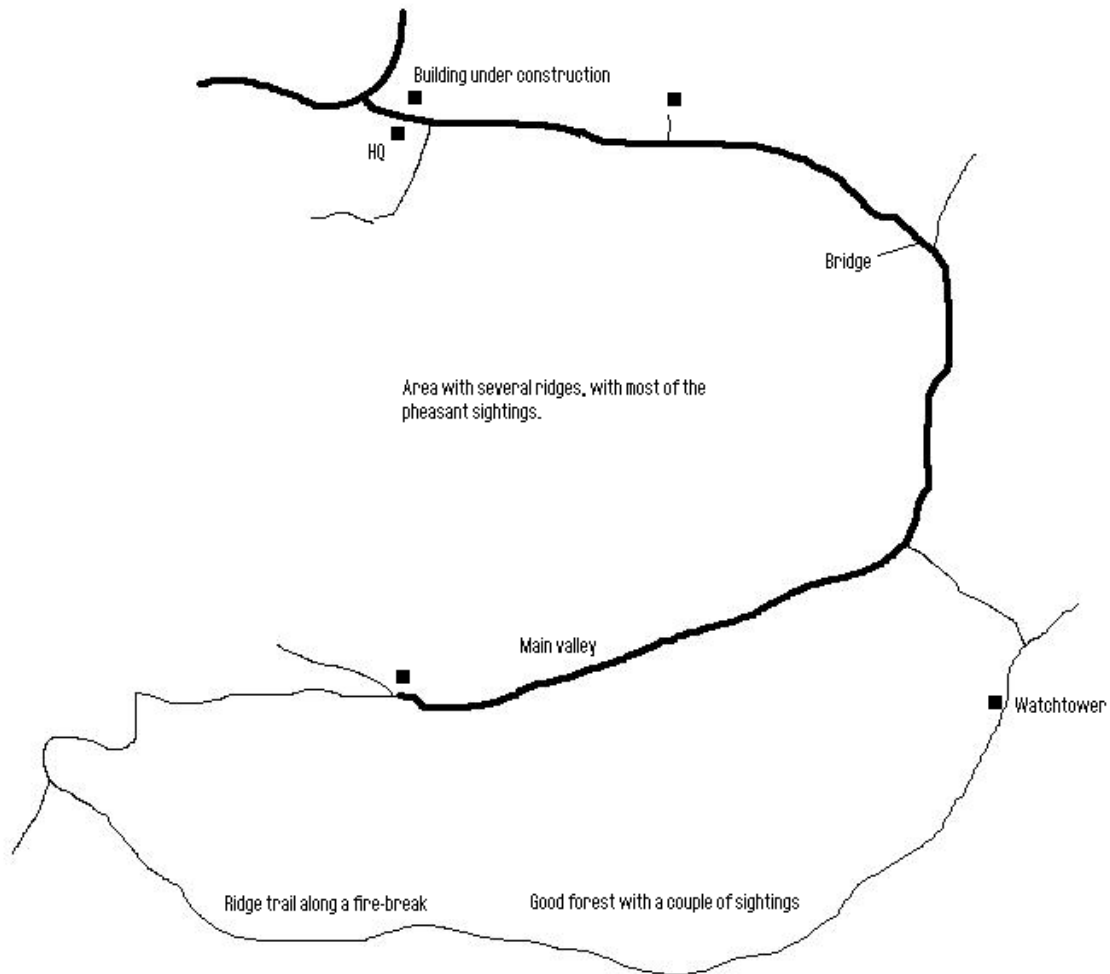
Dongzhai Nature Reserve is located in the very south of Henan province in east-central China, close to the border with Hubei. Coordinates for the headquarters are: 31d56,937'N, 114d15,289'E. Nearest main town is Xinyang, which is one hour drive by car. From Wuhan airport it is about two hours, most of it on expressroad.

The reserve consists of hills ranging from 140 m asl in the valley to 300 m asl at the ridges, with some even higher peaks. The hills are mostly covered with forest (pine, spruce, deciduous trees and bamboo). The area also contains some more open areas like tea plantations, fire-breaks and small clearings.

The area is also good for another speciality, the Fairy Pitta, which occurs with a few tens of pairs. The pittas however does not arrive until mid May, when Reeves's Pheasant is much harder to find.

It seems that Reeves's Pheasants are reasonably easy to see at Dongzhai, perhaps the best place anywhere? We had quite a few sightings during limited time, so it is probably not an uncommon bird at all. We were probably a little bit too early in the season, so there was no display activity and the birds seemed very hard to see on the ground. It should be noted however that we only spent two half days there, so it may be difficult to draw any major conclusions from this visit.

Virtually all the sightings were made along the ridges in close proximity to pine or spruce trees. Only one sighting was in the valley and then they probably came down just for drinking water. Pheasants seem to occur all over the area based on information from the local staff.



Birds

(This list refers only to my personal observations)

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*

One from the train north of Xinyang.

Reeves's Pheasant, *Syrnaticus reevesii*

My personal count was around ten. The others saw about half a dozen more birds.

See also the comments above.

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans lineatus*

One soaring over the main valley.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus nisosimilis*

Two sightings.

Spotted Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis chinensis*

Common between Xinyang and Dongzhai.

Collared Owlet, *Glaucidium brodiei brodiei*

Four heard during daytime.

Asian Barred Owlet, *Glaucidium cuculoides whitelyi*

One heard at dawn.

Speckled Piculet, *Picumnus innominatus chinensis*

Two separate individuals, in the main valley respectively behind the lodge.

Grey-capped Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos canicapillus scintilliceps*

A pair seen in the main valley.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major cabanisi*

One in the main valley.

Collared Finchbill, *Spizixos semitorques semitorques*

Fairly common.



Collared Finchbill

Scaly Thrush, *Zoothera dauma aurea*

One flushed in the forest.

Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula mandarinus*

Several between Dongzhai and Wuhan.

Dusky Thrush, *Turdus naumanni naumanni* and *eunomus*

30-50, mainly along the ridges. About 50 % of each taxon with high proportion of intermediates.

Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler, *Cettia fortipes davidiana*

At least three heard singing.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler, *Phylloscopus proregulus*

10 seen, often in mixed species flocks.

Red-flanked Bluetail, *Tarsiger cyanurus cyanurus*

One female-type in the main valley.

White-crowned Forktail, *Enicurus leschenaulti sinensis*

One pair near the lodge.

Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus canorus*

One in the main valley.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis*

About ten. Difficult to state the ssp, probably *hunanensis*

Vinous-throated Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis webbianus fulvicauda*

Common in bamboo in the valleys.

Black-throated Tit, *Aegithalos concinnus concinnus*

About ten in mixed species flocks.

Yellow-bellied Tit, *Paradaliparus venustulus*

A total of about ten.

Great Tit, *Parus major minor*

10-15 in mixed species flocks.

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius sinensis*

One along the ridge.

Red-billed Blue magpie, *Urocissa erythrorhyncha erythrorhyncha*

5-8.

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica sericea*

Common outside the reserve.

Crested Myna, *Acridotheres cristatellus cristatellus*

Fairly common, mostly outside the reserve.

Eurasian Siskin, *Carduelis spinus*

Fairly common.

Wild Boar

One adult with one smaller individual in company.