

Lhasa, Xizang, China

June 1-5, 2004

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Potala Palace

General

This was the second part of a trip that I did together with my wife. After having been four nights in Jiuzhaigou in northern Sichuan (2000-3000 m), we were well adapted to the high altitude at Lhasa at 3700 m and experienced no altitude sickness. Most of the trip was spent on general sightseeing, although at least one morning was dedicated for some serious birding.

Besides seeing some fantastic Tibetan landscape, the impressive Potala Palace and fascinating monasteries, the three obvious highlights were the sightings of Tibetan Eared-Pheasant, Prince Henri's Laughingthrush and Giant Babax. These are the key birds for any visit to Lhasa, as they occur only in this part of the world.



Prince Henri's Laughingthrushes



Tibetan Eared-Pheasants

Itinerary

We arrived at Lhasa with the early morning flight from Chengdu. Our local guide met us at the airport and we were swiftly transported to Lhasa. The drive from the airport to Lhasa takes almost two hours and leads through a wide river-bed. The river leads to India where it is called Brahmaputra. The rest of the day was spent sightseeing in Lhasa, in particular Jokhang monastery and Barkham Street.

The second day was spent totally on sightseeing in Lhasa, where a visit to the Potala Palace was the highlight. Other places visited was e.g. Norbulingka and Sera Monastery.

The third day was devoted for getting the three target birds of the area. We visited a mountain area well outside Lhasa and had brilliant views of several Tibetan Eared-Pheasants, Prince Henri's Laughingthrushes and a Giant Babax. After finishing the birdwatching in the early afternoon we returned to Lhasa for a brief visit to Drepung Monastery.

The fourth day was planned to go to Namtso Lake, said to be the highest lake in the world at 4700 m. The weather was however not with us this morning and it was snowing heavily. When reaching Lhakan Pass at 5200 m just before Namtso Lake, we decided to turn around in case the weather got worse. The mountains and valleys were all covered in snow and in spite of the clouds, we got very sun-burned, because of all the reflections. In spite of the weather, I managed to see some interesting birds typical of the Tibetan plateau. On the way back to Lhasa, we took a detour to Yangchen monastery where we were fortunate enough to visit at the same time as the yearly dancing show by the monks took place. Certainly a very interesting experience, as we were the first foreigners ever to visit this place.

The last morning in Lhasa, we walked around at the wetlands that are situated north of the Potala Palace, north of Beijing Xi Lu (Beijing West Street). At midday we departed the hotel for the drive to the airport and flew home to Beijing.

Weather

The weather was mostly very nice. The rain period normally begins in early June, but in the beginning most of the rain comes during the nights, and the days are still very bright and clear, giving some superb views of the mountains. The temperature was very comfortable, even late in the evening. At higher altitudes near Namtso Lake it got much colder, although we still managed with a fleece jacket.

Logistics

We were lazy and booked everything via our Beijing-based travel agent. It should not at all be difficult to do on your own though. Having a native Tibetan guide with us, was certainly an advantage and made the visits to the monasteries very interesting indeed. It also gave us the possibility to enjoy visits like the monk monastery at Yangchen.

Birds

- Ruddy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea*
Several in the river between Lhasa and the airport and several in the mountains between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.
- Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*
Ten at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.
- Common Merganser, *Mergus merganser orientalis*
A few in the river between Lhasa and the airport. One between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.
- Lammergeier, *Gypaetus barbatus barbatus*
Three between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.
- Himalayan Griffon, *Gyps himalayensis*
Two between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.
- Upland Buzzard, *Buteo hemilasius*
20 between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass. One at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.
- Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos daphaena*
One or two in a mountain area outside Lhasa.
- Eursian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus interstinctus*
One at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.
- Tibetan Snowcock, *Tetraogallus tibetanus aquilonifer*
One at Lhakan Pass.
- Tibetan Partridge, *Perdix hodgsoniae hodgsoniae*
About five in a mountain area outside Lhasa.
- Tibetan Eared-Pheasant, *Crossoptilon harmani*
15 seen and a handful of more heard in a mountain area outside Lhasa.
- Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra atra*
Two at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.
- Ibisbill, *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*
One between Lhasa and Damxung.
- Common Redshank, *Tringa tetanus eurhinus*
One near Damxung and common at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.
- Great Black-headed Gull, *Larus ichthyaetus*
A few along the river between Lhasa and the airport.
- Brown-headed Gull, *Larus brunnicephalus*
Fairly common along the river between Lhasa and the airport.
- Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo tibetana*
A few along the river between Lhasa and the airport. One between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.
- Hill Pigeon, *Columba rupestris turcestanica*
Fairly common in and around Lhasa.
- Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*
Common.
- Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus bakeri*
Five in a mountain area outside Lhasa.
- Fork-tailed Swift, *Apus pacificus kanoi*
Fairly common around the Potala Palace.
- Hume's Lark, *Calandrella acutirostris tibetana*
A few between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Oriental Skylark, *Alauda gulgula inopinata*

Ten at the fields below a mountain area outside Lhasa and several between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass. Common at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.

Horned Lark, *Eremophila alpestris elwesi*

Common between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Pale Martin, *Hirundo diluta*

Locally common between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Eurasian Crag-Martin, *Hirundo rupestris rupestris*

Fairly common in Lhasa and a few in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba alboides*

A few around Lhasa.

Citrine Wagtail, *Motacilla citreola calcarata*

Ten at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.

White-throated Dipper, *Cinclus cinclus przewalskii*

About five in a mountain area outside Lhasa, one was the all-brown morph. Two at Lhakan Pass.

Robin Accentor, *Prunella rubiculoides rubiculoides*

Five near Lhakan Pass.

Brown Accentor, *Prunella fulvescens sushkini*

At least five in a mountain area outside Lhasa.



Brown Accentor

Eurasian Blackbird, *Turdus merula maximus*

Fairly common in a mountain area outside Lhasa and around Lhasa.

Stolitzka's Tit-Warbler, *Leptopocile sophiae obscura*

Five in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

Tickell's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus affinis*

At least ten in a mountain area outside Lhasa and one near Lhakan Pass.



Tickell's Leaf-Warbler

Black Redstart, *Phoenicurus ochruros rufiventris*

A few in a mountain area outside Lhasa and two at Yangching Monastery.

Hodgson's Redstart, *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*

Five in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

White-throated Redstart, *Phoenicurus schisticeps*

One immature male in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

Guldenstädt's Redstart, *Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis*

Five near Lhakan Pass.

Blue-fronted Redstart, *Phoenicurus frontalis*

Three near Lhakan Pass.

White-capped Water-Redstart, *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

One in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

White-bellied Redstart, *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides phaenicuroides*

Five to ten in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

Common Stonechat, *Saxicola torquata przewalskii*

One male in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

Prince Henri's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax henrici*

Common in a mountain area outside Lhasa and three at Drepung Monastery.

Giant Babax, *Babax waddelli waddelli*

Two (of a party of about five) in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

Great Tit, *Parus major tibetanus*

A few in Lhasa and in a mountain area outside Lhasa and one at Yangching monastery.

Hume's Groundpecker, *Pseudopodoces humilis*

A few between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Grey-backed Shrike, *Lanius tephronotus tephronotus*

Common in a mountain area outside Lhasa and one between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass. Several at Beijing Xi Lu wetland.

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica bottanensis*

One at 4600+ m in a mountain area outside Lhasa and three between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Red-billed Chough, *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax himalayanus*

A few at the Potala Palace and fairly common in a mountain area outside Lhasa and between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Common Raven, *Corvus corax tibetanus*

Ten around Damxung.

Russet Sparrow, *Passer rutilans cinnamomeus*

A few between the airport and Lhasa.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus tibetanus*
Common.

White-winged Snowfinch, *Montifringilla nivalis henrici*
Ten at Lhakan Pass.



White-winged Snowfinch

Black-winged Snowfinch, *Montifringilla adamsi admsi*
Ten at Yangchen monastery.

White-rumped Snowfinch, *Montifringilla taczanowskii*
One near Yangchen monastery.

Rufous-necked Snowfinch, *Montifringilla ruficollis ruficollis*
Common between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Blanford's Snowfinch, *Montifringilla blanfordi blanfordi*
One at Yangching monastery.

Plain Mountain-Finch, *Leucosticte nemoricola nemoricola*
A few between Lhasa and Lhakan Pass.

Common Rosefinch, *Carpodacus erythrinus roseatus*
A few in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

Pink-rumped Rosefinch, *Carpodacus eos*
Common in a mountain area outside Lhasa.



Pink-rumped Rosefinch

Streaked Rosefinch, *Carpodacus rubicilloides lucifer*
Fairly common in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

White-winged Grosbeak, *Mycerobas carnipes carnipes*
Two in a mountain area outside Lhasa.

Godlewski's Bunting, *Emberiza godlewskii khamensis*
Two in a mountain area outside Lhasa.