

# Dongzhai Nature Reserve Henan, China

with notes on Fairy Pitta

May 21-23, 2004

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*Fairy Pitta*

## General

A weekend trip together with Nick Moran from Shanghai. Having both visited Dongzhai in late February for Reeves's Pheasant, we now had a different target in mind: Fairy Pitta. A globally threatened bird with a scattered distribution in southeastern China.

We were lucky to see our first Fairy Pitta already by 6.40 the first morning and were thus able to spend the rest of the weekend with relaxed birding. Reeves's Pheasants were heard displaying (wing-drumming) and Nick also flushed one bird.

## **Itinerary**

We flew from Beijing and Shanghai respectively to Wuhan on the Friday evening and due to a late flight, we only arrived Dongzhai at 00.30 in the night. A friend of a friend was studying the Reeves's Pheasants at Dongzhai, so he kindly arranged with transportation from the airport as well as the accommodation. We checked in at the simple guesthouse at the forest station and slept for a few hours until 04.00, when we went out to listen for nightbirds. As dawn broke we heard the first pittas and we then spent the full morning watching these much sought-after birds.

In the late morning we walked the loop trail over the ridge, which did not produce so many birds and it was also rather hot. Then back to the forest station for lunch and a power-nap, before heading back out again. This time we walked the ridges behind the forest station in an area where we had seen Reeves's Pheasants during the previous visit. Very birdless, although a Chestnut-winged Cuckoo performed brilliantly. The evening was spent at the main pitta site, but there was only little calling activity.

On the Sunday we split up and Nick went back to the pitta site, whereas I walked along the dirt track and trails west of the forest station. We both heard close-up wing-drumming Reeves's Pheasants, but failed to see any birds.

## **Weather**

It was sunny and hot during the whole weekend.

## **Site descriptions and comments on Fairy Pitta**

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 (forest station) 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. There is a newly built hotel at the forest station that was about to open a couple of weeks after our visit.

The area is also good for another Chinese speciality, the Reeves's Pheasant, which is much easier to see during the winter and early spring.

We heard four calling Fairy Pittas in the upper parts of the main valley near and beyond the old house marked on the map. This was in the early morning and none of them called for very long periods. At 06.40 we were fortunate to hear one hopping on the forest floor in an area that was fairly open and covered with lots of dead leaves and a few boulders (on which it liked to sit). This bird gave fantastic views, as it was exposing itself for rather long periods. We also once saw it carry a 30+ cm long stick, thus expecting the nest to be nearby and as it turned out Nick also found the nest the day after. This territory held a pair and there were two other calling birds within 50-100 meters from this site.

There was some pitta calling activity later in the morning and also briefly in the evening in this area. While taking a nap in the forest station during the hottest time of the day, we also heard one pitta calling from the area near the gate. This bird was also heard the morning after. The habitat at this site was fairly similar to the habitat where we found the nest.

There are many valleys with similar habitat in this part of Dongzhai Nature Reserve, so it could be expected that there are several more pairs of pittas. However, we failed to locate any in any other areas. According to the staff at the reserve, the pittas do not arrive until around May 20, so perhaps more birds could be expected a week or so later, although this is only speculation. Calling activity is said to end already in mid-June.

For more notes on Dongzhai, please also see the report written after our February visit.



## **Birds**

(This list refers only to my personal observations)

- Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis poggei*  
One between Dongzhai and Wuhan.
- Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*  
A few between Dongzhai and Wuhan.
- Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis coromandus*  
A few at the gate at Dongzhai.
- Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*  
Three singles flying over the forest station.
- Mandarin Duck, *Aix galericulata*  
At least one pair seen several times flying low over the forest. Breeding site?
- Grey-faced Buzzard, *Butastur indicus*  
One pair and possibly also an immature bird seen several times around the main valley. Behaved like a breeding pair.
- Reeves's Pheasant, *Syrmaticus reevesii*  
I heard one male wing-drumming at close range in very dense vegetation. Nick also flushed one bird near the core Pitta site and also heard wing-drumming in this area.
- Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus torquatus*  
One heard from the ridge trail.
- Whiskered Tern, *Chlidonias hybridus swinhoei*  
Two between Dongzhai and Wuhan.
- Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*  
Fairly common.
- Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, *Clamator coromandus*  
Four to five heard and one seen very well as it responded to the tape.
- Large Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus sparveroides sparveoides*  
Several heard.
- Indian Cuckoo, *Cuculus micropterus micropterus*  
Two heard.
- Lesser Cuckoo, *Cuculus poliocephalus*  
Fairly common.
- Asian Koel, *Eudynamis scolopacea chinensis*  
Three to four heard.
- Oriental Scops-Owl, *Otus sunia stictonotus*  
About five heard.
- Collared Owlet, *Glaucidium brodiei brodiei*  
Three heard during daytime.
- Asian Barred Owlet, *Glaucidium cuculoides whitelyi*  
One heard at dawn near the forest station.
- Northern Boobook, *Ninox japonica japonica*  
One heard near the forest station both morning and evening.
- Jungle (Grey) Nightjar, *Caprimulgus indicus jota*  
Two heard pre-dawn near the main valley.
- Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops saturatus*  
One between Dongzhai and Wuhan.
- Grey-capped Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos canicapillus scintilliceps*  
One near the gate.
- Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major cabanisi*  
One near the gate.
- Grey-faced Woodpecker, *Picus canus guerini*  
Two to three.
- Fairy Pitta, *Pitta nympha nympha*  
A total of six heard and one to two seen extremely well. All but one were in the upper part of the main valley, except for one that was heard both days near the gate. See also notes above.
- Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica gutturalis*  
Several between Dongzhai and Wuhan.

Red-rumped Swallow, *Hirundo daurica japonica*  
Several between Dongzhai and Wuhan.

Collared Finchbill, *Spizixos semitorques semitorques*  
Fairly common.

Light-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus sinensis sinensis*  
Several between Dongzhai and Wuhan.

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

Lanceolated Warbler, *Locustella lanceolata*  
One skulking in the road-side grass at the gate on the second day.

Arctic Warbler, *Phylloscopus borealis ssp*  
About five singing and calling.

Grey-streaked Flycatcher, *Muscicapa griseisticta*  
One in the main valley.

White-crowned Forktail, *Enicurus leschenaulti sinensis*  
One near the forest station.

Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus canorus*  
Common.

Vinous-throated Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis webbianus fulvicauda*  
Common in bamboo in the valleys.

Black-throated Tit, *Aegithalos concinnus concinnus*  
One family flock.

Great Tit, *Parus major minor*  
A few seen.

Tiger Shrike, *Lanius tigrinus*  
One male seen nicely at the gate.

Brown Shrike, *Lanius cristatus ssp*  
One between Dongzhai and Wuhan.

Long-tailed Shrike, *Lanius schach schach*  
Common between Dongzhai and Wuhan.

Black Drongo, *Dicrurus macrocercus cathoecus*  
Common between Dongzhai and Wuhan.

Ashy Drongo, *Dicrurus leucopaheus leucogenis*  
Two flying over the reserve.

Hair-crested Drongo, *Dicrurus hottentottus brevirostris*  
Common in the forest.

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius sinensis*  
Five.

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica sericea*  
Common between Dongzhai and Wuhan..

Crested Myna, *Acridotheres cristatellus cristatellus*  
Common between Dongzhai and Wuhan and a few at the reserve.

Red-billed Starling, *Sturnus sericeus*  
One just outside the reserve.

Russet Sparrow, *Passer rutilans rutilans*  
One pair with nest-material at the gate.

Meadow Bunting, *Emberiza cioides castaneiceps*  
One pair at the ridge.

Muntjac sp  
One seen at close range in the forest.