

# **Chebaling & Babaoshan, Guangdong, China**

**4-8 May 2005**

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*Forested valley at Babaoshan*

## **General**

This is a report of two very brief visits to two of the more well known nature reserves in Guangdong. The purpose was to see Blyth's Kingfisher at Chebaling and Silver Oriole at Babaoshan. The result was both rain and sunshine, as I did well on the first one, but sadly dipped on the Oriole. In general it could be said that both reserves are well worth spending more time in.

## **Itinerary**

4/4

Early in the morning I left Taiwan after a few days birding on this island. After some local transportation in Hong Kong, I boarded the 11.00 train from Kowloon station bound for Guangzhou, where I arrived two hours later. The first week in May is called the Golden Week and that is when all people are off work. The name is probably very relevant for all people in the travel biz as everyone is on the move. Guangzhou train station was no exception, but thanks to some support from a Chinese girl, I soon got hold of a train ticket to Shaoguan, which was my next destination. Shaoguan is a three hours train ride north of Guangzhou and is the gateway to the two reserves Chebaling and Babaoshan. I left on the 15.25 train and thanks to a good book to read the journey passed away without too much trouble. I had phoned to the Chebaling reserve staff earlier in the day in order to arrange a pickup at Shaoguan train station. This worked out as planned and I was soon dosing off in the car for the two hours ride to Chebaling, only interrupted by a dinner stop. Arrived Chebaling late in the evening and checked in at the guesthouse at the reserve HQ.

5/5

I was up well before dawn and positioned myself by the river for the Blyth's Kingfisher performance. Well-behaved as it was, it soon shot by like a bullet. I waited for a while and sure enough, it came ricocheting for a second chance. With the target bird bagged, I was "free" to do some general birding, so I walked up one of the trails and suddenly a Fairy Pitta appeared in front of me. I guess we were equally surprised, as it was just sitting there with a big stick in its beak. After a fair time it decided it was time to continue the house building so it flew up the slope, never to be seen again. The rest of the morning I walked along the main road further into the reserve, but not much was happening. The only highlight being a flock of Laughers that contained both Greater and Lesser Necklaced, the latter having until now escaped by bins.

Later I returned to the large bridge and under the umbrella I was waiting for the kingfisher to reappear. In order of celebrity, first a Blyth's Kingfisher flew past, followed by a majestic Crested and rounded off by the last and least; the Common. In spite of me waiting for a Blyth's repeat performance, it never showed up until it was time for lunch and departure for Babaoshan. An uneventful drive to Chebaling bus station and there I transferred to a truck that would take me to Babaoshan. Mr Zhang at Chebaling had kindly sorted this out. After an equally uneventful drive (a rare thing in rural China!) we arrived at Babaoshan after two hours drive. Checked in at the guesthouse at the HQ and had a dinner before going to bed.

6/5

This day I walked 27 km and spent at least eight hours looking for the key bird, the Silver Oriole. The first few hours were misty, somewhat windy with a light rain, so not only the Orioles decided to keep a low profile. At 9-ish it cleared up, but most of the birds probably had given up by now so it was extremely quiet. Perseverance usually pays off, so I relentlessly spent the entire day in the core area, except for a short lunch break. Needless to say, I did not get even close to seeing nor hearing a sniff of the Orioles. Returned to the guesthouse in the evening having seen very few birds at all during the day.

7/5

Another day and another try for the Orioles. I positioned myself at two good vantage points during a total of more than four hours. The weather was good with a nice bird chorus and everything felt right, BUT the birds just failed to materialize. Actually I am inclined to believe that they were just not around. At 10.30 I gave up and decided to go home to Beijing, which was a long journey. First two hours with the Babaoshan arranged minibus to Shaoguan. As this was the last day of the Golden Week holiday, I feared that it would be difficult to get seats on the train and sure enough, all seats fully booked. One of the reserve staff kindly helped me to procure a bus ticket instead. This turned out to be an even better alternative, as it was quick (three hours) and convenient at a price of RMB 80. Then it was only a short taxi ride to the airport and board the flight to Beijing.

## **Weather**

The weather was in general fairly good. Short periods of light rain or drizzle are the norm in south China this time of the year so was not surprising. The only heavy rain occurred during one night at Babaoshan.

## **Logistics**

In some previous trip reports it is stated that there are two trains a day from Hong Kong to Shaoguan. Unfortunately, these HK to Beijing trains no longer stops in Shaoguan. Instead, one first has to catch a train from HK to Guangzhou and change to another train going north. The trains from HK to Guangzhou runs almost every hour and entry into mainland China is very smooth as entry to China is done at the train stations. I am not aware how frequently the trains from Guangzhou to Shaoguan run, but most likely several a day. I went on one leaving Guangzhou 15.25 that arrives Shaoguan three hours later. Another convenient alternative is to take the direct long distance coaches that most likely run very frequently. The bus station in Guangzhou is just a couple of hundred meters from the train station, at least the train station where the HK trains arrive. There is another train station as well in Guangzhou.

## **Site descriptions**

### Chebaling

Chebaling is a lowland reserve with some apparently extensive tracts of forest still remaining. Access is via Shixing, which is northeast of Shaoguan. I arranged with the staff to pick me up at Shaoguan train station in the evening. The cost for this was RMB 300. At the HQ there is good accommodation available at RMB 220 including meals.

Chebaling used to be the site to connect with the enigmatic White-eared Night-Heron. This is for the time being not the case, as they have not been seen for a year and the habitat is now sadly destroyed (actually just outside the reserve). Most likely there are more WENH in the reserve, but it would require a fair share of luck to find one. Another specialty of Chebaling is Blyth's Kingfisher, which is readily seen from the HQ and the large bridge ca 300 upstream. There are many trails in the area, although I just had time to try the one that runs from behind the museum.

Contacts: Mr Zhang Xin Wang, +86 13927890616 (mobile), +86 7513462114 (office). He speaks limited English, but is very helpful.

## Babaoshan

Babaoshan, or Nanling as it is also known as, is at a much higher altitude than Chebaling and thus has a different avifauna. I only birded along an old logging road at altitudes of ca 1100-1400 m. With more time, it is probably worthwhile to bird the ridges across the river as well as the summit area.

To arrange a car for local transportation is RMB 300 a day. I opted for going on the back of a moto instead and paid RMB 50, which of course is grossly overpriced, but manageable. The accommodation including three meals a day (which probably no birder has time for anyway) is RMB 250. On top of this there is an entrance fee of RMB 35.

Contacts: Mr Gong Yue Ning, +86 13827991628 (mobile), +86 751 5232007 (office), [gyn1974@163.com](mailto:gyn1974@163.com). Mr Gong speaks no English.

### **Birds**

Striated Heron, *Butorides striatus actophilus*

One at Chebaling.

Black Baza, *Aviceda leuphotes syama*

Four together at Chebaling. 6-8 at Babaoshan.

Crested Serpent-Eagle, *Spilornis cheela ricketti*

One at Babaoshan.

Chinese Goshawk, *Accipiter soloensis*

One at Chebaling. One at Babaoshan.

Mountain Hawk-Eagle, *Spixiaetus nipalensis nipalensis*

A pair at Babaoshan.

Chinese Bamboo-Partridge, *Bambusicola thoracica thoracica*

One heard at Chebaling. One heard at Babaoshan.

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus torquatus*

One heard at Chebaling.

Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, *Clamator coromandus*

One calling and then seen at Chebaling. Five at Babaoshan.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus sparveroides sparveroides*

One heard at Chebaling. Two at Babaoshan.

Himalayan Cuckoo, *Cuculus saturatus*

One heard at Babaoshan, 3-4 four note Hoopoe-call.

Drongo Cuckoo, *Surniculus lugubris dicruroides*

One heard and oneseen at Babaoshan.

Coucal sp, *Centropus* sp

One seen briefly at Chebaling was probably a Lesser.

Oriental Scops-Owl, *Otus sunia malayanus*

One calling both evenings at the HQ at Babaoshan and another calling at Babaoshan in the daytime.

Collared Owlet, *Glaucidium brodiei brodiei*

Three heard and one seen at Babaoshan.

White-throated Needletail, *Hirundapus caudacutus caudacutus*

A flock of 15 migrating north was most likely this species.

Blyth's Kingfisher, *Alcedo Hercules*

Three sightings at Chebaling of flying birds might have related to the same individual. Twice seen at the HQ and once at the large bridge. Clearly larger than Common Kingfisher and much darker head with obvious pale spot on side of head. Call was deeper in pitch. Key species at Chebaling and my reason for coming here.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis bengalensis*

Two at Chebaling.

Crested Kingfisher, *Megaceryle lugubris guttulata*

One at the large bridge at Chebaling.

Dollarbird, *Eurystomus orientalis abundus*

At least 20 hawking insects over the forest at Chebaling. 10-20 at Babaoshan.

Great Barbet, *Megalaima virens virens*

3-4 at Chebaling. Four at Babaoshan.

Black-browed Barbet, *Megalaima oorti sini*

3-4 heard at Chebaling. Five at Babaoshan.

Grey-capped Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos canicapillus kaleensis*

Two at Babaoshan.

Grey-headed Woodpecker, *Picus canus sobrinus*

Two heard at Chebaling.

Bay Woodpecker, *Blythipicus pyrrhotis sinensis*

One heard both days at Babaoshan.

Fairy Pitta, *Pitta nympha*

A surprise find and the first record for Chebaling, was one at the museum trail carrying nest material. It was hopping on the trail for a while before deciding to fly up the slope.

Red-rumped Swallow, *Cecropis daurica japonica*

A few seen en route between Chebaling and Babaoshan.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba leucopsis*

Two at Chebaling.

Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike, *Coracina melaschistos intermedia*

At least five at Babaoshan.

Grey-chinned Minivet, *Pericrocotus solaris griseogularis*

About ten at Babaoshan.

Collared Finchbill, *Spizixos semitorques semitorques*

Four at Chebaling.

Red-whiskered Bulbul, *Pycnonotus jacosus jacosus*

One outside Chebaling.

Chestnut Bulbul, *Hemixos castanonotus canipennis*

15-20 at Babaoshan.

Mountain Bulbul, *Ixos mcclllandii holtii*

Five at Babaoshan.

Black Bulbul, *Hypsipetes leucocephalus ssp*

Common at Babaoshan. Ssp should be *leucocephalus* according to range, but they were all black-headed (?).

Brown Dipper, *Cinclus pallasii pallasii*

Two at Chebaling.

Blue Whistling-Thrush, *Myophonus caeruleus caeruleus*

At least five at Chebaling and about the same number at Babaoshan.

Oriental Magpie-Robin, *Copsychus saularis prosthopellus*

One at Chebaling.

Plumbeous Water-Redstart, *Rhyacornis fuliginosus fuliginosus*  
Two at Chebaling and a few outside the reserve. Several at Babaoshan.

Slaty-backed Forktail, *Enicurus schistaceus*  
Two pairs at Chebaling.

Lesser Necklaced Laughingthrush, *Garrulax monileger melli*  
One or probably two heard and seen together with some Greater at Chebaling.  
Eventually this one of my jinx birds showed up.

Greater Necklaced Laughingthrush, *Garrulax pectoralis picticollis*  
Three or four together with the preceding species at Chebaling and and additional  
two seen at the museum trail at Chebaling. One at Babaoshan.

Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus canorus*  
One heard outside the reserve at Chebaling.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis stridulus*  
Two heard at Chebaling and four heard at Babaoshan.

Pygmy Wren-Babbler, *Pnoepyga pusilla pusilla*  
One heard at Babaoshan.

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps davidi*  
Several at Babaoshan.

Striated Yuhina, *Yuhina castaniceps torqueola*  
Fairly common at Babaoshan.

Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, *Alcippe morrisonia hueti*  
Two at Chebaling and fairly common at Babaoshan.

Yellow-cheeked Tit, *Parus spilonotus rex*  
Ten at Babaoshan.

Crow-billed Drongo, *Dicrurus annectans*  
Two at Babaoshan.

Red-billed Blue Magpie, *Urocissa erythrorhyncha erythrorhyncha*  
10+ at Chebaling and 20+ at Babaoshan.

Grey Treepie, *Dendrocitta formosae sinica*  
Three at Babaoshan.