

Bawangling, Hainan, China

January 15-16, 2005

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White-winged Magpie

General

A weekend trip with the purpose of seeing Hainan Hill-Partridge and Hainan Peacock-Pheasant. Given all the trouble I had with logistics and inflexible reserve staff, I counted myself lucky to see the former species. The Peacock-Pheasant is very difficult to find during the winter and I could not find any sign of it during a total of seven hours spent at the best sites and known territories. A highlight was to find a fair number of White-winged Magpies, a species very seldomly encountered outside Viet Nam. I also had sightings of other specialties like Hainan Leaf-Warbler, Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush, the local subspecies of Silver Pheasant and Yellow-billed Nuthatch.

Itinerary

One of the last things I said to my wife over the phone before take-off in Beijing, was that nothing should be taken for granted until the bird is bagged. This came out to be very true on this trip! After a slight delay at the airport, we finally taxied out and the engines roared. However, only to die off half-way down the runway. Back to the terminal for a long wait for a new aircraft to be called in. With a 3.5 hour flight it was already 22.30 on the Friday evening when I arrived Haikou airport. From there it was a 4 hours drive to Bawangling town. Most of the way is very good expressroad, but the last hour was on bumpy dirt roads. It became a rather short night at the hotel, as I wanted to leave by 6.00 in order to be in the forest by dawn at 7.00.

So far so good, and I managed to find the right site at KM 22 immediately and soon heard several duetting pairs of Hainan Hill-Partridges, although the first birds I saw were White-winged Magpies and a male Red Junglefowl! After an hour trying to unsuccessfully get access to the partridges, I started walking the ridge trail. Life was great with a long day in primary forest to look forward to. However, just when I encountered the first mixed flock, I was approached by two reserve staff, who insisted on me leaving the forest as I had no permit. After some long negotiations over the phone with some boss, I eventually had to give up and join them back to the car, where the boss waited. Same negotiations again, which of course ended in me having to go to the reserve station Dong Er at KM 18.5. There the negotiations continued until I was promised to get the permit if I personally went to Bawangling town. At some point in time one really has to give in and just do as they say, so I decided to make a quick trip to town and try to be back as quickly as possible. The first thing that happened was that the driver failed to brake in one curve and in order to stop the car, he aimed for a large pile of rocks with the result that the car stopped but also closely turned upside down! Puh, reverse gear and we were continuing down the mountain. Ten minutes later a motorbike came around a corner and with the same likelihood as fire in hell, we quickly grounded him. Fortunately he was alright and after sorting out what loose pieces belonged to the car respectively the moto, we carried on again.

In town I was met by the even bigger boss, who asked if he could join me going birding. I said, "of course, as long as we go back into the forest". "No, impossible, but I know another place with many different birds." By now I had a very serious feeling that the entire weekend would be completely ruined and that was indeed also what my translating travel agent in BJ told me over the phone. It was now mid-afternoon and I had only been doing 1.5 hours of birding and only heard the partridges. Being totally crossed, I started to realize that I had the option of either spending my weekend in Bawangling town (not the sort of place you dream about) or giving up and returning to Beijing. I actually opted for the latter and we started going back to the hotel to pick up the gear. As a last idea I thought I could phone a birding friend in Haikou and ask him about any reasonable site nearby, not requiring a permit. As it turned out, he did not do that, but rather said that he would call a friend to arrange for my permit to Bawangling! Within minutes, I was granted access and we were soon on our way from the hotel back up the mountain. It is absolutely amazing what some connections are worth! [Thank you very much again when you read this!!]

About 15.30, seven hours after the birding came to an abrupt halt in the morning, I was back on track again and this time with a Peacock-Pheasant "hunter" as a guide. We had some very good birding indeed in the valley below KM 22, seeing both Hainan Hill-Partridges and Hainan Silver Pheasants, before returning to the reserve station Dong Er at KM 18.5 slightly before dusk. Together with the now suddenly very cooperative reserve staff we had dinner (rice and cooked weeds) and a chat around the open fire in the evening. The night was spent in the rather rustic house. No electricity, raw concrete, very cold, a rock hard bed with some blankets that had seen far better days, what don't you put up with for some good birds?

Next morning I was happy to get up and out as quickly as possible. After a breakfast consisting of plain noodles, we were soon hitting the trails and ridges in search of Peacock-Pheasants. Although we invested the entire morning, we failed to find anything else than fresh feeding tracks. Surprisingly there were no Hill-Partridges calling at all this morning. We came back to the station at 11.00 and I walked down the road until my driver picked me up at 12.00 for the return journey to Haikou.

On the way to Haikou I speculated for myself about the chances for the flight being on time and sure enough, a serious delay was building up and I was not at home until 2.00 on the Monday morning. A tough trip, but still the partridge and the magpie under the belt...

Although the above account tells something about all the hassle I had, I have not even included the financial part which is equally worse.

Bottom line 1: never take anything for granted until the bird is bagged and you are back home behind your front door.

Bottom line 2: In China nothing is easy, but on the other hand nothing is impossible!

Bottom line 3: Fortunately some of those birds out there are really great to get your bins on, and afterwards you have some fond memories and good stories to tell.



White-winged Magpie

Weather

The weather was surprisingly cold and a fleece jacket proved very useful indeed, especially at night and early morning. Most of the time it was overcast, but dry. There had been some rain the day before my arrival.

Site descriptions

Bawangling is probably one of the better sites to see most of the endemic species and subspecies of Hainan. The best area seems to be around KM 22, where there is a 30 x 30 m large open area just by the road before the road starts to descend on the far side of the ridge. Hainan Hill-Partridges called frequently between 7-8 in the morning, but then stopped. The ridge trail could probably yield pheasants. The forest is good all the way back to around KM 16, when it starts to get rather hacked. On both sides of the road between KM 18-22 there are several minor tracks that lead either down the valley or up the slopes/ridges. Most of these trails are very small and without guide or compass it could be easy to get lost.

Accommodation could be either at the Yejia Village hotel, a very new and comfortable hotel, but note that it takes almost one hour to drive from there to KM 22. Alternatively it is possible to stay at Dong Er station, which is not equally comfortable, but more birdy of course. Do not rely on the hotel to arrange for the permit as I did, but do apply for this separately.

Schematic map over Bawangling area



Some coordinates that may prove useful:

Hotel Yejia village	N19°05.081, E109°07.359, 452 masl
KM 22	N19°05.348, E109°11.357, 1035 masl
Silver Pheasant	N19°05.573, E109°11.389
Dong Er station	N19°05.937, E109°10.520, 985 masl

Birds

Cattle Egret, *Bubulcus ibis coromandus*

One between Bawangling and Haikou.

Black-shouldered Kite, *Elanus caeruleus vociferous*

One near Haikou.

Oriental Honey-Buzzard, *Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis?*

One soaring at KM 16.

Crested Goshawk, *Accipiter trivirgatus indicus*

One soaring at KM 20.

Hainan Hill-Partridge, *Arborophila ardens*

Three pairs duetting from the parking lot at KM 22 the first morning between 7.00 and 8.00 when they were not heard again. In the late afternoon I encountered two birds and saw one very well, although briefly in the forest some 100 m below KM 22. In that same area I also disturbed another larger party of maybe up to 10 birds. Perhaps one from this last group was also flushed on the way back in the same general area. In the evening three more pairs were duetting around Dong Er (KM 18.5).

Red Junglefowl, *Gallus gallus jabouillei*

One male slowly strolled across the road at KM 22 in the very early morning.

Silver Pheasant, *Lophura nycthemera whiteheadi*

One male and two females disturbed and flushed some 100 m below KM 22 in the late afternoon.

Eurasian Woodcock, *Scolopax rusticola*

One flying silently over the forest at Dong Er (KM 18.5) in the early morning.

Mountain Imperial-Pigeon, *Ducula badia griseicapilla*

About four heard and five seen.

Green-billed Malkoha, *Phaenicophaenus tristis hainanus*

One at KM 17.

Collared or Asian Barred Owlet, *Glaucidium* sp

One seen in a top of a tree at KM 19. Not identified because of time constraints. Another unidentified *Glaucidium*/*Otus* flew across the road in the dark at around KM 8.

House Swift, *Apus nipalensis* ssp

A few in Bawangling town.

Red-headed Trogon, *Harpactes erythrocephalus hainanus*

A total of four seen and one heard.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis bengalensis*

One in Bawangling town.

Blue-bearded Bee-eater, *Nyctyornis athertoni brevicaudata*

Two at KM 15.

Black-browed Barbet, *Megalaima oorti faber*

A total of at least 20.

Grey-capped Woodpecker, *Dendrocopus canicapillus swinhoei*

Two separate between Dong Er and KM 22.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica* ssp

A few between Bawangling and Haikou.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba* ssp

Four in Haikou seen from the car.

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea melanope/robusta*

10+ between Bawangling town and KM 22.

Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni yunnanensis*

Three at Dong Er.

Scarlet Minivet, *Pericrocotus flammeus fraterculus*
Five at KM 17.

Grey-chinned Minivet, *Pericrocotus solaris griseogularis*
Several small flocks between KM 17 and KM 22.

Light-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus sinensis hainanus*
One near Haikou.

Puff-throated Bulbul, *Alphoixus pallidus pallidus*
Fairly common between KM 17 and KM 22.

Chestnut Bulbul, *Hemixos castanonotus castanonotus*
Common between KM 17 and KM 22.

Mountain Bulbul, *Ixos maclellandii similis*
Fairly common between KM 17 and KM 22.

Black Bulbul, *Hypsipetes leucocephalus perniger*
Two at KM 22.

Orange-bellied Leafbird, *Chloropsis hardwickii lazulina*
Three around KM 19.

Blue Whistling-Thrush, *Myophonus caeruleus caeruleus*
One along the mountain road at low elevation in the early morning.

Asian Stubtail, *Urosphena squameiceps*
One at the ridge trail at KM 22.

Yellow-browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*
About ten seen and heard.

Hainan Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus hainanus*
About ten seen and heard, mostly in mixed species flocks.

Rufous-faced Warbler, *Abroscopus albogularis fulvifacies*
One seen and at least five heard.

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher, *Culicapa ceylonensis calochrysea*
One below KM 22.

Siberian Blue Robin, *Luscinia cyane ssp*
One female below KM 22.

Red-flanked Bluetail, *Tarsiger cyanurus cyanurus*
One female at the ridge trail at KM 22.

Oriental Magpie-Robin, *Copsychus saularis prosthopellus*
One at Y village hotel.

White-crowned Forktail, *Enicurus leschenaulti sinensis*
About five seen and heard.

White-throated Fantail, *Rhipidura albicollis celsa*
About five seen.

Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, *Garrulax pectoralis semitorquatus*
Two identified as this species in a flock of ten Neckies moving through the forest at KM 18.5.

Rufous-cheeked (Grey) Laughingthrush, *Garrulax (maesi) castanotis*
Heard at almost ten occasions between KM 18 and KM 22 and a party of four seen very well below KM 22.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis nigrostellatus*
Two plus one around KM 20.

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps goodsoni*
Three at KM 18.

Spot-necked Babbler, *Stachyris striolata swinhoei*
One at KM 22.

White-browed Shrike-Babbler, *Pteruthius flaviscapis lingshuiensis*
One at the ridge trail at KM 22.

Dusky Fulvetta, *Alcippe brunnea arguta*

Two at KM 20.

Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, *Alcippe morrisonia rufescentior*
Common.

White-bellied Yuhina, *Yuhina zantholeuca tyrannula*

A total of three seen.

Sultan Tit, *Melanochlora sultanea flavocristata*

Five below KM 22.

Yellow-billed Nuthatch, *Sitta solangiae chienfengensis*

Two at the ridge trail at KM 22.

Olive-backed Sunbird, *Nectarinia jugularis rhizophorae*

One female at Bawangling town.

Japanese White-eye, *Zosterops japonicus hainana*

Five at Bawangling town.

Long-tailed Shrike, *Lanius schach hainanus*

Six between Bawangling and Haikou.

Bronzed Drongo, *Dicrurus aeneus aeneus*

Five between KM 17 and KM 22.

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, *Dicrurus paradiseus johni*

At least three around KM 20-22.

White-winged Magpie, *Urocissa whiteheadi whiteheadi*

Surprisingly many seen as there seems to be extremely few previous sightings at all from this reserve, or in fact anywhere in Hainan. First three distantly at KM 22 in the very early morning and later about ten just by the road at KM 22 (could have been the same flock).

Then two single individuals at the ridge trail at KM 22 and finally two flying across the road at KM 11. Certainly one of the trip highlights as the large flock was really confiding.



White-winged Magpie

Yellow-breasted Magpie, *Cissa hypoleuca katsumatae*

One heard at KM 20. Note: Identification based on the local guide who was familiar with the call.

Grey Treepie, *Dendrocitta formosae insulae*

A total of five.

Mammals: One small hare, one huge black/red squirrel, one small grey squirrel