

Happy Island, Hebei, China



Australasian Grass-Owl at Magic Wood

16-17 September 2006

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General

This is a report from a quick trip to one of the most famous migration hotspots in East Asia. Most birders visit in May or end of September/early October, so these sightings might be of some interest. Apart from wanting to see some migration, my specific target was to find a Yellow-legged Buttonquail, one of my few northeast Asian remaining lifers. I was fortunate enough to see the Buttonquail three times (two birds), but maybe the most surprising find was the Australasian Grass-Owl that I flushed at Magic Wood. This is a seldom seen species anywhere within its range and certainly this far north of its presumed range.

The visible migration was so-so, especially the second day which was very foggy the first few hours.

Itinerary

Happy Island is such a well visited place that it needs no further description or directions. The first boat to Happy Island leaves at 8.00 in the morning, so I decided to go to nearby Jingtanggang and stay overnight on the Friday evening. On Saturday morning I birded the Magic Wood for a couple of hours until the boat was ready to leave. As Sunday was rather foggy and no migration took place, I left the island already by noon and drove back to Beijing. From central Beijing it took three hours to drive to the end of Tang Gang Expressway. The return trip took the same time although I then headed to my home near the airport.

Weather

Wonderful weather with pleasant temperatures and almost no wind, only very light northeasterly winds. The humidity was still quite high since the summer monsoon, so both mornings were rather foggy.

Birds

Most of the records refer to observation the first day, unless specifically noted.

Little Grebe, *Tachybaptus ruficollis poggei*

Twelve in the dam at Happy Island.

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

150+ at Happy Island.

Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea jouyi*

A few on Happy Island.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba modesta*

One at Magic Wood.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

Five at Magic Wood and at least five at Happy Island.

Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*

50 at Magic Wood and a few on Happy Island.

Common Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*

15 on Happy Island.

Eurasian Teal, *Anas crecca crecca*

200-300 on Happy Island.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*

30+ on Happy Island.

Yellow-knobbed Duck, *Anas zonorhyncha zonorhyncha*
500-700 on Happy Island.

Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*
10 on Happy Island.

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans lineatus*
Two on Happy Island.

Eastern Marsh-Harrier, *Circus spilonotus spilonotus*
3-5 on Happy Island.

Pied Harrier, *Circus melanoleucos*
Five migrating south and on male hunting on Happy Island.

Japanese Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter gularis sibiricus*
100+ on Happy Island and 10+ at Magic Wood the first day and only small numbers the second day.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus nisus*
10+ on Happy Island. One that I released after I found it stuck in an old towel that was stuck in a tree. It took me quite a while to get it loose as I was rather keen on not having the bird's claws in my blood vessels.

Eurasian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus ssp*
Two on Happy Island.

Eurasian Hobby, *Falco subbuteo strechi*
One on Happy Island each day.

Peregrine Falcon, *Falco peregrinus ssp*
One male and one female on Happy Island.

Japanese Quail, *Coturnix japonica*
Ten on Happy Island the first day and a few the second day.

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus ssp*
Common on Happy Island, where probably only released birds.

Yellow-legged Buttonquail, *Turnix tanki blanfordii*
One seen very well when flushed just next to Little Wood on Happy Island in the late morning and probably the same bird flushed from the same spot in the late afternoon. The second day another bird was flushed along the bank just south of the temple. A long-awaited lifer and *the* target bird of the weekend.

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus chloropus*
One at Magic Wood on the second day.

Eurasian Oystercatcher, *Haematopus ostralegus osculans*
Three on Happy Island.

Grey-headed Lapwing, *Vanellus cinereus*
Two on Happy Island.

Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*
300+ on Happy Island.

Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus*
50+ on Happy Island.

Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago gallinago*
One on Happy Island.

Bar-tailed Godwit, *Limosa lapponica menzbieri/baueri*
10+ on Happy Island.

Whimbrel, *Numenius phaeopus variegates*
5+ on Happy Island.

Eurasian Curlew, *Numenius arquata orientalis*
500+ on Happy Island.

Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatilis*
About five on Happy Island.

Common Greenshank, *Tringa nebularia* ssp
100+ on Happy Island.

Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*
One at Magic Wood.

Terek Sandpiper, *Xenus cinereus*
One on Happy Island.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina* ssp
Heard twice on Happy Island on the second day.

Black-tailed Gull, *Larus crassirostris*
20+ at the boat pier and a few on Happy Island.

Vega/Mongolian Gull, *Larus vegae/mongolicus*
Three adults on Happy Island.

Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*
Fairly common at Magic Wood and on Happy Island.

Saunders's Gull, *Larus saundersi*
Two adults in winter plumage feeding on crabs on the mudflats on the southern tip of Happy Island.

Gull-billed Tern, *Gelochelidon nilotica addenda*
Five at Magic Wood on both days and 20 on Happy Island.

Caspian Tern, *Hydroprogne caspia*
Two on Happy Island.

Little Tern, *Sternula albifrons*
One at Magic Wood and a few on Happy Island.

Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*
A few at Magic Wood and 10+ on Happy Island.

Cuckoo sp, *Cuculus* sp
A few seen on Happy Island were either Common or Oriental.

Australasian Grass-Owl, *Tyto longimembris chinensis*
One flushed from a grassy area at Magic Wood and then seen well and photographed in flight. A very rare bird this far north. Interestingly, up to five birds were later in the month seen by other birders.

Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops saturate*
Three at Magic Wood and three on Happy Island.

Eurasian Wryneck, *Jynx torquilla torquilla*
Two on Happy Island.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major* ssp
One at Magic Wood.

Sand Martin, *Riparia riparia* ssp
A few at the boat pier.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica* ssp
Common on the mainland and on Happy Island.

Red-rumped Swallow, *Cecropis daurica* ssp
Common on the mainland and on Happy Island, but less common than barn Swallow.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba* ssp
A few migrating on Happy Island.

Eastern Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla tschutschensis* ssp
Ten on Happy Island.

Richard's Pipit, *Anthus richardi*
Common at Magic Wood and on Happy Island.

Blyth's Pipit, *Anthus godlewskii*
One migrating south at the boat pier.

Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni yunnanensis*
A few at Magic Wood and a few on Happy Island.

[Pechora Pipit, *Anthus gustavi*
One was most likely heard near the pier on Happy Island.]

Red-throated Pipit, *Anthus cervinus*
Two at the boat pier and three on Happy Island.

Light-vented Bulbul, *Pycnonotus sinensis ssp*
Four on Happy Island.

Asian Stubtail, *Urosphena squameiceps*
One on Happy Island.

Chinese Bush-Warbler, *Bradypterus tacsanowskii*
One flushed from the grass and seen very well in a bush on Happy Island the first day.
Another was seen the day after. China-tick on this one.

Lanceolated Warbler, *Locustella lanceolata*
About five at Magic Wood and 20+ on Happy Island over the course on both days. Many
seen incredibly well. 20-30 unidentified *Locustella* (*Bradypterus*) warblers flushed on
Happy Island.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, *Locustella certhiola ssp*
One at Magic Wood and at least two on Happy Island. One of them seen very well.

Black-browed Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*
Two at Magic Wood and three on Happy Island.

Oriental Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus orientalis*
Three at Magic Wood.

Thick-billed Warbler, *Acrocephalus aedon stegmanni*
Two at Magic Wood and three on Happy Island.

Dusky Warbler, *Phylloscopus fuscatus fuscatus*
50+ on Happy Island on both days.

Radde's Warbler, *Phylloscopus schwarzi*
About five on Happy Island the second day.

Yellow-browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*
20+ at Magic Wood and 50+ on Happy Island on both days.

Two-barred Greenish Warbler, *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*
Ten on Happy Island on both days.

Pale-legged Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus tenellipes*
Two at Magic Wood and five on Happy Island on both days.

Asian Brown Flycatcher, *Muscicapa dauurica*
One at Magic Wood and one on Happy Island the second day.

Taiga Flycatcher, *Ficedula albicilla*
Five on Happy Island.

Siberian Rubythroat, *Luscinia calliope*
One male on Happy Island the first day and 5-8 the second day.

Siberian Blue Robin, *Luscinia cyane ssp*
One adult male and four immatures on Happy Island.

Common Stonechat, *Saxicola rubicola maurus*
A few at Magic Wood and 30+ on Happy Island on both days.

Chestnut-flanked White-eye, *Zosterops erythropleurus*
Many large flocks consisting of 10-50 individuals on Happy Island on both days.

Black-naped Oriole, *Oriolus chinensis diffuses*
Two at Magic Wood.

Brown Shrike, *Lanius cristatus* ssp/ & *lucionensis*

A few at Magic Wood and 10-15 on Happy Island. One adult *lucionensis* on Happy Island.

Black Drongo, *Dicrurus macrocercus cathoecus*

Three on Happy Island.

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica sericea*

Heard on Happy Island.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus* ssp

Common on Happy Island.

Common Rosefinch, *Carpodacus erythrinus grebnitskii*

One at Magic Wood.

Little Bunting, *Emberiza pusilla*

One on Happy Island. Many unidentified ticking buntings heard and seen flying over.

Chestnut Bunting, *Emberiza rutila*

One on Happy Island the second day.