

Labaha Nature Reserve, Sichuan, China

12-14 October 2007



Streaked Barwing, the target bird of the trip

Björn Anderson

General

This was yet another trip to try to find the enigmatic Streaked Barwing. This species occurs in south Sichuan, Yunnan and northern Viet Nam, but there are no really reliable and accessible places to see it. After having tried to find it at Emei Shan, Laojunshan and Xining, I eventually got to know about a sighting at Labahe. My thanks go to Chen Liang in Beijing who kindly gave me the information and details about his sighting there in November 2005. On this trip I was also accompanied by visiting birder Dave Sargeant.

Without doubt the highlight of the weekend was the flock of Streaked Barwings that we found. It was also very nice to once again encounter the recently described Sichuan Treecreeper, this time at the very type locality. Birding in general was rather slow due to the time of the year and few birds were responsive, but we still turned up a fair selection of Sichuan mid altitude birds.

Itinerary

12/10

We left Chengdu at 16.40 and arrived at White Dove Resort (Bai Ge Lin) at Labahe shortly after 21.00. It was freezing cold (at least it felt like that) and drizzling. Once settled into the nice and clean bungalows, we were promised that the heaters would start working soon. Taking their word for it, we had a good dinner in the nearby restaurant and enjoyed chatting with the locals. Meanwhile, in at least one of the rooms, the heater had kicked in.

13/10

We went up at 6.45 and by then it was still twilight. It did not rain, although it was almost dripping from the sky. It was still very cold and the dawn chorus was zip zero. We started by walking up the main road and soon we encountered the first couple of bird flocks. Up a short side trail we discovered a pair of Sichuan Treecreepers that provided us with real close-up views. Not often that this species is seen below eye-level. Around the upper hotel we found several migrants that had found a refuge amongst the grass and bushes. We continued birding around this hotel and also from a trail that continued further along the river, until we decided to walk back to White Dove Resort. The trees around that hotel looked more promising for Streaked Barwing and we birded along the road both above and below this hotel. Around 15.00 we were checking the back side of the bungalows and when I came around the corner of the northernmost bungalow I immediately found myself staring at a smashing Barwing, merely 15 meters away. Dave quickly caught up with me and we could then follow a flock of six Barwings at close range as they worked their way through the trees. In fact, we had found the birds at virtually the exact spot where Chen Liang had seen them two years previously!

Satisfied with the success, we decided to walk back to the upper hotel for the rest of the afternoon. To our surprise we saw an immature Moorhen along the road and even more exciting was stumbling upon a Crake along the trail. It flew up and landed in a small bush and was sat there for enough time for us to get all the details to eventually identify it as a Ruddy-breasted Crake! In the early evening it got colder again and it started to rain lightly, and we returned to the hotel shortly before dusk.

14/10

We started birding at the same time, but instead rather quickly walked all the way up to the upper hotel. This morning was slightly wetter, although not really raining, and the bird activity was rather low. Few birds were singing and those that were, did not really respond to playback. We walked the trail along the river for most of the morning and added a few new species.

By noon we were back at White Dove resort and packed up before having lunch. Immediately after lunch we crammed ourselves into the tiny car that would take us back to Chengdu.

We did a few short stops along the road at lower altitudes, but in the early afternoon it was almost birdless, so we continued to Chengdu airport where we arrived at 17.00. I managed to rebook to a slightly earlier flight to Beijing and Dave continued on his birding trip to Yunnan.



The restaurant at White Dove Resort

Weather

Any day in Sichuan mountains without rain is a bonus. We were lucky to have 1.5 days of principally rain-free weather. The clouds swept low over us and produced a very wet environment and together with the temperature it was rather cold and damp. Temperatures probably hovered around 10-15 degrees and my gloves proved handy.

Logistics

Thanks to Chen Liang I got the contact details for White Dove Resort and with assistance from a colleague, I managed to book rooms and arrange transport both ways. The hotel arranged the return journey for 700 RMB, but refused to send the car for pick-up without deposit. I therefore had to arrange another car to take us to Labahe. The drive from Chengdu is first 140 km on a very good expressroad to Ya'an, then 38 km on a paved and good country-side road to Tianquan (note that the scientific name of Sichuan Treecreeper is *C. tianquanensis*). From Tianquan to the turn-off it is another 37 km on Rd 318 and then it is 22 km up the river to the hotel.

The hotel consisted of a small restaurant with quite good food and at least a dozen bungalows. These were made of sandwich panels and very nice and clean with hot water and electricity for most of the time. The much appreciated heater worked in a least one room. The place can be highly recommended for a stay at Labahe. There are also a couple of other hotels nearby and the entire area seems set for tourism development, which is however unlikely to improve the birding.

White Dove Resort can be contacted at +86-13981641988 or +86-13981640008. The other hotel below White Dove is called Lu Ming Hotel and can potentially be contacted through +86-13981640891 or +86 13981640892, although we could not reach them on these mobile numbers.



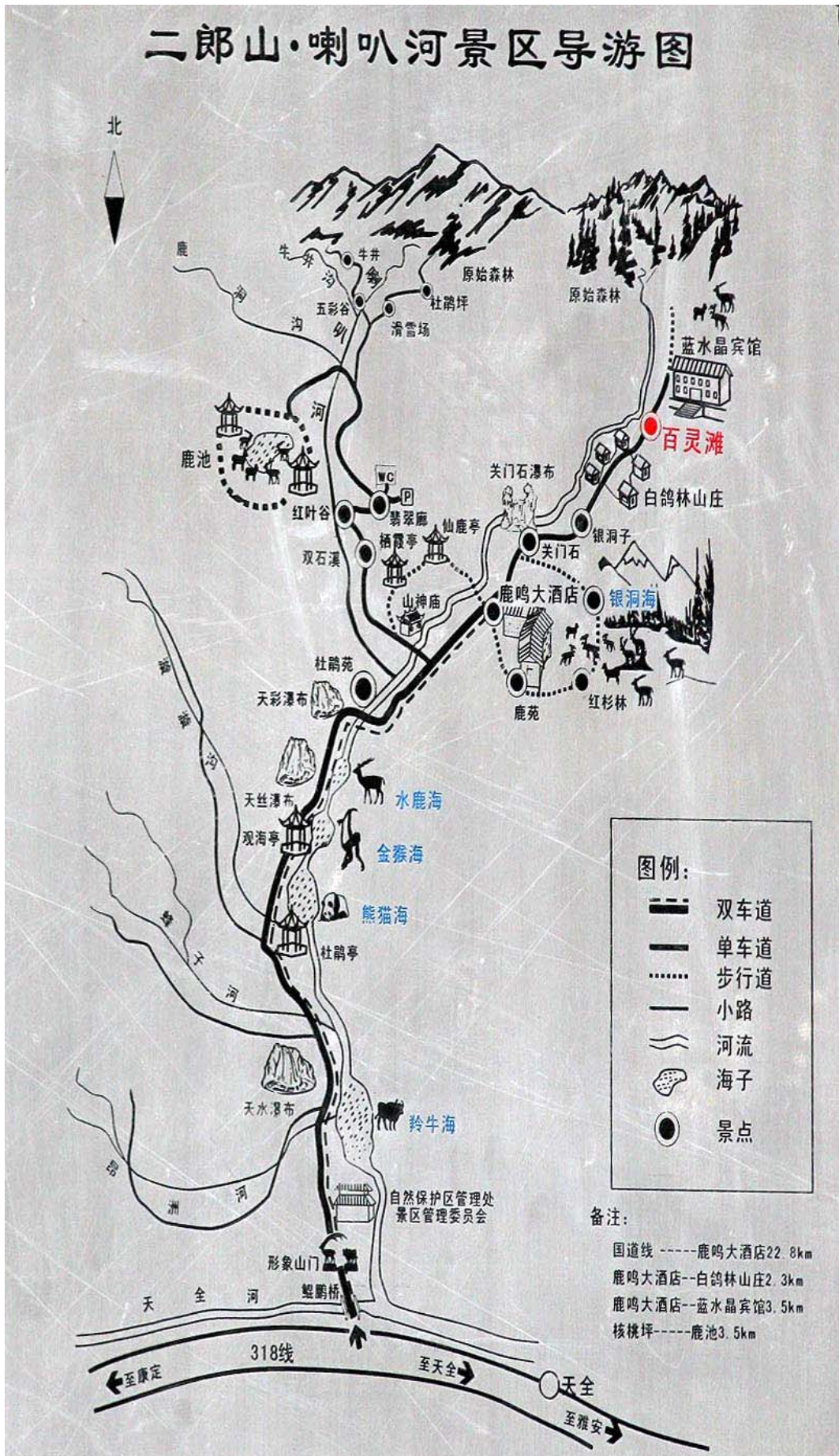
White Dove Resort with the White Transport Car

Site descriptions

Labahe Nature Reserve is a panda reserve and situated not far southwest of the more famous Wolong. It is at the foot of Erlan Mountain and covers an area of 234 sqkm. No permits are required for the areas along the entrance road and the connecting trails. There are a few small narrow and steep trails above White Dove Resort that should lead up to higher ridges. We did not try them for very far, as it was very poor visibility along them. Near Lu Ming Hotel there are a couple of larger trails that apparently leads to altitudes of at least 2300 masl. We did not try these and do not know the status of the forest, although it looked rather good from a distance.

White Dove Resort is situated at 2050 masl and the upper hotel at about 2100 masl. The trail beyond the upper hotel is fairly level and we walked it for about 1 km until a large land-slide. It is probably possible to walk past this land-slide, but we did not really have the time for this.

二郎山·喇叭河景区导游图



Map of Labahe Nature Reserve. Road 318 leads east (right) to Tianquan, Ya'an and eventually Chengdu. White Dove Resort is the five small houses up the east (right) fork. The upper hotel is the bigger building with the front steps, last building along this road.

Birds

Chinese Pond-Heron, *Ardeola bacchus*

5-8 scattered along the river, but mostly at the upper hotel.



Several Chinese Pond-Herons seemed to have found a migration stop-over place

Northern Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis schvedowi*

One driving out of the valley.

Ruddy-breasted Crake, *Porzana fusca fusca*

One immature flushed along the trail 100 meters beyond the upper hotel. It landed in a small bush and could be studied for at least half a minute.

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus chloropus*

One immature on the road and then running up into the forest.

Eurasian Woodcock, *Scolopax rusticola*

Two together flying across the valley at the White Dove Resort at dawn the second morning.

Lesser Coucal, *Centropus bengalensis lignator*

One at the upper hotel.

Himalayan Swiftlet, *Aerodramus brevirostris innominatus*

Three near the upper hotel.

Black-capped Kingfisher, *Halcyon pileata*

One along the river below the upper hotel.

Hoopoe, *Upupa epops saturata*

One at the upper hotel.

Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos major stresemanni*

One at the upper hotel.

Asian House-Martin, *Delichon dasypus cashmiriensis*

200-300 in flocks over the upper valley on both days.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba alboides* & *ocularis*

About ten at the upper hotel, mostly *alboides* and at least one *ocularis*.



White Wagtail of the taxon ocularis

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea cinerea*

One near the upper hotel.

Richard's Pipit, *Anthus richardi* ssp

One probable at the upper hotel, but Blyth's Pipit could not be entirely ruled out.

Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni* ssp

About ten scattered along roadsides and the trail.

Rosy Pipit, *Anthus roseatus*

About five around the upper hotel and along the trail.

Long-tailed Minivet, *Pericrocotus ethologus ethologus*

70 in one flock apparently roosting in a tree-top and another flock (or same?) of minimum 150 birds the day after.

Collared Finchbill, *Spizixos semitorques semitorques*

20+, mostly around the upper hotel.

Brown Dipper, *Cinclus pallasii pallasii*

Two sightings along the river.

Rufous-breasted Accentor, *Prunella strophciata strophciata*

Four scattered around the upper hotel.

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

One near the upper hotel.

Aberrant Bush-Warbler, *Cettia flavolivacea dulcivox*

One near the upper hotel.

Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler, *Cettia acanthizoides acanthizoides*

One seen and two heard singing near the upper hotel.

Spotted Bush-Warbler, *Bradypterus thoracicus (przevalskii?)*

One at the upper hotel was calling and seen well as it responded to the played song. The pale plumage and very faint spotting on the breast may indicate the taxon *przevalskii*.

Dusky Warbler, *Phylloscopus fuscatus* ssp

Three near the upper hotel.

Tickell's Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus affinis*

Four near the White Dove Resort.



Tickell's Leaf-Warbler

Yellow-streaked Warbler, *Phylloscopus armandii* ssp

Three near the upper hotel.

Buff-barred Warbler, *Phylloscopus pulcher pulcher*

10-20 around the upper hotel.

Ashy-throated Warbler, *Phylloscopus maculipennis maculipennis*

One near the upper hotel.

Sichuan Leaf-Warbler, *Phylloscopus forresti*
30-50, the common Phyllo.

Yellow-browed/Hume's Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus/humei mandelli*
Two seen near the upper hotel, but could not be identified to species.

Bianchi's Warbler, *Seicercus valentini*
3-5 identified by song and call, 20+ unidentified *Seicercus*.

Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, *Ficedula strophinata strophinata*
10-20 along the road.

Taiga Flycatcher, *Ficedula albicilla*
Three around the upper hotel.

Vivid Niltava, *Niltava vivida oatesi*
One female was seen well just above the White Dove Resort as it was perched in the sub-canopy. The mainland form has a significantly different song from the widely allopatric nominate form in Taiwan and a future split is not unlikely.

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher, *Culicicapa ceylonensis calychrysea*
One at the upper hotel.

Daurian Redstart, *Phoenicurus aureus leucopterus*
At least five, mainly around the upper hotel.

Blue-fronted Redstart, *Phoenicurus frontalis*
One male at the upper hotel.

White-capped Water-Redstart, *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*
A total of about 20 along the entire river.

Plumbeous Water-Redstart, *Rhyacornis fuliginosus fuliginosus*
A total of at least 20 along the entire river.

White-crowned Forktail, *Enicurus leschenaulti sinensis*
One along the trail above the upper hotel.

Common Stonechat, *Saxicola torquatus ssp*
Three immatures at the upper hotel.

Elliot's Laughingthrush, *Garrulax elliotii elliotii*
A total of about ten around the upper hotel and heard singing from the opposite side of the river.

Red-winged Laughingthrush, *Garrulax formosus formosus*
One pair just above the upper hotel. Discovered by their churring calls, they were seen as they moved low through the bamboo in their typical fashion.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis eidos*
At least five.

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps davidi*
Four seen around the upper hotel.

Streaked Barwing, *Actinodura souliei souliei*
Six in one flock at the last (most northeastern) bungalow at the White Dove Resort. Yip! Great views were provided as they slowly moved through the low trees. There was no specific reaction when I played neither Streak-throated, Hoary-throated nor Black-crowned Barwing calls and songs. Their subdued feeding calls were a quiet soft churring. The habitat consisted of secondary scrub with some bamboo and lots of lower and a few higher trees with many tangles and moss-covered branches.



Streaked Barwings

Golden-breasted Fulvetta, *Alcippe chrysotis swinhoii*

About ten above the upper hotel.

Streak-throated Fulvetta, *Alcippe cinereiceps cinereiceps*

20+ scattered.



Streak-throated Fulvetta

Stripe-throated Yuhina, *Yuhina gularis omiensis*

Two around the upper hotel.

White-collared Yuhina, *Yuhina diademata*

At least 50 birds, often in larger flocks, mainly around the upper hotel.



White-collared Yuhinas

Black-browed Tit, *Aegithalos iouschistos bonvaloti*
Ten at the White Dove Resort.



Black-browed Tit

Grey-crested Tit, *Lophophanes dichrous wellsii*
Five scattered in mixed flocks.

Yellow-bellied Tit, *Pardaliparus venustulus*
One near the White Dove Resort.

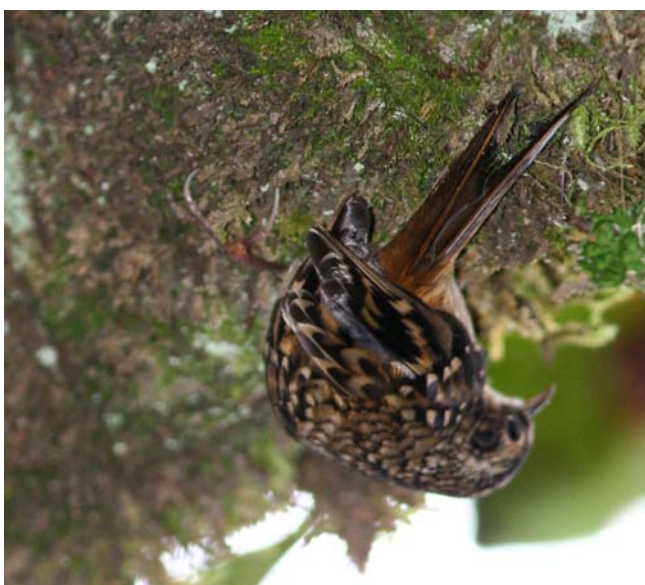
Green-backed Tit, *Parus monticolus yunnanensis*
10-20, mainly near the White Dove Resort.

Yellow-browed Tit, *Sylviparus modestus modestus*
One above the upper hotel.

Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, *Sitta nagaensis*
Two plus five near the White Dove Resort.

Sichuan Treecreeper, *Certhia tianquanensis*

Two were seen very well at 2080 masl up the flight of steps a couple of hundred meters below the upper hotel. Both were strongly attracted by playing its song and they even started to sing a few times. The species has been reported as low as 1600 masl during winter at this site. In spite of the reaction to the song being played, I do believe that this was a wintering area. There were no coniferous trees at all at this altitude and during breeding season I have normally found them only above 2600 masl in mature coniferous forests. In November 2003 I found a wintering bird at nearby Wuyipung (Wolong) at ca 2500 masl.





Sichuan Treecreeper. Note the long plain brown tail, the scaly/checkered mantle and the short and rather straight bill. The underparts are rather drab, becoming paler towards the throat. The song is completely distinctive; an about one second long descending high-pitched ringing trill.

- Grey-backed Shrike, *Lanius tephronotus tephronotus*
Three immature near the White Dove Resort.
- Black Drongo, *Dicrurus macrocercus cathoecus*
One at the upper hotel.
- Red-billed Blue Magpie, *Urocissa erythrorhyncha erythrorhyncha*
20-30 through the entire area.
- Eurasian Nutcracker, *Nucifraga caryocatactes macella*
Two near the upper hotel.
- Large-billed Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos tibetosinensis*
A few seen and heard.
- Russet Sparrow, *Passer rutilans intensior*
25-30 in one flock at the upper hotel.
- Common Rosefinch, *Carpodacus erythrinus ssp*
Three females scattered along the river.
- Vinaceous Rosefinch, *Carpodacus vinaceus vinaceus*
One male near the White Dove Resort.
- Grey-headed Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula erythaca erythaca*
Two along the trail at the upper hotel.
- Little Bunting, *Emberiza pusilla*
Ten scattered.