

Yangmaxia & Emeishan, Sichuan, China

28-30 December 2007



Moustached Laughingthrush – target bird of the trip

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General

This weekend trip was focused on seeing Moustached Laughingthrush. This is a species with a reasonable large range, essentially in China, but during my five years of birding in China I have not yet connected with it. I have spent many days specifically looking for it at several sites. First of all it is probably not a very common bird, but furthermore it occurs at altitudes and habitats that are not frequently visited by birders (with a few exceptions). Nevertheless, I recently got to know of some Chinese birders in Mianyang in central Sichuan that claimed the bird was comparatively easy to find. These very nice birders even made a scouting trip in early December to a known site and scored their second day of trying. This temptation was hard to resist, so Marco della Seta and I decided to end the year with a trip to Yangmaxia. We owe our thanks to Li Peng and Mr Wang for arranging everything in a splendid way and also for accompanying us in the field.

Luckily it took us less than two hours of searching to find a showy pair of Moustached Laughingthrushes! This Laugher is actually a very smart-looking bird and we were very happy with such a quick success.

With the target bird under the belt, we decided to continue to Emeishan to look for birds in general (Marco) and Blanford's Rosefinch in particular (Bjorn), during the Sunday. Emei summit was completely frozen with snow and a 2 cm thick layer of ice covering everything. No birds would survive in such a hostile environment, so we instead birded the mid altitude slopes. Best bird was a Chinese Tawny Owl that Marco found right out in the open.



Li Peng, Mr Wang, Marco and Bjorn

Itinerary

28/12

The planned flight from Beijing to Chengdu was cancelled, but fortunately we managed to quickly rebook to another flight. On arrival we found to our surprise that we had not arrived at Chengdu airport, but at a completely unknown place called Daxian. Luckily the same flight continued to Chengdu after half an hour, so we were back on track again. From Chengdu we travelled by car north to Mianyang, which took about 1.5 hours. We were met by Li Peng who took us to Mianyang Birdwatching Society,

where we teamed up with the local birders as well as the local TV team! I made a short speech about birding and we enjoyed some very nice dumplings and good company.

Very late in the evening we drove north to Yangmaxia, where we arrived well after midnight. The hotel room was extremely cold and I slept with all clothes plus three layers of blankets plus my hat!

29/12

We rose at 7.00 and started the day with a bowl of hot noodles before walking up through the nearby secondary scrub forest. We followed a narrow trail and it did not take us too long until we could lay our eyes on the sought after target bird, Moustached Laughingthrush. We could study the pair for quite some time as they skulked low in the scrub and bamboo.

Happy with this easy success, we continued on the trail for another couple of hours, hitting a few good bird flocks. By 13.00 we were back down at the hotel and a lunch.



Marco is sketching the Laughher

As we had scored already on the first day, we decided to move on and change habitat. The choice came down to Emeishan, as that would not be too far away for the Sunday return flight. In the afternoon we therefore drove back to Mianyang, changed cars and continued to Chengdu. Due to roadworks being carried out between Mianyang and Chengdu it took us much longer time than usual to get to Chengdu, where we arrived around 20.00. From there we drove on the expressroad south and reached Emei before 22.00. We had called to Teddybear Hotel in advance and they had rooms prepared for us.

30/12

The first bus to Leidongping would leave at 7.00, so after a quick breakfast we walked around the corner and got onto the bus. The weather was cloudy, as usual at this mountain, and above the ticket gate halfway up the mountain there was snow and ice covering the ground. The bus stopped to put on snow chains and continued climbing, eventually reaching Leidongping. My target bird was Blanford's Rosefinch, but on arrival it did not take an Einstein to realize that in the existing weather conditions there would be no birds whatsoever around. The entire landscape was covered in 2 cm thick ice and we had to buy extra spikes for our shoes in order to move around at all. In spite of the harsh conditions, we actually managed to find one Crow, one Nuthatch, three Tits and one Fulvetta trying to survive around the garbage dumps.

We drifted around for about one hour, but then decided to get back down to lower altitudes. We took the bus down to 6 km before the ticket gate and walked from there. This meant that we covered altitudes of 1750 to 1350 masl. It was clear of snow and visibility through the clouds was slightly improved. By 13.00 we reached the ticket gate and we waited for the next bus to take us back down to Emei. Our driver picked us up and swiftly brought us to Chengdu airport in less than two hours.



Weather

The weather was rather cold for most of the weekend. At Yangmaxia it was very cold and a bit damp during the night, but in the late morning the sun warmed us and it became rather nice. At Emeishan it was freezing cold at Leidongping with snow and ice on the ground and trees. Lower down it was more humid and almost drizzle at times.

Site descriptions

Yangmaxia



I do not know if Yangmaxia (Horse-food gorge) has the status of Nature Reserve or if it is just a recreation area. Anyway there are a number of hotels along the main drag through the tiny village. These hotels were completely empty during our visit, but seem to enjoy some business during the summer period. From Mianyang it took us about two hours on smaller roads, but coming back was slightly quicker as we took the expressroad.

The area is a large valley with secondary forest and scrub on the slopes and cultivated land in the valley bottom. From a general birding perspective, the site may never make it to the big headlines on the birding scene, but in general it was some really nice birding. The altitude is about 900 masl.

The trail we walked is located to the right just when entering the village (before the large red wall on the right side and before the temple). The trailhead is just to the right of a small living house, which is situated at the edge of the forest about 200 meters off from the road. We followed this trail for 1-2 km up through the secondary forest. At one point it passes a large living house in the forest and it was about 100 meters before this house where we saw the Laughingthrushes.

Birds

Little Grebe, *Tachybaptys ruficollis poggei*
4+1 between Yangmaxia and Chengdu.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta garzetta*
About ten between Yangmaxia and Chengdu.

(Buzzard sp, *Buteo* sp
One near Yangmaxia was probably a Eurasian.)

Spotted Dove, *Streptopelia chinensis chinensis*
One between Yangmaxia and Chengdu.

Chinese Tawny Owl, *Strix nivicola nivicola*
One seen in daylight at close range at 1650 masl at Emeishan. Only the second time I have actually seen this rather widespread bird in China. The song is completely different from the western Palearctic taxa. I prefer the name Chinese Tawny Owl, as it shows the relationship with *Strix aluco*. Himalayan Wood Owl as proposed by Rasmussen is not a very good name as its main range is within China.



Chinese Tawny Owl

Speckled Piculet, *Picumnus innominatus chinensis*
One at Yangmaxia.

Crimson-breasted Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos cathpharius pernyi*
One at 1500 masl at Emeishan.

(Pale Martin, *Riparia diluta*
Two at Mianyang were probably this species.)

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba alboides*
Two at Yangmaxia, two in Mianyang and two at Emeishan.

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea cinerea*
One in Mianyang.

Olive-backed Pipit, *Anthus hodgsoni yunnanensis*
20+ at Yangmaxia.

Collared Finchbill, *Spizixos semitorques semitorques*
Four at Yangmaxia.

Brown-breasted Bulbul, *Pycnonotus xanthorrhous andersoni*
Five at Yangmaxia.

Chinese Bulbul, *Pycnonotus chinensis hoyi*
One at Yangmaxia.

[Brown Dipper, *Cinclus pallasii pallasii*

One seen by Marco at Emeishan.]

Rufous-breasted Accentor, *Prunella strophinata strophinata*

One at Yangmaxia.

Chinese Blackbird, *Turdus mandarinus sowerbyi*

One between Yangmaxia and Chengdu.

Dusky/Naumann's Thrush, *Turdus naumanni ssp*

About 15 in a flying flock at Emeishan.

Rufous-faced Warbler, *Abroscopus albogularis fulvifacies*

Five at Yangmaxia.

Orange-flanked Bush-Robin, *Tarsiger rufilatus*

Two females at Yangmaxia were probably this species, although cyanurus could not be entirely ruled out.

[Oriental Magpie-Robin

One seen by Marco near Baugou at Emeishan]

Daurian Redstart, *Phoenicurus aureus leucopterus*

3-4 at Yangmaxia.

Plumbeous Water-Redstart, *Rhyacornis fuliginosus fuliginosus*

Three near Yangmaxia.

White-crowned Forktail, *Enicurus leschenaulti sinensis*

One at Yangmaxia and another seen by Marco at Emeishan.

White-throated Laughingthrush, *Garrulax albogularis eous*

One flock of almost 20 birds at Yangmaxia.

Moustached Laughingthrush, *Garrulax cineraceus cinereiceps*

One pair at Yangmaxia.



Moustached Laughingthrush

Hwamei, *Garrulax canorus canorus*

One heard singing at Yangmaxia.

White-browed Laughingthrush, *Garrulax sannio oblectans*

About five at the hotel at Yangmaxia and one at Yangmaxia.

Spot-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis gravivox*

One heard at Yangmaxia.

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, *Pomatorhinus ruficollis eidos*

5-8 at Yangmaxia and about five at Emeishan.



Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler

Rufous-capped Babbler, *Stachyris ruficeps davidi*

Five at Yangmaxia and 10-15 at Emeishan.

Red-billed Leiothrix, *Leiothrix lutea lutea*

Ten at Yangmaxia and heard at Emeishan.



Red-billed Leiothrix

White-browed Shrike-Babbler, *Pteruthius flaviscapis ricketti*

Two at Emeishan.

Green Shrike-Babbler, *Pteruthius xanthochloris pallidus*

Two at Yangmaxia was only my second record in China of this species.



Green Shrike-Babbler

Golden-breasted Fulvetta, *Alcippe chrysotis swinhoii*

About ten at Yangmaxia.



Golden-breasted Fulvetta

Streak-throated Fulvetta, *Alcippe cinereiceps cinereiceps*

One in the icy conditions at Leidongping at Emeishan.

Dusky Fulvetta, *Alcippe brunnea olivacea*

One pair at Yangmaxia.



Dusky Fulvetta

Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, *Alcippe morrisonia davidi*

About ten at Yangmaxia and 20+ at Emeishan.

Ashy-throated Parrotbill, *Paradoxornis alphonsianus alphonsianus*

About 20 in a flock at 1500 masl at Emeishan.

Black-throated Tit, *Aegithalos concinnus concinnus*

A few at Yangmaxia and ten at Emei village.

Coal Tit, *Periparus ater aemodius*

Five at Yangmaxia and five at Emeishan.

Yellow-bellied Tit, *Pardaliparus venustulus*

Ten at Yangmaxia and 20 at Emeishan.

Grey-crested Tit, *Lophophanes dichrous dichroides*

Three at Leidongping at Emeishan survived by hanging around the garbage dump.



Grey-crested Tit

Great Tit, *Parus major minor*

Five at Yangmaxia.

Green-backed Tit, *Parus monticolus yunnanensis*

One at Emeishan.

Yellow-browed Tit, *Sylviparus modestus modestus*

Five at Emeishan.

Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, *Sitta nagaensis nagaensis*

One at Leidongping at Emeishan.



Chestnut-vented Nuthatch

Long-tailed Shrike, *Lanius schach schach*

Several in the Red Basin.

Eurasian Jay, *Garrulus glandarius sinensis*

One at Yangmaxia and one at Emeishan.

Red-billed Blue Magpie, *Urocissa erythrorhyncha erythrorhyncha*

Heard at Yangmaxia and two at Emeishan.

Large-billed Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos tibetosinensis*

One at Yangmaxia and one at Leidongping at Emeishan.

[Crested Myna, *Acridotheres cristatellus cristatellus*

One seen by Marco in Mianyang.]

Brambling, *Fringilla montifringilla*

100-150 in a flock at Yangmaxia.

Oriental Greenfinch, *Carduelis sinica sinica*

20-30 at Yangmaxia.

Grey-headed Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula erythaca erythaca*

Five at Emeishan.

Brown Bullfinch, *Pyrrhula nipalensis ricketti*

Two flocks of about eight each at 1500-1600 masl at Emeishan.



Brown Bullfinches