

Laojunshan, Sichuan, China

(With notes on Sichuan Hill-Partridge)

21-24 April 2005

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Golden Parrotbill

General

Together with Jesper Hornskov, we decided to go looking for Sichuan Hill-Partridge over an extended weekend. Laojunshan is probably the best, or at least most accessible, site to see this very difficult species. We were fortunate to hear plenty of birds calling all through the days and I personally saw five different individuals during the days I stayed in the reserve. Another specialty of the area is the seldom-seen Streaked Barwing, which we spent a lot of time looking for. As it turned out Jesper was lucky and found two birds only four hours after I had to leave the area. All in all it was a very birdy weekend in some very good forest.

Itinerary

21/4

Jesper and I were picked up at my hotel in Chengdu at 17.30 and we headed out of town to the express road to Chongqing. This express road is about ten years old and still in fairly good condition. A one-hour stop for dinner and then we continued on to Pingshan, where we arrived at midnight. We were met by the reserve staff and quickly checked in at the hotel for a short night, i.e. four hours.

22/4

Up at 4.00 in order to be at the edge of the forest at daybreak. The road is very bumpy for most parts and it took us almost 2.5 hours to reach the end of the road, the last bit merely a drivable track. It was raining and we quickly got organized for the walk in to the reserve. The rain held up after a while and later in the morning the sun came out. At Er Yuan Ping we had a bowl of noodles for breakfast and saw the first White-spectacled Warblers and heard several Hill-Partridges at close range. At 8.45 we started to walk towards Laojun guesthouse and it was not long before one Hill-Partridge was calling temptingly close to the trail. Some playback brought it into a nice view for me, although Jesper only saw parts of it.

By the time we had climbed the ridge it was about noon and the bird activity had dropped. We birded the ridge trail all the way to Laojun guesthouse, where we arrived mid afternoon. After having installed ourselves and had a lunch, we walked down the trail immediately south of the guesthouse. Little bird activity and we instead returned up again and took the trail towards Yujiashan. This trail leads along the electricity line and then leaves it and goes across the main ridge and down the north side and down along ridge B. The habitat looked good and plenty of Hill-Partridges were heard.

23/4

The entire day was devoted for Streaked Barwing. We saw two choices to spend the morning, either to walk down along ridge B or stay along the main ridge. We opted for the first alternative as we had heard a couple of interesting calls there the evening before. We had many Hill-Partridges calling and even saw a couple, but no sign of any Barwings. By two in the afternoon we were back at the guesthouse for a quick lunch before setting out again. This time we walked the main ridge trail, but neither saw nor heard any birds at all! It was not too long before the clouds swept in and the wind picked up. The light faded quickly in the rain and we were forced back to the guesthouse for an early evening.

24/4

Left Laojun guesthouse at 6.00 just before dawn and walked slowly along the ridge trail in search of Barwings. No luck, but had a nice view of a male Temminck's Tragopan on the trail. At 8.15 we had reached the top of the steps and I had to descend in order to go back to Chengdu. I wished Jesper good luck with the Barwings and needless to say he saw a couple at 12.30 at the very same spot we had been looking. That's the way it goes sometimes.

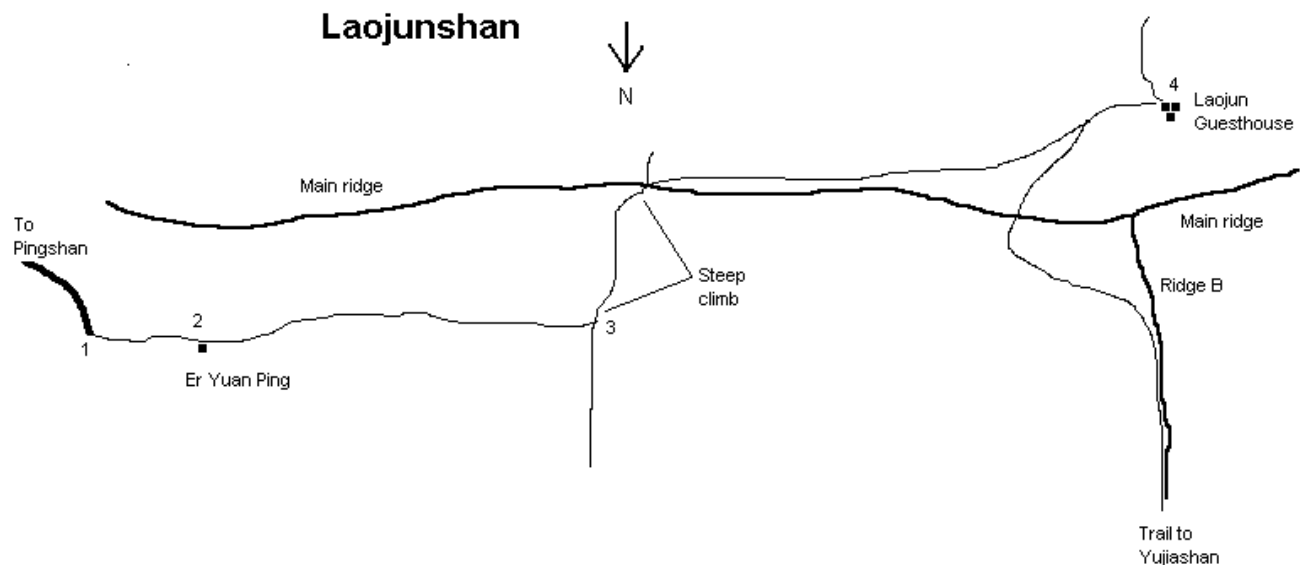
Weather

Sichuan is notoriously known for its varying weather and it is even said, “the dogs are barking at the sun”. We were fairly lucky and mostly had a clear or overcast sky, although wind, low clouds and rain ruined one late afternoon/evening. The temperature was very comfortable even during the night at 1800 m at the guesthouse. In the winter it would probably be very cold and wet, so would not be recommended.

Logistics

Mr Dai Bo in Chengdu kindly arranged everything for us and we are grateful to him for making it all happen. The transport, permits, accommodation and food were taken care of by the reserve staff. From Chengdu we went with one of the reserve people, who happened to have a meeting in town.

Site descriptions



Coordinates:

1	End of drivable track	N28°41.981, E104°01.980	
2	Er Yuan Ping guesthouse	N28°42.015, E104°01.963	1521 m
3	Trail T-junction	N28°41.937, E104°00.442	1606 m
4	Laojun guesthouse	N28°41.706, E104°59.264	1884 m

Distances:

From Er Yuan Ping to Trail T-junction is 2.5 km, one hour steady walk.

From the ridge at the top of the steps to Laojun guesthouse is 2 km.

From Chengdu to Yibin is 3-4 hours depending on speed on the expressroad.

From Yibin to Pingshan is 2 hours on reasonably good road.

From Pingshan to end of road at 1, is 2 hours going up, 1.25 hours speeding down.



Laoyun guesthouse

Sichuan Hill-Partridges seem to occur all over the area we visited. They occur in the secondary forest all the way at the end of the drivable track east of Er Yuan Ping. Many birds were encountered around Er Yuan Ping and along the trail leading to the steps up the ridge. Around Laojun guesthouse there were a few territories and several were recorded along ridge B. They started calling at dawn and were very active until late morning when the activity decreased somewhat. During the mid afternoon they were still calling, although not as frequently. Activity picked up again in the late afternoon and evening, when it seemed that most territorial males/pairs were calling frequently. We saw one bird that came in to playback to check us out. Another male was seen nicely when it was feeding along the trail. Two birds were running quickly in front of me on the ridge trail at dusk when it was raining lightly.

Streaked Barwings apparently occur among mature trees along the main ridge at altitudes of ca 1800 m. Another rare south Sichuan specialty that has been seen in the reserve a few times is Gold-fronted Fulvetta. It occurs in lower altitudes along mossy streambeds in both primary and secondary forest. As I had seen this species before and was limited in time, I did not spend so much time in those areas. Jesper, who stayed for another couple of days, did look for it without seeing it.

Birds

Following species and numbers were recorded by myself. Species recorded only by Jesper during my stay have been added in [].

Besra, *Accipiter virgatus affinis*

Three seen and heard.

Sichuan Hill-Partridge, *Arborophila rufipectus*

The bird of the trip. Laojunshan seems to be THE place to see this threatened endemic. We heard them calling from Er Yuan Ping and all the way to Laojun guesthouse as well as around ridge B. As usual they were most active in the morning and evening, but actually called basically all through the day. We estimated a total number of at least 15 territories, many were duetting pairs. I personally saw five birds, two of them very well, although not for long.

Chinese Bamboo Partridge, *Bambusicola thoracica thoracica*

Pair heard near Er Yuan Ping.

Temminck's Tragopan, *Tragopan teminckii*

One male heard and briefly seen by Jesper above the Laojun guesthouse, one heard calling there the morning after and one male seen along the ridge trail. Also one more seen by Jesper along ridge B.

[Speckled Wood-Pigeon, *Columba hodgsonii*

One seen by Jesper along ridge B.]

Large Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus sparveroides sparveroides*

Several heard all over the area.

Himalayan Cuckoo, *Cuculus saturatus*

Three heard and one seen. Called variably with 3 or 4 note calls, never the double call that is used by the northern form Oriental Cuckoo, *C. horsfieldi*.

Oriental Scops-Owl, *Otus sunia malayanus*

Three heard calling, both daytime and nighttime.

Collared Owlet, *Glaucidium brodiei brodiei*

Five heard from Er Yuan Ping to Laojun guesthouse.

Asian Barred Owlet, *Glaucidium cuculoides whitelyi*

One heard below ridge B.

Great Barbet, *Megalaima virens virens*

5-10, mostly heard.

Speckled Piculet, *Picumnus innominatus chinensis*

One near Laojun guesthouse.

Crimson-breasted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos cathpharius pernyi*

One along ridge B.

Grey-faced Woodpecker, *Picus canus guerini*

One heard.

Bay Woodpecker, *Blythipicus pyrrhotis pyrrhotis*

Four along the ridges.

Red-rumped Swallow, *Hirundo daurica daurica*

Common in the villages between Laojunshan and Pingshan. One seen by Jesper along ridge B.

[Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni* ssp

One by Jesper.]

[Black Bulbul, *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* ssp

3-4 by Jesper.]

[Dusky Thrush, *Turdus naumanni* ssp
One by Jesper.]

[Eye-browed Thrush, *Turdus obscurus*
Six flying over by Jesper.]

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

Buff-barred Warbler, *Phylloscopus pulcher pulcher*
About ten seen.

Ashy-throated Warbler, *Phylloscopus maculipennis maculipennis*
One along ridge B.

Sichuan Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus forresti*
Three seen near Laojun guesthouse and ridge B.

Pallas's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus proregulus*
3-4.

Chinese Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus yunnanensis*
One heard near Laojun guesthouse.

Hume's Warbler, *Phylloscopus humei mandellii*
One singing along ridge B.

Large-billed Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus magnirostris*
One heard near Er Yuan Ping.

[Blyth's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus reguloides*
Two seen by Jesper.]

Ogilviegranti's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus ogilviegranti disturbans*
10-20. Separated from White-tailed Leaf-Warbler.

Grey-crowned Warbler, *Seicercus tephrocephalus*
Common along the ridges, i.e. 1700-1900 m. Separation from *S. omeiensis* not possible? Trilling song, grey hind-crown, plenty of white in tail, call-note "chu", "chup" or "chuchuchup".

White-spectacled Warbler, *Seicercus affinis affinis*
15-20 between Er Yuan Ping and the steps to the ridge, i.e. 1500-1600 m. Very similar (identical?) song and call-note as ssp *intermedius* from Wuyishan in Fujian. Calls with typical "tjuu-turrr"

Chestnut-crowned Warbler, *Seicercus castaniceps sinensis*
Three heard near Er Yuan Ping.

Snowy-browed Flycatcher, *Ficedula hyperythra hyperythra*
One male seen, and probably another heard along ridge B.

Slaty-blue Flycatcher, *Ficedula tricolor diversa*
3-4 heard.

Grey-headed Flycatcher, *Culicicapa ceylonensis calochrysea*
15-20, mostly heard.

Siberian Blue Robin, *Luscinia cyane* ssp
One female at 1550 m west of Er Yuan Ping.

White-tailed Robin, *Cinclidium leucurum leucurum*
3-4 heard, along the upper ridges.

White-throated Laughingthrush, *Garrulax albogularis eous*
Total of 15-20 in a three different flocks.

Spotted Laughingthrush, *Garrulax ocellatus artemisiae*
One along ridge B.

Rusty Laughingthrush, *Garrulax poecilorhynchus ricinus*
Common.

Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus canorus*
 One heard along ridge B.

Elliot's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax elliotii elliotii*
 One heard along the ridge.

Red-winged Laughingthrush, *Garrulax formosus formosus*
 Fairly common.

Omei Shan Liocichla, *Liocichla omeiensis*
 10+ heard.

Spot-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis decarlei*
 One heard near Laojun guesthouse.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis eidos*
 20+.

Pygmy Wren-Babbler, *Pnoepyga pusilla pusilla*
 5-10 heard between Er Yuan Ping and the steps to the ridge.

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps davidi*
 Common.

Red-billed Leiothrix, *Leiothrix lutea lutea*
 Common.

White-browed Shrike-Babbler, *Pteruthius flaviscapis ricketti*
 5+, mostly heard.

[Streaked Barwing, *Actinodura souliei*
 Besides the Hill-Partridges, this was our target bird of the trip. We searched along the ridges for most of the time, but it was not until 12.30 on the 24th when Jesper found two birds along the ridge. Alas, I was by then going back to Pingshan... At least a good reason to come back to this wonderful reserve!]

Blue-winged Minla, *Minla cyanouroptera wingatei*
 Common along the ridges.

Red-tailed Minla, *Minla ignotincta jerdoni*
 20+ along the ridges.

Golden-breasted Fulvetta, *Alcippe chrysotis swinhoii*
 20+, mostly along the ridges.

Streak-throated Fulvetta, *Alcippe cinereiceps cinereiceps*
 15-20 along the ridges.

Black-headed Sibia, *Heterophasia desgodinsi*
 10-15 along the ridges.

Stripe-throated Yuhina, *Yuhina gularis omissis*
 10-15 along the ridges.

White-collared Yuhina, *Yuhina diademata*
 20 along the ridges.

Grey-headed Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis gularis fokiensis*
 One near Er Yuan Ping.

Golden Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis verreauxi verreauxi*
 2+1+3 along the ridges.

Coal Tit, *Periparus ater aemodius*
 One near Laojun guesthouse.

Green-backed Tit, *Parus monticolus yunnanensis*
 15-20.

Yellow-cheeked Tit, *Parus spilonotus rex*
 Two near Er Yuan Ping.

Yellow-browed Tit, *Sylviparus modestus modestus*

Three along the ridges.

Gould's Sunbird, *Aethopyga gouldiae*

One female along ridge B.

Japanese White-eye, *Zosterops japonicus simplex*

A few along the ridges.

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius sinensis*

Four along the ridges.

Red-billed Blue Magpie, *Urocissa erythrorhyncha erythrorhyncha*

A few seen.

Dark-breasted Rosefinch, *Carpodacus nipalensis intensicolor*

One flying over near Laojun guesthouse.

Grey-headed Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula erythaca erythaca*

A few seen along the ridges.

Meadow Bunting, *Emberiza cioides castaneiceps*

One between Laojunshan and Pingshan.