

# Emei Shan, Sichuan, China

14-17 July 2005

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## General

Yet another short trip to this famous birdy mountain. My initial target for the extended weekend was to do more exciting birding than Emei, but as it turned out those plans failed with short notice. Emeishan has the advantage that it is easy to get to, no permits are required, and no local transport needs to be prearranged. The choice was therefore fairly easy and I still had a couple of target birds to connect with. Moustached Laughingthrush and Green Shrike-Babbler, both being fairly widespread across China, but still not so frequently recorded, especially the former. I decided to spend as much time as possible at mid to low altitudes and eventually tallied a good selection of typical Emei species.

## Itinerary

### 14/7

Taxi from Chengdu airport in the evening and less than two hours later I arrived at Emei Shan (Grand) Hotel near Bauguo temple at the foot of the mountain. Late in the evening I was invited to a dinner by a Chinese family and had far too many ganbeis.

### 15/7

The first bus to the Golden Summit leaves at 6.00 and in fact I got on an even earlier one. Shortly before 8.00 I got off at the end station at Leidongping at around 2500 m. From here I started to descend the mountain on the trail that leads to Xixiangchi. This trail held lots of good coniferous and bamboo forest and many of the typical high altitude birds were seen. I did not spend so much time here though, as I wanted to get down to mid altitudes below Xixiangchi, which I arrived after two hours slow walk.

Xixiangchi is at 2050 m and I had a quick bowl of noodles here before descending a bit further. Here is where I intended to spend more time birding. However, as the weather God played it, it started to rain around noon when I reached the Crossroads. This is the junction where you either can take to the right to Xianfeng or to the left to Wannian. During the early afternoon I walked in the rain all the way to Xianfeng at 1770 m and saw virtually no birds at all. In Xianfeng I booked a very expensive room (the cheap ones were all full, or so they said at least) and by now the rain had almost stopped. I birded the late afternoon along the trail beyond/below Xianfeng down to Cha You Snack Bar, but heard and saw very little. I went back up again and instead took the other direction from Xianfeng, i.e. back towards the Crossroads, but again the bird activity was very poor.

### 16/7

This morning I left very early when it was almost dark, as I wanted to go back up to around the Crossroads again. After slightly more than one hour's brisk walk up all the stairs I reached it at 7.00. Then I birded the area between the Crossroads at 1840 m and the foot of Xixiangchi in the hope of finding Moustached Laughingthrush. Spotted Laughingthrush

showed well as did a cooperative Bar-winged Wren-Babbler and the area in general was fairly birdy. After a quick noodle brecky around 10.00, I decided to try walking down the trail to Wannian. This trail however, starts going up for a while before descending almost one vertical km to Wannian at 1100 m.

I spent many hours walking slowly this part of the trail down to about 1500 m. Found some good bird waves and best of all two Green Shrike-Babblers in one flock at 1500 m. From there I walked somewhat quicker the rest of the trail down to Wannian, where I got a nice room in the temple area. After some recharging, I started walking the Pipeline trail and almost go to the end before the rain set in. retraced to the hotel and had a beer-less dinner in the temple before crashing.

### 17/7

Got up before dawn and heard a couple of Northern Boobooks, a Collared Scops-Owl and an Asian Barred Owlet, all calling around the temple. At 6.15 I headed again out along the Pipeline trail in search of the wanted Laughingthrush. Only scored on a single Rusty, but added some more birds to the trip list. By 10.00 I was back at Wannian and thought it might be a good idea to try the secondary forest that was supposed to be found between Wannian and Qingyin pavilion. Maybe I was not the only person on earth needing Moustached Laughher, because what seemed like tens of thousands of people were moving in a steady stream down the trail, all accompanied by the incredible cicadas. Needless to say I saw very few, if any, birds along this stretch. I tried to move on as quickly as possible in order to reach the car park at Wuxiangang. The best way to move quickly in the procession of people was to walk in the wake of the porters carrying lazy people. At noon I was able to take a bus back up to Wannian car park in a last desperate attempt by taking the cable car up to Wannian temple and walking back down. This is how my search for my other target bird ended and I eventually took the bus down to Emei town and pick up my other bag and left for Chengdu.

### **Weather**

Most of the time the weather was really with me. On the first two days it rained lightly for 1-3 hours midday, but there was no wind. Temperatures were very pleasant, although a bit hot on the lower sections.

### **Logistics**

From Chengdu airport I arranged a car. I have done this a few times before and it is easily arranged at the travel desk at the baggage claim. I usually pay 400 RMB for the one-way trip including toll fees. This is to compare with the 350 RMB that the Emei taxi charges for the reverse direction.

### **Site descriptions**

Emeishan is well described in many previous trip reports and needs no further presentation here. The names I use are those found on the most common tourist map. The nomination of the Crossroads refers to the trail fork below Xixiangchi. The Wannian pipeline trail is a contouring level trail that starts from the back side of the Wannian temple complex. To find the trailhead, walk counter-clockwise around the perimeter wall until you see the 15 cm thick pipeline.

I noticed two things that could be worth considering when planning the birding on this mountain. The first thing is that, at least during this time of the year, it is extremely quiet

in the afternoons with almost nothing calling or moving it seems. Therefore it might be a mistake to plan on covering an otherwise good part of the trails then. The second thing is the cicadas. They are absolutely horrible around Wannian and it seems impossible to even hear your own thoughts. They seemed to be only slightly less active in the very early morning.

This was my fourth visit to Emeishan. Most of my birding this time was at mid to low altitudes in order to maximize the chances of encountering the Moustached Laughingthrush, and therefore many of the typical high altitude birds were missed (as was the Laughing!).

Accommodation, food and drinks are readily available almost everywhere, so there is no need to bring any food or drinks up the mountain. It seemed that all the food stalls even had English menus.

### **Birds**

Besra, *Accipiter virgatus affinis*

One at Wannian Pipeline Trail .

Chinese Bamboo-Partridge, *Bambusicola thoracica thoracica*

About a handful heard from Xixiangchi to Wannian.

Speckled Wood-Pigeon, *Columba hodgsonii*

Four between Leidongping and Xixiangchi.

Wedge-tailed Pigeon, *Treron sphenura sphenura*

Heard at Xixiangchi and between Chudian palace and Wannian and one male seen well at Wannian Pipeline Trail.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus sperverioides sperverioides*

A total of six heard widespread across the mountain.

Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo, *Cuculus nasicolor*

Two heard at Xianfeng.

Lesser Cuckoo, *Cuculus poliocephalus*

A total of at least ten heard scattered all across the mountain.

Asian Koel, *Eudynamis scolopacea chinensis*

One heard above Wannian.

Collared Scops-Owl, *Otus lettia erythrocampe*

One heard predawn at Wannian.

Oriental Scops-Owl, *Otus sunia malayanus*

One heard predawn at Xianfeng.

Asian Barred Owllet, *Glaucidium cuculoides whitelyi*

One heard at predawn Wannian and a pair seen at Wannian Pipeline Trail.

Northern Boobook, *Ninox japonica ssp*

Two heard predawn at Wannian.

Swift sp, *Apus sp*

A flock of about 30 high above Xianfeng were most likely House Swifts.

Speckled Piculet, *Picumnus innominatus chinensis*

One at Wannian Pipeline Trail .

Grey-headed Woodpecker, *Picus canus guerini*

One at Wannian Pipeline Trail .

Bay Woodpecker, *Blythipicus pyrrhotis pyrrhotis*

On near Xianfeng, a pair below the Crossroads and one at Wannian Pipeline Trail.

Red-rumped Swallow, *Hirundo daurica daurica*

Several around Emei town.

- Asian House Martin, *Delichon dasypus nigrimentalis*  
About ten near Xianfeng.
- Light-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus sinensis hoyi*  
A few in Emei town.
- Black Bulbul, *Hypsipetes leucocephalus leucothorax*  
Three above Wannian and two near Qingyin,
- Blue Whistling-Thrush, *Myophonus caeruleus caeruleus*  
A total of 10-15 scattered sightings.
- Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler, *Cettia fortipes davidiana*  
Fairly common from Xixiangchi and below.
- Aberrant Bush-Warbler, *Cettia flavolivacea dulcivox*  
Four heard between Leidongping and Xixiangchi.
- Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler, *Cettia acanthizoides acanthizoides*  
Three heard between Leidongping and Xixiangchi.
- Buff-barred Warbler, *Phylloscopus pulcher pulcher*  
Two near Leidongping.
- Ashy-throated Warbler, *Phylloscopus maculipennis maculipennis*  
Two between Leidongping and Xixiangchi.
- Large-billed Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus magnirostris*  
Fairly common from Leidongping all the way down to Zhanglaoping.
- Claudia's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus claudiae*  
More than ten heard and seen between Leidongping and the crossroads and a few down to Zhanglaoping. Separated from Blyth's Leaf-Warbler, ref Olsson et. al. (2005).
- Sulphur-breasted Warbler, *Phylloscopus ricketti*  
One at Wannian Pipeline Trail .
- Plain-tailed Warbler, *Seicercus soror*  
One heard at Wannian Pipeline Trail .
- Bianchi's Warbler, *Seicercus valentini*  
Common above 2100 m.
- White-spectacled Warbler, *Seicercus affinis affinis*  
Two heard between Huayan Peak and Chudian Palace.
- Omei Warbler, *Seicercus omeiensis* (?)  
Common between 2300 m and all the way down to about 1500 m. Almost all were calling with a single "chu" or multiple "chu-du-du". This would be my personal transcription, although others refer to it as "check" or "tk"! All birds seen well had a complete eyering at the rear end and virtually all had fairly indistinct crown-pattern. Around the crossroads, a few individuals called with a churring "trrrr" and these were not heard to give the "chu" call, although this might just have been birds in a different mood. I still struggle with separating omeiensis from tephrocephalus, and this ID is tentative, as are all my other sightings of this species pair in China... As the song from any individual varies so much, I find it very hard to pick out the key characters (whatever they are!). It may even not be sure that tephrocephalus occur at all on Emeishan.
- Chestnut-crowned Warbler, *Seicercus castaniceps sinensis*  
Four between the Crossroads and Chudian palace.
- Rufous-faced Warbler, *Abroscopus albogularis fulvifacies*  
One at Qingyin.
- Slaty-blue Flycatcher, *Ficedula tricolor diversa*  
One female and another heard between Xixiangchi and the Crossroads
- Rufous-bellied Niltava, *Niltava sundara denotata*  
One female near Xianfeng.

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher, *Culicicapa ceylonensis calochrysea*  
 Fairly common at mid and low elevation.

Oriental Magpie-Robin, *Copsychus saularis prosthopellus*  
 One near Emei town.

Plumbeous Water-Redstart, *Rhyaconis fuliginosus fuliginosus*  
 One at Yuxian temple.

White-bellied Redstart, *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides ichangensis*  
 One at Xixiangchi and three between the Crossroads and Chudian Palace.

White-tailed Robin, *Cinclidium leucurum leucurum*  
 One heard below Xianfeng, one heard near the Crossroads and one heard near Wannian.

Spotted Forktail, *Enicurus maculatus guttatus*  
 One at Yuxian temple.

Rusty Laughingthrush, *Garrulax poecilorhynchus berthemyi*  
 One at Wannian Pipeline Trail .

Spotted Laughingthrush, *Garrulax ocellatus artemisiae*  
 One heard at Xianfeng and one seen and two heard between the Crossroads and Xixiangchi.

Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus canorus*  
 One pair near Xianfeng.

Red-winged Laughingthrush, *Garrulax formosus formosus*  
 Two plus one near Xianfeng, two between Xianfeng and the Crossroads and two between the Crossroads and Chudian Palace.

Omei Shan Liocichla, *Liocichla omeiensis*  
 A total of more than 20 heard and many of those seen at close range (attracted by pishing). All records were between Xixiangchi and Xianfeng and from the Crossroads to Chudian Palace.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis eidos*  
 Frequently heard and many seen from Xixiangchi and below.

Pygmy Wren-Babbler, *Pnoepyga pusilla pusilla*  
 One heard near the Crossroads.

Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, *Spealaeornis troglodytoides troglodytoides*  
 One really showing well less than 100 m “uphill” from the Crossroads.  
 Responded to pishing and started to sing in the open at a distance of 0.5 m!

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps davidi*  
 Fairly common from Xixiangchi and below.

Red-billed Leiothrix, *Leiothrix lutea ssp*  
 Common at all altitudes.

Green Shrike-Babbler, *Pteruthius xanthochlorus pallidus*  
 Two seen well in a mixed species flock at 1500 m near the temple that I think is Xixin Place. The subspecies *pallidus* does not look even remotely similar to the picture in MacKinnon. Much like a small grayish-green Grey-checked Fulvetta with a faint wingbar and yellowish vent/flanks. This little gem was to me the highlight of the weekend as I have been looking for it in so many places.

Golden-breasted Fulvetta, *Alcippe chrysotis swinhoii*  
 One pair just uphill from the Crossroads.

Streak-throated Fulvetta, *Alcippe cinereiceps cinereiceps*  
 About ten seen between the Crossroads and Wannian.

Dusky Fulvetta, *Alcippe brunnea olivacea*  
 One between Chudian palace and Wannian, and one at Wannian Pipeline Trail .

Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, *Alcippe morrisonia davidi*  
Fairly common from Chudian palace and down to Wannian and along Wannian Pipeline Trail.

Black-headed Sibia, *Heterophasia desgodinsi*  
One heard at 2235 m above Xixiangchi and one heard near Xianfeng.

White-collared Yuhina, *Yuhina diademata*  
One between Leidongping and Xixiangchi.

Black-chinned Yuhina, *Yuhina nigrimenta intermedia*  
Five between Leidongping and Xixiangchi, eight near Xianfeng, five between Chudian palace and Wannian, and six at Wannian Pipeline Trail. Always in flocks on their own, maybe because no other birds can keep their pace?

Grey-headed Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis gularis fokiensis*  
One at Wannian Pipeline Trail.

Golden Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis verreauxi verreauxi*  
Eight between the Crossroads and Chudian palace, and one at 1450 m above Wannian. One of my favorite parrotbills and always a delight to see!

Yellow-bellied Tit, *Pardaliparus venustulus*  
One near Xianfeng, one between the Crossroads and Chudian palace, and one at Wannian Pipeline Trail.

Grey-crested Tit, *Lophophanes dichrous wellsi*  
One below Leidongping.

Green-backed Tit, *Parus monticolus yunnanensis*  
Fairly common at most altitudes.

Yellow-browed Tit, *Sylviparus modestus modestus*  
Three above Xixiangchi and two between the Crossroads and Chudian palace.

Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, *Sitta nagaensis nagaensis*  
Two at Xianfeng and two between the Crossroads and Chudian palace.

Gould's Sunbird, *Aethopyga gouldiae dabryi*  
One female above Xixiangchi and one male near the Crossroads.

Chestnut-flanked White-eye, *Zosterops erythropleurus*  
One between the Crossroads and Chudian palace.

Long-tailed Shrike, *Lanius schach schach*  
One near Emei town.

Hair-crested Drongo, *Dicrurus hottentottus brevirostris*  
Four above Wannian and six at Wannian Pipeline Trail .

Grey Treepie, *Dendrocitta formosae sapiens*  
Eight at Wannian Pipeline Trail .

Large-billed Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos colonorum*  
A few heard at mid and low altitudes.