

Jiuzhaigou, Sichuan, China

May 27-31, 2004

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Swan Lake towards Primeval Forest

General

Together with my wife we spent three full days hiking and birding in Jiuzhaigou. Although it was not a dedicated birding trip, I certainly spent some time looking for my target birds. The best bird was the nice Sukatschev's Laughingthrush that came in to the tape and performed well. I was not so lucky with the Rufous-headed Robin, as I only heard three birds singing, although two at very close range. Other noteworthy birds were Pere David's Tit, Severtsov's Grouse, Indian Blue Robin and Three-banded Rosefinch.

Itinerary

We flew to JZG from Beijing via Chengdu and arrived at JZG airport at 19.30. From there we took the shuttle bus to JZG village, which took 1hr45. Checked in at the hotel and had a late dinner.

Next morning we left the hotel at 6.30 in order to be at the entrance gate by 6.45, as the buses start running at 7.00. The bus took us to Pearl Shoal waterfall where we quickly entered the trail up Danzhegou, after having briefly admired the fascinating waterfalls. This is the trail that is described in many reports at Pearl Shoal Waterfall trail. We spent the full morning along the trail in search of Rufous-headed Robins and Slaty Buntings, but could not find either. Several Pere David's Tits was a reasonable temporary compensation, as it was one of my key birds.

By noon we were back down to Pearl Shoal and walked the trails along the lakes all the way to Five Flower Lake before taking the bus up to Primeval Forest. Not many birds around, and certainly not the hoped for Sukatschev's Laughingthrush. Birded for about an hour before returning down the valley by bus, getting off at Panda Lake for a walk half-way round the lake until it was time to catch the last bus to the gate.

In the evening we tried to find some decent scrub around Jiuzhaigou village, but it proved rather birdless.

The second morning we went with the bus to Nourilang, where the bus dropped us off. We hitched to Zechawa village and there tried to negotiate a further hitch to Kezegou, which is 3-4 km beyond Zechawa. Eventually gave up and started to walk in the drizzle. Soon after a truck picked us up and gave us a lift to Kezegou. Started walking the trail and rather soon heard our first Rufous-headed Robin. Although it once came very close, it refused to show off. Soon after we heard a second male singing, but was equally unsuccessful in seeing that. Gave up after an hour in the drizzle and returned to the road, where we stopped a bus and drove up to Long Lake.

Long Lake car park was extremely crowded, so we soon escaped along a small trail going counter-clock-wise around the lake. The trail soon disappeared and we climbed some mossy boulder-field before finally giving up and tried to find another route to good forest, meaning holding Sichuan Jay. Heard another Rufous-headed Robin singing in the distance. After having spent a couple of hours looking for the Jay, we gave up and were suddenly positively distracted by a calling Sukatschev's Laughingthrush. Rushed downhill and soon had good views of it, another of my four key birds.

We then boarded the bus and went downhill, stopping at Kezegou for another try for the Rufous-headed Robins. No luck this time either, as they were not even singing. Jumped on another bus and went to Nourilang. Walked from there most of the way to Shuzheng Lakes, but apart from nice scenery, we did not find any special birds.

The third morning was planned for Primeval Forest and more specifically Sichuan Jay. Arrived at Primeval Forest car park before 8.00 and started walking slowly up through fantastic forest. It was drizzling and the bird activity was fairly low. By late morning the drizzle became sleet before it finally cleared up. We did not find many interesting birds and alas no Jays. By noon we were back by the car park and started walking along Swan and Grass Lakes. The afternoon was spent walking, and occasionally busing, down to Arrow Bamboo and Panda Lakes, before it was time to catch the last bus out of the park.

As a last chance to get Sichuan Jay, we decided for a pre-dawn departure the last day to Gong Gang Ling, which is the pass between Jiuzhaigou village and the airport. The area still has patches of decent forest, although after having spent an early morning hour, it was time to continue to the airport. The weather was fair until we reached the airport, when it suddenly began to snow with low visibility. This meant a serious flight delay, which meant that we missed the connecting flight to Lhasa. Spent the evening in Chengdu instead and had a few Irish beers with friends.

Weather

The weather in Sichuan/Tibet is normally very unpredictable and changes very fast. The first day was reasonably clear with just some light overcast. The second day started with light rain, but then turned into just thick clouds, before starting to rain again in the evening. The third day also started with light rain, before clearing up nicely in the afternoon. Temperatures ranged from pleasant (no jacket) to rather chilly at high elevations when it was also snowing.

Site descriptions

Since the autumn of 2003, Jiuzhaigou has been dramatically much easier to visit, as there is a newly built airport nearby. The drawback is that a large proportion of the Chinese population has also discovered this advantage. Currently there are no direct flights from BJ, although this is certainly planned for.

As beautiful and bird-rich Jiuzhaigou is, as frustrating it is from a logistic perspective. Since a few years it is no longer possible to arrange your own transport within the park. Neither is it officially allowed to stay overnight. There are a zillion hotel rooms available outside the park. There should however still be possible to find some simple accommodation in e.g. Zechawa village, which would be an immense advantage from a birding perspective.

The buses run frequently up and down the valleys. They normally stop only at dedicated places, but we occasionally flagged them down just at any place.

The price per person per day for entering the park is 145 plus 90 for the bus. For some reason, we as a couple only had to pay one entrance fee. The ticket office is open at 6.30 so it should be no problem getting on the first bus, meaning that you get to the birdy places between 7.30-8.00. The other problem is that the last buses seem to run as early as around 17.00, which means that one will miss some good birding hours at both ends of the day! This could only be overcome by staying inside the park.

The park is usually crowded with the abundant Chinese Screamers, although they fortunately stay together at the paved viewpoints, so it should not be difficult to sneak away on the trails for some serious birding.

Gong Gang Ling is the pass at 3500 m between the airport and Jiuzhaigou village. We only birded for one hour in the early morning along the main road. The general area is logged to a large extent, but patches of good forest still remains and if one could find a trail leading in through the forest, it could certainly be worthwhile birding. Other birders have found some central Chinese specialties in this area.



Map of Jiuzhaigou

Birds

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*

Five seen on the lakes up to Primeval Forest.

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans lineatus*

One at Gong Gang Ling

Besra, *Accipiter virgatus affinis*

One male just above Long Lake car park.

Eurasian Buzzard, *Buteo buteo japonicus*

One near Jiuzhaigou village.

Severtsov's Grouse, *Bonasa sewerzowi*

Two separate birds flush from the trail ca 2500 m at Danzhugou.

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus suehschanensis*

One male near Jiuzhaigou airport. Three around Zechawa village. Several between Gong Gang Ling and JZG airport.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus sparverioides sparverioides*

Three heard.

Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus bakeri*

One heard at Kezegou and one heard at Gong Gang Ling.

Oriental Cuckoo, *Cuculus saturatus saturatus*

Several heard.

Collared Owlet, *Glaucidium brodiei brodiei*

One heard at Danzhugou.

Fork-tailed Swift, *Apus pacificus kanoi*

Occasionally seen in good numbers. Three at JZG airport.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major stresemanni*

One at Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Black Woodpecker, *Dryocopus martius khamensis*

Heard at Danzhugou and a pair near Long Lake.

Asian House Martin, *Delichon dasypus cashmeriensis*

Occasionally seen in large numbers.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba alboides & leucopsis*

Several seen in Jiuzhaigou village and all the way up to Long Lake. Most were alboides, but at least one leucopsis.

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea robusta*

One in Jiuzhaigou village.

Rosy Pipit, *Anthus roseatus*

Two at Grass Lake and two at Primeval Forest car park.

Long-tailed Minivet, *Pericrocotus ethologus ethologus*

Fairly common. Also a few at Gong Gang Ling.

Goldcrest, *Regulus regulus yunnanensis*

One at Primeval Forest.

White-throated Dipper, *Cinclus cinclus przewalskii*

One visiting a nest below Nourilang waterfalls. A few seen along the lakes between Swan Lake and Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Winter Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes szetschuanus*

Two at Danzhugou, two at Primeval Forest and one at Gong Gang Ling.

Rufous-breasted Accentor, *Prunella strophhiata strophhiata*

One near Long Lake car park.

Maroon-backed Accentor, *Prunella immaculate*

Two near Long Lake car park, two in Primeval Forest and two at Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Blue Whistling-Thrush, *Myophonus caeruleus temminckii*
One at Shuzheng waterfall, two above the entrance gate and one at Arrow
Bamboo Lake.

Long-tailed Thrush, *Zoothera dixonii*
A pair at Primeval Forest.

Chestnut Thrush, *Turdus rubrocanus gouldii*
Fairly common, also at Gong Gang Ling.

Kessler's Thrush, *Turdus kessleri*
Two at JZG airport.

Chinese Thrush, *Turdus mupinensis*
One seen at Danzhugou and one heard at Kezegou.

Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler, *Cettia acanthizoides acanthizoides*
One heard at Kezegou.

Tickell's Leaf Warbler, *Phylloscopus tickelli*
Four at Swan Lake.

Yellow-streaked Warbler, *Phylloscopus armandii armandii*
Several seen between Long Lake and Nourilang and one near Swan Lake.

Pale-rumped Warbler, *Phylloscopus chloronotus*
Common, also at Gong Gang Ling.

Chinese Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus sichuanensis*
One heard at Danzhegou and several heard at Kezegou.

Hume's Warbler, *Phylloscopus humei mandellii*
Several heard at Panda Lake and at Kezegou. Common between Swan Lake and
Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Greenish Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochiloides obscuratus*
Common, also at Gong Gang Ling.

Large-billed Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus magnirostris*
Common.

Blyth's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus reguloides claudiae*
Common.

White-tailed Leaf Warbler, *Phylloscopus davisoni disturbans*
Three at Swan Lake.

Bianchi's Warbler, *Seicercus valentini*
Common.

Siberian Flycatcher, *Muscicapa sibirica rothschildi*
One seen.

Slaty-backed Flycatcher, *Ficedula hodgsonii*
Common.

Slaty-blue Flycatcher, *Ficedula tricolor diversa*
One male at Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, *Ficedula strophinata strophinata*
Several at Danzhugou.

Rufous-bellied Niltava, *Niltava sundara denotata*
One male at Danzhegou.

Chinese Blue Flycatcher, *Cyornis glaucicomans*
Two at Danzhegou.

Rufous-headed Robin, *Luscinia ruficeps*
Two heard at Kezegou and one heard near Long Lake car park. None were seen
nor heard at Danzhegou.

Indian Blue Robin, *Luscinia brunnea brunnea*
Fairly common all the way from the gate to Long Lake, Danzhegou, Kezegou,
Nourilang, Swan Lake and Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Red-flanked Bluetail, *Tarsiger cyanurus rufilatus*
Two at Danzhegou. Common from Primeval Forest to Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Hodgson's Redstart, *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*
A pair breeding at the entrance gate.

Blue-fronted Redstart, *Phoenicurus frontalis*
Several around Primeval Forest car park.

White-capped Water-Redstart, *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*
Fairly common in most streams, also one at Gong Gang Ling.

Plumbeous Water-Redstart, *Rhyacornis fuliginosus fuliginosus*
Common in all streams.

White-bellied Redstart, *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides ichangensis*
One heard at Rhinoceros Lake and one at Gong Gang Ling.

Pere David's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax davidi concolor*
Three seen near Hotel International at Jiuzhaigou village.

Sukatshev's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax sukatschewi*
One heard and seen very well and another heard near Long Lake car park.

Elliot's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax elliotii elliotii*
Fairly common.

White-collared Yuhina, *Yuhina diademata*
One at Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Pere David's Tit, *Poecile davidi*
Four encounters of singles or pairs at Danzhegou and two at Arrow Bamboo
Lake.

Coal Tit, *Periparus ater aemodius*
Several at Danzhegou and at Primeval Forest.

Rufous-vented Tit, *Periparus rubidiventris beavani*
One at Swan Lake.

Yellow-bellied Tit, *Pardaliparus venustulus*
Several heard.

Grey-crested Tit, *Lophophanes dichrous dichroides*
Two at Primeval Forest and one at Gong Gang Ling.

Green-backed Tit, *Parus monticulus yunnanensis*
Singles or pairs at Shuzheng, Danzhegou and Arrow Bamboo Lake.

Eurasian Nuthatch, *Sitta europaea sinensis*
Singles at Danzhegou and Panda Lake.

Eurasian Treecreeper, *Certhia familiaris khamensis*
One at 3200 m above Long Lake and three at Primeval Forest.

Bar-tailed Treecreeper, *Certhia himalayana yunnanensis*
One at Swan Lake.

Chestnut-flanked Whiteeye, *Zosterops erythropleurus*
A few at Danzhegou.

Brown Shrike, *Lanius cristatus lucionensis*
One at Shuzheng.

Grey-backed Shrike, *Lanius tephronotus tephronotus*
Common, also along the road to the airport.

Nutcracker, *Nucifraga cariocatactes macella*
Several heard.

Hooded Crow, *Corvus cornix orientalis*

Several seen, also along the road to the airport.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus obscuratus*

One at JZG airport.

Beautiful Rosefinch, *Carpodacus pulcherrimus argyrophrys*

20 at Gong Gang Ling.

Vinaceous Rosefinch, *Carpodacus vinaceus vinaceus*

Fairly common at Kezegou and Long Lake.

Three-banded Rosefinch, *Carpodacus trifasciatus*

One male near Long Lake car park, five at Primeval Forest car park and one male at Gong Gang Ling.

White-browed Rosefinch, *Carpodacus thura dubius*

Several around Long Lake and 10+ at Gong Gang Ling.

Red Crossbill, *Loxia curvirostra himalayensis*

One heard at Swan Lake.

Tibetan Serin, *Serinus thibetanus*

One or two at Gong Gang Ling.

Grey-headed Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula erythaca erythaca*

A pair at Danzhegou, several near Long Lake car park, five at Primeval Forest car park and a few at Gong Gang Ling.

White-winged Grosbeak, *Mycerobas carnipes carnipes*

One at Zechawa village and several near Long Lake.