

Wuyuan Jiangxi, China

With notes on Yellow-throated (Courtois's) Laughingthrush



Yellow-throated Laughingthrush at Zhongyun. Copyright Bjorn Anderson

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General

This trip was dedicated to seeing the form courtoisi of Yellow-throated Laughingthrush. This taxon only occurs at a handful of localities around Wuyuan in north-east Jiangxi in east China. After having been described in 1923, it was not seen until it was rediscovered in 2000. The total population is estimated to be around 200 individuals.

Highlights

Besides the Yellow-throated Laughingthrushes and the brilliant views of the pair of Pied Falconets, seeing the male Elliot's Pheasant, although briefly, was truly memorable. Also the flocks of Swinhoe's Minivets were notable.



Pied Falconets. Copyright Bjorn Anderson

Itinerary

I took the afternoon flight from Beijing to Huangshan in Anhui, where I was met by professor He Fen-qi, a birding friend who is studying the laughingthrushes together with Laura Gardner from the UK. We then drove south to Wuyuan which took a little bit more than two hours. After a delicious dinner we went to the guesthouse just outside the town itself.

I got up early and walked up the hill behind the guesthouse, although the forest was fairly empty of birds. At 7.00 we set off for Site 2 and birded that area for a couple of hours without seeing any laughingthrushes. We left for a small pitoresque village named Xiaoqi, which is northeast of Wuyuan. This is a very reliable spot for Pied Falconet, a species near-endemic to China. We also had the nice opportunity to have a cup of tea in one of the villagers old-style house. Later we drove back through Wuyuan to the village of Zhongyun and had lunch before visiting another site for the laughingthrush. As they here occur in the backyard of some houses, in which garden the only large trees in the whole area grow, the birds are very easy to find. We spent a couple of hours watching about 20 birds feeding and nest-building, at a few meters distance.

In the late afternoon we went to Site 4, a village called Ma Jia. When the others went looking for laughingthrushes, I went up a side-valley and looked for pheasants.

The last morning we drove west out of Wuyuan and the others went checking a possible seventh site for laughingthrushes, whereas I continued to an area with forest-covered hills. I was lucky enough to find a good trail along a river that then continued up in a valley with good fields and forest. It was here I stumbled upon a male Elliot's Pheasant that flew off from the trail just in front of me. I spent most of the morning in this area and returned to the car at 10.00 and drove to Zhongyun, where I met the others. After spending another hour with the laughingthrushes we went for lunch nearby.

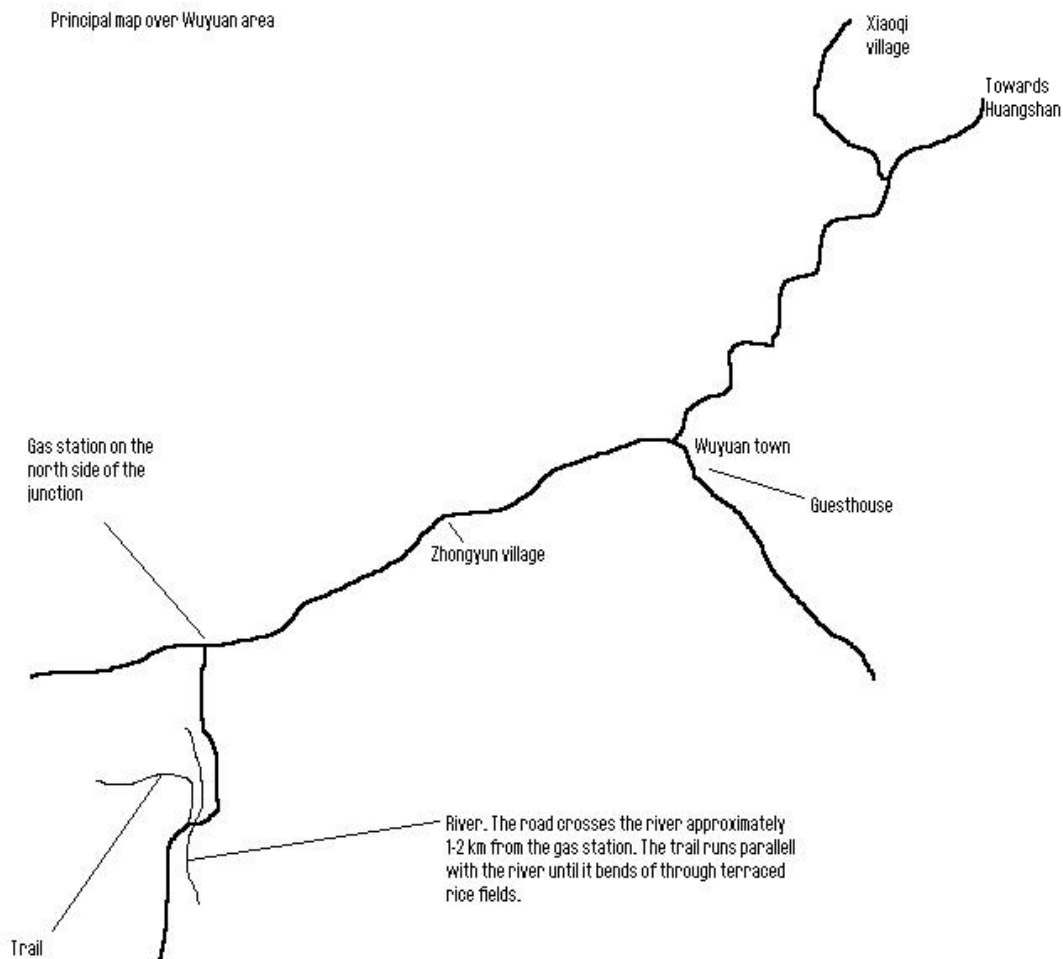
Between 13.00 and 15.00 we visited Site 3 and Site 1, without finding any more laughingthrushes. There were however a nice flock of Swinhoe's Minivets and a male Narcissus Flycatcher. At 15.00 we split up and I did the 2.5 hours drive across the hills to Huangshan airport while the others returned to Wuyuan.

Weather

Most of the first full day was windy with a little bit of rain in the morning. It was clearly cooler than Beijing. On the Sunday, the wind was gone although it was still cloudy.

Site descriptions

Yellow-throated Laughingthrush has been found at six sites, all of them in Wuyuan county. The sites are numbered in the order when the birds were found during the last few years.



Birds

Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis poggei*

Seen in most of the rivers.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba modesta*

One near Wuyuan.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

Seen in small numbers.

Chinese Pond-Heron, *Ardea bacchus*

Seen in small numbers.

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis coromandus*

Totally less than 20.

Striated Heron, *Butorides striatus amurensis/actophilus*

Two at Site 2.

Mandarin Duck, *Aix galericulata*

Three males at Site 2, two pairs at Ma Jia and one pair at Site 1.

Spot-billed Duck, *Anas poecilorhyncha zonorhyncha*

One pair at Ma Jia.

Chinese Goshawk, *Accipiter soloensis*

One at Site 2 and one along the road on the return trip to Huangshan.

Sparrowhawk sp, *Accipiter* sp

About five at Site 2.

Black Eagle, *Ictinaetus malayensis malayensis*

One pair circling low over the road west of Zhongyun. According to literature this is well north of its normal range. However, other birders have seen it in this area before.

Pied Falconet, *Microhierax melanoleucus*

One pair seen extremely well in the town of Xiaoqi. Also another pair from the car just outside Xiaoqi.

Chinese Bamboo-Partridge, *Bambusicola thoracica thoracica*

One heard at the guesthouse near Wuyuan and up to ten heard and a pair seen at Elliot's Valley.

Elliot's Pheasant, *Syrmaticus ellioti*

One male flushed from the trail just in front of me in Elliot's Valley. This species probably occurs in reasonable numbers in this areas, as other birders have seen a lot of feathers in the villages. The problem in finding this pheasant is that it is normally very silent and shy.

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus torquatus*

One heard near the guesthouse outside Wuyuan.

Crake sp

One in the rice-fields at Elliot's Valley.

Grey-headed Lapwing, *Vanellus cinereus*

One over Elliot's Valley and one at Zhongyun.

Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*

One at Site 3.

Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*

Fairly common.

Spotted Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis chinensis*

A few at Huangshan.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus sparveroides sparveroides*
One heard at Site 2 and one heard at Ma Jia.

Indian Cuckoo, *Cuculus micropterus micropterus*
Two at Site 2 and one heard at Site 1.

Asian Barred Owlet, *Galucidium cuculoides whytelyi*
One at Site 2, two heard at Elliot's Valley and one seen along the road going back to Huangshan.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis bengalensis*
Several seen along the rivers.

White-throated Kingfisher, *Halcyon smyrnensis fokiensis*
One at Zhongyun.

Crested Kingfisher, *Megaceryle lugubris guttulata*
One at Site 2.

Grey-capped Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos canicapillus scintilliceps*
One at Site 2.

Grey-headed Woodpecker, *Picus canus guerini*
One at Zhongyun, one at Ma Jia and one at Site 1.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica ssp*
Common.

Red-rumped Swallow, *Hirundo dauurica japonica*
Common.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba leucopsis*
Common.

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea robusta*
One along the road when going back to Huangshan.

Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni yunnanensis*
Fairly common on migration.

Swinhoe's Minivet, *Pericrocotus cantonensis*
One flock with 40 flying past at Site 2, one flock with about 50 at Elliot's Valley, one flock with 100+ at Zhongyun and single pairs at Site 3 and Site 1.

Grey-chinned Minivet, *Pericrocotus solaris griseogularis*
One male at Elliot's Valley.

Collared Finchbill, *Spizixos semitorques semitorques*
Common.

Chinese Bulbul, *Pycnonotus sinensis sinensis*
Common.

Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula mandarinus*
Fairly common at in wooded areas.

Plain Prinia, *Prinia inornata extensicauda*
One at Elliot's Valley.

Yellow-browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*
Singles heard in most areas.

Grey-spotted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa griseisticta*
Three at the guesthouse near Wuyuan, one at Site 3 and one at Site 1

Narcissus Flycatcher, *Ficedula narcissina narcissina*
One male at Site 1.

Blue-and-white Flycatcher, *Cyanoptila cyanomelana ssp*
One male at Site 2 and one male at Site 1.

Plumbeous Water-Redstart, *Ryacornis fuliginosus fuliginosus*
Seen in many of the rivers.

White-crowned Forktail, *Enicurus leschenaulti sinensis*
One pair at Elliot's Valley.

Masked Laughingthrush, *Garrulax perspicillatus*
10 near and at Site 2 and one at Elliot's Valley.

Yellow-throated Laughingthrush, *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*
About 20 at Zhongyun on both days.

Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus canorus*
Two at Ma Jia and about five at Elliot's Valley.

Spot-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis swinhoei*
Two at Elliot's Valley.

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps davidi*
One heard at the guesthouse near Wuyuan and common at Elliot's Valley.

Dusky Fulvetta, *Alcippe brunnea superciliaris*
One at Elliot's Valley.

Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, *Alcippe morrisonia hueti*
Common at Elliot's Valley.

Vinous-throated Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis webbianus suffusus*
One flock at Site 2, one flock at Ma Jia, a few at Elliot's Valley and one flock at Site 3.

Black-throated Tit, *Aegithalos concinnus concinnus*
One flock at the guesthouse near Wuyuan and one flock at Ma Jia.

Great Tit, *Parus major commixtus*
Seen in most areas.

Japanese White-eye, *Zosterops japonicus simplex*
Five at the guesthouse near Wuyuan.

Black-naped Oriole, *Oriolus chinensis diffusus*
Two at Site 2.

Ashy Drongo, *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis*
Two at Site 2.

Black Drongo, *Dicrurus macrocercus cathoecus*
Two at Zhongyun.

Hair-crested Drongo, *Dicrurus hottentottus brevirostris*
One at Ma Jia.

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius sinensis*
A few seen in wooded areas.

Red-billed Blue Magpie, *Urocissa erythrorhyncha erythrorhyncha*
Two at Ma Jia and two at Zhongyun.

Grey Treepie, *Dendrocitta formosae sinica*
One at Site 2 and a pair at Elliot's Valley.

Crested Myna, *Acidotheres cristatellus cristatellus*
Fairly common in cultivated areas.

Black-collared Starling, *Gracupica nigricollis*
Fairly common.

Red-billed Starling, *Sturnus sericeus*
A few at Zhongyun and 30 at Ma Jia.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus ssp*
Common along the road when going back to Huangshan.