

## HAPPY ISLAND, CHINA 23 SEPTEMBER - 5 OCTOBER 2007

### HAPPY ISLAND, LAOTING, HEBEI PROVINCE

#### PARTICIPANTS

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#### INTRODUCTION

This trip was our 4<sup>th</sup> and second to Happy Island, respectively. Flight was from Copenhagen to Beijing and return with Scandinavian Airlines. Arrangements in China were made by *Qiqihar China International Travel Service* with Cui Ligang as Deputy Managing Director and also our guide to and from Happy Island. The staff in the restaurant on the island made a good job in cooking and serving our meals, but otherwise, no assistance or guide was required while on Happy Island.

Since our last visit in October 2003, Happy Island is now a private island, bought by a Chinese mine owner by the name of Xu Jianyi. We met Mr Xu one evening and discussed his ambitions with, and our worries for Happy Island. We stressed the importance of not turning HI into an amusement park for the Beijing middleclass. Instead we suggested to keep the island much as it is, possibly improve some of the accommodation facilities etc. As we understood it, these were also his intentions. His aim was apparently to preserve Happy Island and its nature for the future in the fastgrowing chinese economy and the increasingly exploited Bohai shores.



Mårten scanning for Pallas's Reed Buntings, Happy Island. Photo: Mats Rellmar

#### ITINERARY

##### 23/9

We arrived in Beijing early afternoon and after a very fast passage through the customs, we were picked up at the airport by our guide and headed straight for the coast. Unfortunately, we missed the correct exits on the highways, so the drive took a bit longer than expected. We finally arrived to Laoyujian (mainland harbour) in the evening and checked in for the night at a local hotel.

##### 24/9

We got up at dawn (5:30) for a few hours of birding in the closest surroundings around the harbour. A nice mix of waders, gulls, terns and herons were feeding on the mudflats and a few Richard's and Olive-backed Pipits and a single Pechora Pipit flew over. A Blue and white Flycatcher gave nice views resting on the pier.

The boat for Happy Island departed at 9:00 and we arrived just in time for a late breakfast. We accommodated us in our cabin and then went out to get familiar with the Island. We spent the day in the woods and in the grassy fields on west side of the Island, where we flushed an Eastern Grass Owl.

**Weather:** A hot, sunny but hazy day. A bit cloudier in the afternoon. Calm NW-wind, 25 C.

### 25/9

Started of the morning on the big, newly constructed hill, which is located in the middle of the Island. From here you have an impressive view over the island and the scrimp ponds, and this spot makes a perfect place to watch migration. This morning the fresh NE-wind made this site a real hotspot with lots of birds migrating along the west side of the island; c. 200 Oriental Pratincoles, c. 200 Grey-headed Lapwings and many different passerines.

Midday birding in and around the woods, and after lunch we walked down to the southern part of the island.

**Weather:** A line of clouds over the mainland during the morning, otherwise sunny, hot and humid, 25 C. A fresh NE-wind which decreased during the day and the evening was very calm. Several Night Herons and unidentified bitterns were heard calling, migrating over the island after dark.

### 26/9

As yesterday we started up on the big hill, but today the migration was rather poor. The rest of the day was spent around the woods and in the grass fields on the west side of the Island. Highlights of the day; Oriental Scops Owl, Needle-tailed Swift and Yellow-legged Buttonquail.

**Weather:** A cloudy, calm day with oppressive heat and some spots of rain in the afternoon, 25C. Heavy rain during the evening – night.

### 27/9

We birded around the woods and along the eastern side before lunch. The afternoon was spent on the southern part of the Island.

Highlights of the day; putative Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Grey-tailed Tattler, Red-necked Stint, Pallas's Gull and Rufous Hawk Cuckoo.

**Weather:** The rain continued during the morning. The rest of the day was dry, but cloudy. Fresh NE-wind during the morning, turning and dropping to light SW in the afternoon. 17C.

### 28/9

No migration this morning so we birded around the woods until lunch. The rest of the day was spent on the southern part of the Island.

Highlights of the day; Broad-billed Sandpiper, Nordmann's Greenshank and Hair-crested Drongo.

**Weather:** A bit chilly morning and evening. Otherwise a sunny day with a few clouds. A light to fair NE-wind. 20C.

### 29/9

A short visit to the hill in the morning proved to be unproductive with poor migration. Instead, we walked inside the woods and discovered there had been a major downfall of passerines during the night. We stayed here for rest of the day.

**Weather:** Cloudy morning, sunny afternoon. A light N-wind which increased during the day and turning to W. 16C

### 30/9

The morning was spent around the woods and in the surrounding grass fields. We skipped lunch and spent the rest of the day at the southern part of the Island.

Highlights of the day; Baikal Teal (c.175), Red-crowned Crane and a possible Lesser Coucal.

**Weather:** Sunny most of the day until late afternoon when clouds emerged from the south.

A light to fair westerly wind during the day. 17C.

### 1/10

Heavy rain this morning which continued to early afternoon. Very low bird activity while it rained but when the rain stopped it was like an explosion, birds popped out everywhere and you could see warblers, buntings, robins etc, feeding together.

**Weather:** Heavy rain and a fresh NE-wind until 14.00 o'clock. Then the rain stopped and the wind calmed down. 15C

### 2/10

Rain this morning as well, and the only place you could do some birding was in the woods. After lunch, the weather improved and we walked along the western bank down to the southern mudflats.

Highlights of the day; Little Curlew, Northern Boobook, Pacific Swift.

**Weather:** Heavy rain and a steady NE-wind until noon. Thereafter cloudy and a light wind. 17C

### 3/10

A calm and cloudy morning made it perfect to look for passerines in the bushy areas. At noon the sky turned blue and a good raptor-migration could be seen from the big hill.

Highlights of the day; Ruddy Shelduck, Black Stork, Amur Falcon (79) and Chinese Penduline Tit.

**Weather:** Cloudy morning with a light NW-wind. Sunny and calm from noon. 15-25C.

### 4/10

The whole day was spent in the closest surroundings to the woods. Low bird-activity this day due to the high pressurised weather.

**Weather:** Sunny, hot and calm. The hottest day, 27C.

### 5/10

Heavy rain this morning made bird-watching nearly impossible. After a short visit in the woods we left the island after breakfast and went back to Beijing.

**Weather:** During the night it started to rain which increased in the morning. A fair to fresh E-NE wind, c 15C.

## TAXONOMY, NOMENCLATURE AND SYSTEMATICS

All records refer to Happy Island, if nothing else is stated.

This trip report follows the standpoints of the Swedish Taxonomic Committee of February 2007. For species concerned in this report, the STC follows Mark Beamans' *Palaearctic Birds: a checklist of the birds of Europe, North Africa and Asia north of the foothills of the Himalayas*.

Exceptions from the STC list are Grass Owl *Tyto capensis*, for which we follow the opinion in Owls (Koenig, Weick and Becking) and consider it a separate species, Eastern Grass Owl *Tyto longimembris*.

Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens* of the race *cheleensis*, 'Asian Short-toed Lark', is another often considered split, which we have adopted here, along with 'Chinese Penduline Tit' *Remiz consobrinus* (An Annotated Checklist of Birds of the oriental Region, Inskipp *et al.* 1996).

The subspecies given after each species indicates the race (or races) likely to be seen in the area. They do not represent the races identified by us on this trip. Any racial claims are mentioned in the texts.

If no subspecies is given, the species is normally treated as monotypic.

A few unidentified species are included in the account below. Some of these, even if seen well, remain unidentified due to difficulties in identification in the field, i.e. Pintail Snipe versus Swinhoe's Snipe or the non-calling autumn cuckoos.

Others, not seen well and therefore left unidentified, are included for future reference. Even if left unidentified, we are reasonably sure of their identity, but also realize that we cannot make a 100% claim based on the brief sightings, and also before we know more about their true status in the area, etc. Inclusion here is for the event that other birders encounter these species on HI in the future.

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS:

### **Bean Goose** *Anser fabilis serratirostris & middendorffii*

Nine 27/9 and 7 28/9. These birds were dark-billed with a yellowish subterminal band. The bills weren't all that long, mainly recalling nominate *fabilis* in length and shape, indicating *serratirostris*?

### **White-fronted Goose** *Anser a. albifrons & frontalis*

Two adults and seven 1<sup>st</sup> W landing on the mudflats, later continuing south on 2/10.

### **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*

Two at the shrimp ponds 3/10.

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

Several hundred seen regularly at the mudflats, as well as migrating flocks around the island.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

Recorded on 7 out of 12 days, with a maximum of c. 15 30/9. Seen mainly at the mudflats.

**Falcated Duck** *Anas falcata*

Recorded daily with a maximum of c. 50 26/9. As for the rest of the ducks, only when airborne, there was a chance to both count and identify simultaneously. At other times, the ducks were hidden in ponds and canals or too far away for id., making any attempt of counting each species completely hopeless.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

One 26/9, 2 28/9, 3 30/9 and c. 10 2/10.

**Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa*

Recorded daily with a maximum of no less than 175 on 30/9. It is probable that the actual number on this date was at least some tens higher, due to difficulties in counting the ducks.

This species seem to have increased in the area, as none was seen on HI in our 1999 autumn trip, and only 2-3 in 2003.



Baikal Teal, Happy Island. Photo: Mårten Müller

**Common Teal** *Anas c. crecca*

Common but not counted. Estimated daily numbers were between 500 and 1000.

**Mallard** *Anas p. platyrhynchos*

Seen daily in low numbers with a maximum of c. 75 27/9.

**Spot-billed Duck** *Anas poecilorhyncha zonorhyncha*

This species, along with Common Teal, was the most numerous duck. Not counted.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*

Recorded daily in numbers between 5 and 30.

**Garganey** *Anas querquedula*

Seen in low numbers on 6 days with a maximum of 8 2/10.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

Records much as for Pintail. Top day was 1/10 with c. 50.

**Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

One male at the mudflats 2/10.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

Three 1-2/10.

**Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila*

Five flying east 2/10.

**Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*

One 1<sup>st</sup> W male was flushed from a ditch on 26/9.

**Japanese Quail** *Coturnix japonica*

Flushed all over the island in moderate numbers, with no obvious peak days. Between 5 and 40 recorded daily.

**Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

In autumn of 1999, no birds were seen on HI. On a trip in autumn 2003, several were seen daily, sometimes in numbers up to 30. On this trip, several were recorded daily, perhaps equalling the records of 2003.

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis poggei*

15-20 were seen daily 23/9- 5/10.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps c. cristatus*

Three 27/9, 4 28/9 and 1 2/10.

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps n. nigricollis*

Five 27/9 and 1 1/10.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

Seen daily with more than 1000 at the mudflats regularly in the evenings.

**Great Bittern** *Botaurus s. stellaris*

Six 25/9, 2 27/9, 1 28/9, 4 2/10 and 1 3/10. Generally seen or heard at dusk when starting their migration and calling.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax n. nycticorax*

Seen daily due to a large roost in the woods. This gathering reached its maximum on 2/10 with 220 birds.

Unfortunately, the birds were regularly flushed on purpose by non-birders visiting the island for the Chinese holidays. Finally, many birds seem to leave for the mainland.

As for preceding species, many started migrating at dusk and on 25/9, at least 200 in a few, large flocks were seen flying south. Many more were also heard during the night but were, of course, impossible to count.

**Chinese Pond Heron** *Ardeola bacchus*

One in the woods 1/10 and probably the same 2/10.

**Chinese Egret** *Egretta eulophotes*

Four 27/9 and 1 28/9.

**Little Egret** *Egretta g. garzetta*

Seen daily in moderate numbers and a maximum of c. 30 on several dates.

**Great White Egret** *Egretta a. alba*

One 27/9.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea jouyi*

Common and not counted. Flocks of 10-30 were regularly seen flying south.

**Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea manilensis*

Seen almost daily with highest totals of 66 25/9, 30 26 and 27/9, all of these flying south. Only singles were seen feeding on the island.

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*

Three flying south 3/10 and 1 1<sup>st</sup> W arriving from the west 4/10.

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea l. leucorodia*

Five 26/9, 3 28/9, up to 42 30/9-2/10. Also 64 flying south on 2/10 and 13 flying south 3/10.

**Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis*

Records were 22 24/9, 10 25/9, 1 26/9, 6 27/9, 2 28/9, 3 30/9, 1 2/10, 4 3/10 and 4 4/10, indicating that the peak migration had past. Two adults were seen 24/9 and 1 2<sup>nd</sup> W with a few juvenile remiges in each wing, otherwise showing adult plumage 3/10.

**Black (-eared) Kite** *Milvus migrans lineatus*

The only records were 3 27/9 and 1 4/10.

**Eastern Marsh Harrier** *Circus s. spilonotus*

Seen daily in numbers between 3 and 15.

**Hen Harrier** *Circus c. cyaneus*

Three 3/10 and 1 4/10. Only juveniles and adult females were seen, which seem to be the normal case on HI at this time of year.

**Pied Harrier** *Circus melanoleucos*

1 juv 24/9, 2 juv 25/9, 2 juv+2 F 26/9, 4 juv+1M+ 2F 27/9, 1 M 28/9, 1 F 1/10, 2 3/10 and 1F+ 1 juv 4/10.

**Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis albidus (etc?)*

Seen daily in small numbers, with a maximum of 4 3/10. Both adults and juveniles recorded.

**Japanese Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter gularis*

The most numerous raptor, recorded daily in numbers between 15 and 40.

**Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus nisosimilis*

Recorded daily but in lower numbers than preceding species, reaching a maximum of >15 on 30/9. Rates were about 1 to 5, some days 1 to 10, but the numbers seemed to increase towards the end of our stay. On the top day, 1 out of 3 was a 'Eurasian'.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo japonicus*

Five 24/9, 1 25/9, 1 27/9, 3 30/9, 1 1/10, 1 2/10, 29 3/10 and 8 4/10. To European birdwatchers, this subspecies may recall a small Long-legged Buzzard with 'Steppe Buzzard' influences and a touch of Rough-legged Buzzard in the silhouette.

**Osprey** *Pandion h. haliaetus*

One 24/9, 1 27/9, 1 28/9, 3 3/10 and 3 4/10.

**Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus interstinctus*

Seen daily in numbers between 1 and 4.

**Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis*

Two 24/9, 18 26/9, 14 29/9, 55 30/9, 18 1/10, 1 2/10, 79 3/10, 29 4/10 and 4 5/10.

Heavy rain on some of these dates seemed to keep the 'Amurs' off HI.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius insignis & pacificus*

Three 2/10.

**Eurasian Hobby** *Falco s. subbuteo*

Seen daily in numbers between 1 and 4.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus japonensis (etc?)*

Recorded almost daily with up to 3 on 3/10.

Some of the first winters look amazingly large, with a silhouette somewhat recalling Saker *Falco cherrug*. If you add a fairly bright head and the striking rufous underwing coverts shown by many, you might have to look twice when identifying some of them.

**Yellow-legged Button Quail** *Turnix tanki blanfordii*

Singles seen 26, 27, 28/9 and 1/10.

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus indicus*

Singles on 1 and 3/10.

**Ballion's Crane** *Porzana p. pusilla*

One 30/9.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula c. chloropus*

Singles by the large pond 25/9, 1, 3 and 4/10.

**Red-crowned Crane** *Grus japonensis*

Two adults, probably a pair, at the mudflats 30/9- 4/10.



Red-crowned Crane, Happy Island. Photo: Mårten Müller

**Pheasant-tailed Jacana** *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

In the evening of 27/9, a quail-like bird was flushed from a strip of grass, bordered by a fresh water marsh. It landed after c. 30 m but could not be seen or flushed again. The observation was only very brief, but the size and the jizz of the bird indicated some kind of quail, buttonquail, crane or rail, *i.e.* small to medium- sized, with rapid wing beats and a straight, low flight.

The bird appeared yellowish brown or light golden brown with pure white on the leading edge and on the rear edge of the wing, both on the primaries and the secondaries. The total amount of white covered c. 50% of the wing, the rest (on the central wing, perhaps median and greater coverts) being yellowish or golden brown. At the time, we could not find anything remotely similar in any of the books that we had brought.

!!!

After some research at home, Mårten found good pictures of 1<sup>st</sup> W Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, a species which to colours, size, type of flight fits the description almost to 100%!

The only doubt raised at the moment, is the status of this species in Hebei province, and indeed on HI.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus osculans*

Seen regularly when visiting the mudflats at the southern tip of the island, with a maximum of 20 28/9.

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus h. himantopus*

Only recorded at the shrimp ponds: 1 24/9, 2 25/9, 3 26/9 and 2 2/10.

**Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*

A large flock of up to 6-700 was a regular feature at the mudflats.

**Oriental Pratincole** *Glareola maldivarum*

All records: 32 24/9, c. 200 25/9, 9 26/9, 2 27/9, 1 28/9, 20 29/9, 3 30/9 and 1 3/10.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius curonicus*

5-10 by the mainland harbour Laoyujian, 24/9.

**Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*

One by the mainland harbour Laoyujian, 24/9. HI records were 3 25/9, 1 27/9 and 5 28/9.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius a. alexandrinus (etc?)*

Very common and not counted.

**Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius m. mongolus & stegmanni*

Only recorded at the mudflats: 9 27/9, 23 28/9, 5 30/9 and c. 25 2/10.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*

Three by the mainland harbour Laoyujian 24/9. On HI, 11 27/9, 2 28/9 and c. 20 2/10.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*

Common in moderate numbers. Not counted.

**Grey-headed Lapwing** *Vanellus cinereus*  
C. 200 25/9, 28 28/9 and 3 30/9.

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*  
Five 25/9, 68 28/9, 1 2/10 and 13 3/10.

**Great Knot** *Calidris tenuirostris*  
6 by the mainland harbour, Laoyujian, 24/9. HI records were c. 250 25/9, c. 75 27/9, c. 150 28/9 and 80 30/9.

**Red Knot** *Calidris canutus rodgersi*  
One 27/9 and 4 28/9.

**Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis*  
Four by the mudflats 27/9.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii*  
One by the mainland harbour, Laoyujian, 24/9.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina sakhalina (etc?)*  
Fairly common and seen mainly at the mudflats. Not counted.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus sibirica*  
Two at the mudflats 28/9.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago g. gallinago*  
Two 24/9, 1 25/9, 2 28/9, 1 1/10, 5 3/10 and 1 4/10.

**Pintailed Snipe/Swinhoe's Snipe** *Gallinago stenura/megala*  
Unidentified "Pinhoe's" were 2 24/9, 1 25/9, 2 27/9, 1 28/9, 1 30/9, 1 1/10, 7 2/10 and 1 3/10. Could some of these even be Latham's Snipe *G. hardwickii*?

**Eurasian Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola*  
One 28/9 and 1 29/9.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa melanuroides*  
Four 25/9, c. 80 26/9, 17 28/9, 1 30/9 and 16 2/10.

**Bar-tailed Godwit** *Limosa lapponica baueri & menzbieri*  
Uncommon, recorded in small numbers on five days only: 5 26/9, 5 27/9, 2 28/9, 1 30/9 and 1 2/10.

**Little Curlew** *Numenius minutus*  
One flying west together with Pacific Golden Plovers 2/10.

**Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus variegatus*  
One by the mainland harbour, Laoyujian, 24/9 and only two records on HI: 1 27/9 and 4 28/9.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata orientalis*  
Seen daily in high numbers but not counted. Compared to the following species, more than 90% of the Curlews in the area were 'Eurasians'.

**Far Eastern Curlew** *Numenius madagascariensis*  
Not very common, but probably slightly overlooked in the large flocks of 'Eurasians'. C. 10 recorded 25/9, noted as "quite common" 27/9 and "singles" 28/9, with 3 on 2/10. Four were also seen by the mainland harbour Laoyujian 24/9.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*  
Seen daily in numbers up to c. 100. This year, the shrimp ponds along the west side of the island really attracted good numbers of *Tringas*, especially of this and Marsh Sandpiper.

**Redshank** *Tringa totanus ussuriensis & terrignotae*  
One at the shrimp ponds 25/9.



**Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis*

Seen daily in but generally not counted. Highest day's total were >100 on 27/9.

**Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

Recorded daily in moderate numbers.

**Nordmann's Greenshank** *Tringa guttifer*

One by the Mudflats 28/9.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

A total of 13 seen on 7 days.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

Three 24/9, 3 30/9 and 2 2/10.

**Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus*

Seven 27/9, 2 28/9 and 4 30/9.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleuca*

One 26/9.

**Grey-tailed Tattler** *Heteroscelus brevipes*

One at the beach by the camp 27/9.

**Pallas's Gull** *Larus ichthyæetus*

By the Mudflats, one 1<sup>st</sup> W on 27/9. Probably the same 1<sup>st</sup> W was seen 30/9, almost at the same spot.



Pallas's Gull, 1<sup>st</sup> W, Happy Island 30/9. Photo: Mats Rellmar

**Relict Gull** *Larus relictus*

Seen mainly and regularly at the Mudflats, with >80 28/9 and c. 120 2/10 (only counted with some accuracy on these dates).

**Saunders's Gull** *Larus saundersi*

More roaming than previous species, with single birds regularly flying across the island. Perhaps also a little more solitary. Seen daily in small numbers with a maximum of >25 on 30/9.

**Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus sibiricus*

Common, seen daily and not counted.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus*

One 1<sup>st</sup> W 27/9. This bird was closer to *kamtschatschensis* than *heinei*, but the possibility of an intermediate could not be ruled out.

**Black-tailed Gull** *Larus crassirostris*

Seen daily in numbers up to 50.

**'Herring Gull'** *Larus argentatus/vegae/cachinnans*

Seen daily in low or moderate numbers. No safe (sub-)specific identifications were made, mainly due to distant observations. Many birds (the majority) recalling *mongolicus* were seen, but also, in lower numbers, birds certainly of *vegae/birulai*-group. Some may also have been hybrids between *birulai* and *L. heuglini taimyrensis* or back-crosses.

The situation with the large gulls seem to be complicated in eastern Asia (as well) and Happy Island is not a good place to study these. Only "fly-bys" normally gave you a fair distance, but these kind of observations alone did not contribute to the more precise studies we felt we required.

**Siberian Gull** *Larus heuglini 'taimyrensis'*

One ad 25/9, 1 ad 30/9, 1 1st w 1/10 and 1 ad 3/10. Of course, the possibility of true *heuglini* does exist, and one or two of the ad's where in fact fairly dark- mantled. Then again, the variation within 'taimyrensis' may not be fully understood, at least not by us.

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons sinensis*

One by the mainland harbour Laoyujian, 24/9, 2 from the boat on the way to HI 24/9 and 1 HI 28/9.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon n. nilotica & addenda*

Recorded almost daily in low numbers with a maximum of 40 at the Mudflats 28/9.

**Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne c. caspia*

17 at the mainland harbour Laoyujian, 24/9, was the highest day's total. Otherwise seen almost daily in low numbers, mainly by the Mudflats.

**White-winged Black Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus*

C. 25 24/9, 2 25/9 and 1 26/9. No subsequent records were made.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo longipennis*

One by the mainland harbour Laoyujian, 24/9.

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia (domest.)*

Seen daily, not counted.

**Rufous Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia o. orientalis*

Common, seen daily with maximum of 70 28.9.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

Two seen along the highway on our way to HI 23/9.

**Rufous Hawk Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx hyperythrus*

One adult 27/9, 1 1<sup>st</sup> W 29/9, 1 adult 1/10 and probably the same 2/10.

**Cuckoo species** *Cuculus sp.*

Seen daily with 1-3 and a total of c. 20. At least 5 really small cuckoos were almost certainly Lesser Cuckoo *C. poliocephalus*, but all were left unidentified since none was heard calling and since we find the size limits between *C. canorus/optatus* and *optatus/poliocephalus* overlapping or at least unclear.

**Lesser Coucal** *Centropus bengalensis*

A brief observation in the morning on the 30/9 was most likely a juvenile Lesser Coucal.

The bird was seen making a short glide-flight over a reed-bed and then quickly disappearing, probably landing somewhere in the surrounding grass-fields.

The size, structure, some markings and the wingformula indicates some kind of Coucal *Centropus*, most likely a Lesser Coucal *C. bengalensis*. Although we were reasonably close to where it must have landed, we did not rediscover the bird.

The fact that it, despite its size and virtually nowhere to go, disappeared into "thin air", may also indicate this group of species.

**Eastern Grass Owl** *Tyto longimembris*

One and probably the same individual 24, 25/9 and 1/10. One can speculate whether it is actually possible to rediscover a Grass Owl on HI on more than one occasion, but we consider these records to be the one and same owl.

**Oriental Scops Owl** *Otus sunia stictonotus*

Two 25/9, 12 26/9, 5 29/9 and 1 1/10.

**Northern Boobook** *Ninox japonica*

One in the woods 2/10.



Northern Boobook, Happy Island 2/10. Photo: Mats Rellmar

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua plumipes*

One near the HI harbour 24.9.

**Owl species** *Asio sp*

One 25/9 and 1 27/9, the first one probably being a Short-eared Owl, the second probably a Long-eared.

**Needle-tailed Swift** *Hirundapus c. caudacutus*

One 26/9 and 2 27/9. As always, these birds just shot by and were gone in a few seconds. Sad.

**Pacific Swift** *Apus p. pacificus*

Two in strong easterly winds and rain 2/10.

**Black-capped Kingfisher** *Halcyon pileata*

One 25/9 and 1 28/9.

**Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis bengalensis*

Recorded with 1-2 almost daily.

**Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops saturata*

5-10 daily with a maximum of 12 2/10.

**Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx t. torquilla & chinensis*

One 24, 26 and 27/9 respectively.

**Asian Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella ch. cheleensis*

One 25/9, 2 2/10 and 2 3/10.

**Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis pekinensis (etc.)*

Recorded daily in low or moderate numbers.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia ijimae*

Only single birds were recorded 24/9-2/10. Thereafter apparently becoming quite abundant with a good passage 3-4/10.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica saturata (etc.)*

One of the most common birds, recorded daily in moderate or large numbers.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica japonica*

Five 24/9, 1 25/9 and 1 26/9. None were seen 27-29/9, even though Barn Swallows were passing by in good numbers. Suddenly, on 30/9, the tables turned and the Red-rumps were seen in hundreds and even outnumbering Barn Swallows on two or three dates.

**Eurasian House Martin** *Delichon urbicum lagopoda*

One by the mainland harbour Laoyujian 24/9.

**Richard's Pipit** *Anthus r. richardi (etc.)*

Seen daily in numbers between 10 and 35.

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus h. hodgsoni & yunnanensis*

Seen daily in numbers between 5 and 20, with a peak on 2/10 with c. 75.



Olive-backed Pipit, Happy Island. Photo: Márten Müller

**Pechora Pipit** *Anthus g. Gustavi & menzbieri*

One by the mainland harbour Laoyujian 24/9. Records on HI were 3 27/9, 1 28/9, 1 2/10 and 2 3/10. As always on HI, none was located on the ground.

**Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus*

Recorded as for Olive-backed Pipit above, though slightly less common on peak days. A maximum of c. 35 4/10. Does it get even more common later in the autumn?

**Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens japonicus*

One 24/9, 4 1/10, 3 2/10, 5 3/10 and 2 4/10. Obviously, the numbers seemed to increase towards the end of our stay and the same question as for Red-throated applies - what is it like later in autumn?

**Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava taivana & simillima & macronyx (etc.)*

Recorded daily in low to moderate numbers with a maximum of c. 50 25/9. To our ears, many of the calls heard were disappointingly similar to (western) Citrine Wagtail *M. citreola* and quite different from western Yellow Wagtails.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea robusta*

One 25/9, 1 28/9, 3 2/10 and 1 3/10.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba leucopsis & ocularis*

Seen daily in low numbers with daily totals seldom exceeding 25. No racial claims were made for these autumn birds.

**Ashy Minivet** *Pericrocotus d. divaricatus*

Single birds or small flocks recorded almost daily. A large flock of c. 200 flying south 27/9 and c. 80 3/10.

**Chinese Bulbul** *Pycnonotus s. sinensis*

Common and seen daily. Not counted.

**Rufous-tailed Robin** *Luscinia sibilans*

One 28/9, 10 29/9, 2 2/10 and 1 3/10.

**Siberian Rubythroat** *Luscinia calliope*

Recorded almost daily. Totals were 3-7 and a maximum of 10 29/9.

**Bluethroat** *Luscinia s. svecia*

1-4 seen daily between 26/9-1/10, increasing to 6 2/10 and 10 on both 3 and 4/10.

**Siberian Blue Robin** *Luscinia cyane bochaiensis*

One 26/9, 1 30/9, 3 1/10 and 2 2/10.

**Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger c. cyanurus*

Low numbers 24-27/9 and increasing from 28<sup>th</sup>. Highest daily totals were c. 50 29/9 and c. 40 3/10.

**Daurian Redstart** *Phoenicurus a. aureus*

One male 29/9, 1 30/9 and 1 4/10.

**Common Stonechat** *Saxicola torquatus stejnegeri*

Common and seen daily with numbers varying between 20 and 60.

If You multiply all fields and grassy patches on HI hosting 5–10 birds, You would probably end up with several hundred birds! But as for the rest of the numbers and totals in this report, only birds actually seen are given (and not the presumed “island totals”).

**White-throated Rock Thrush** *Monticola gularis*

One 27/9, 10 29/9, 2 2/10 and 1 3/10.

**Scaly Thrush** *Zoothera dauma aurea (etc?)*

Recorded almost daily in low numbers with a maximum of 5 28/9.

**Siberian Thrush** *Zoothera s. sibirica (etc?)*

One male 29/9, 1 30/9 and 2 2/10.

**Grey-backed Thrush** *Turdus h. hortolorum*

More than 15 2/10, 4 3/10 and 4 4/10.

**Eyebrowed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus*

One 29/9 was the only record.

**Dusky Thrush** *Turdus n. naumanni & eunomus*

Three 27/9, 2 29/9, 1 *eunomus* 1/10, 1 *eunomus* + 1 *naumanni* 2/10 and 3 3/10.

**Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus r. ruficollis & atrogularis*

Three 26/9, 2 27/9, 1 28/9, 18 29/9, 1 30/9 and 2 4/10. Only the race *atrogularis* was seen.

**Chinese Thrush** *Turdus mupinensis*

One 1/10 was the only sighting.

**Asian Stubtail Warbler** *Urosphena squameiceps*

One 29/9, 1 2/10 and 1 5/10. Unexpectedly scarce.

**Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis tinnabulans*

One 25/9, 1 27/9, 3 30/9, 3 3/10 and 1 4/10.

**Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella c. certhiola & rubescens*

Two 26/9.

**Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata*

Recorded daily except for 24-25/9. A maximum of 20 seen on several dates, but the species probably reached a peak on 29/9. Even if only c. 10 were seen on this date, note that only the woods was visited. Unfortunately, there was no time to visit the grasslands where the majority of 'Lanceolates' normally hide. There is, however, little doubt that a walk anywhere in suitable habitat would have revealed numbers way over 20.

**Black-browed Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus b. bistrigiceps*

Fairly common, recorded all days except for three. Highest totals on 26 and 28/9 with c. 25 and 30 respectively.

**Oriental Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus orientalis*

Two 26/9, 3 27/9 and 1 28/9.

**Thick-billed Warbler** *Acrocephalus aedon stegmanni*

One 26/9, 1 27/9, 3 28/9 and 1 4/10.

**Eastern Crowned Warbler** *Phylloscopus coronatus*

One, along with increasing numbers of Yellow-browed and Pallas's Warblers, 25.9.

**Pale-legged Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus tenellipes*

One 24/9, 3 25/9 and 1 29/9.

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides plumbeitarsus*

1-5 seen daily.

**Arctic Warbler** *Phylloscopus b. borealis & hylebata & xanthodryas (etc.)*

Single birds seen almost daily with a maximum of 4 3/10. Even if it seems unlikely and even if we found no indications of it, we cannot completely rule out that the odd Sakhalin Leaf Warbler *Ph. borealoides* may have been involved.

**Pallas's Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus*

Recorded daily, with fairly low numbers 24-27/9, thereafter increasing, on a few dates equalling or even outnumbering Yellow-browed Warbler and thus being the commonest warbler on the island on those days, together with Dusky Warbler.

**Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Common throughout the trip, perhaps dropping slightly in numbers towards the end of our stay.

Many Yellow-browed are really drab, some with weak "upper wingband" and sometimes showing a combination of greyish head and green back and a weak crownstripe. Some (not uncommon) were heard calling with a straight "tsii", quite unlike the normal "tsiui".

Some of the drab ones may have been Hume's Leaf Warbler, but no calls supporting this were heard.

**Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

Recorded daily and increasing from the last days of September and outnumbering Dusky in October.

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus f. fuscatus & robustus*

Common 24-29/9, thereafter dropping in numbers but still fairly common in October.

**Blue-and-white Flycatcher** *Cyanoptila cyanomelana cumatilis*

For some reason, only 1<sup>st</sup> W males were seen: 1 at the mainland harbour Laoyujian 24/9, 1 29/9, 1 1/10 and 1 3/10.



Blue-and-white Flycatcher, Laoyujian 24/9. Photo: Mårten Müller

**Dark-sided Flycatcher** *Muscicapa s. sibirica*

One 1<sup>st</sup> W 27/9.

**Asian Brown Flycatcher** *Muscicapa d. dauurica*

One on 25, 26, 28, 29/9 and 2 2/10.

**Taiga Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicilla*

Recorded daily with maximum numbers of 20 25/9 and 15 2/10.

**Mugimaki Flycatcher** *Ficedula mugimaki*

Ten 29/9, 2 30/9, 1 1/10 and 3 2/10. Thus, appearing from no-where on the 29<sup>th</sup> and thereafter dropping in numbers, perhaps concerning the same individuals that had arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Yellow-bellied Tit** *Periparus venustulus*

Four 25/9, 1 27/9, c. 15 29/9, c. 50 3/10 and considered "common" 4/10.

**Chinese Penduline Tit** *Remiz c. consobrinus*

C. 75 3/10 and 8 4/10.

**Chestnut-flanked White-eye** *Zosterops erythropleura*

Common, seen each day.

**Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis diffusus*

Seen almost daily, except for two days. Mainly low numbers with a maximum of 8 29/9 and 3/10.

**Brown Shrike** *Lanius c. cristatus & confusus & luconiensis & superciliosus*

Recorded every day except for 2/10. Between 1 and 5 seen, all aged were 1<sup>st</sup> W.

**Chinese Grey Shrike** *Lanius sphenocercus*

One and two recorded almost daily. Many of these observations probably refer to the same bird or birds.

**Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus cathoecus*

Three 25 and 26/9, 1 30/9.

**Hair-crested Drongo** *Dicrurus hottentottus brevirostris*

Three 28/9, 1 29/9, 1 2/10 and 1 3/10. Possibly the same birds were involved on all dates.

**Common Magpie** *Pica pica camtschatica*

Seen daily, not counted.

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus pastinator*

One 25/9.

**Daurian Starling** *Sturnus sturninus*

Four 28/9 and 2 29/9 were the only records, all associating with White-cheeked.

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*

One 4/10.

For the record, one (1) single bird was seen on the island in autumn trips 1999 and 2003. This species should be a rarity in these parts but, based on these three observations, it might just as well be a regular (although scarce) bird on HI?!!

**White-cheeked Starling** *Sturnus cineraceus*

Fairly common, recorded 8 out of 12 days, with a maximum of c. 250 29/9.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus iubilaeus*

Common, not counted.

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

Two 28/9, 1 29/9 and 1 1.10.

**Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus grebnitskii*

Recorded almost daily in low or moderate numbers, with a maximum of c. 20 29/9.

**Yellow-billed Grosbeak** *Euphona m. migratoria & sowerbyi*  
One 25/9 was, in fact, the only sighting.

**Black-faced Bunting** *Emberiza s. spodocephala*  
The most abundant sparrow. Seen daily but not counted.

**Chestnut-eared Bunting** *Emberiza f. fucata*  
Seen almost daily in low numbers.

**Yellow-throated Bunting** *Emberiza e. elegans*  
Three 25/9, 4 28/9, 3 29/9, 1 1/10 and 1 3/10.

**Yellow-browed Bunting** *Emberiza chrysophrys*  
Seen daily, except for 24/9 and 5/10, in numbers between 1 and 6.



Yellow-browed Bunting, Happy Island. Photo: Mårten Müller

**Tristram's Bunting** *Emberiza tristrami*  
One 27/9, 4 29/9, 2 30/9, 2 1/10, 2 3/10 and 1 4/10. Possibly the same birds involved on a few dates, these sparrows seemed to favour certain spots in the woods and near the camp.

**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*  
The second most common *Emberiza*, even if fairly low numbers were recorded.

**Chestnut Bunting** *Emberiza rutila*  
Single birds recorded 27, 29 and 30/9.

**Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza a. aureola & ornata*  
Single birds recorded 24, 26, 28 and 30/9 and three 3 and 4/10.

**Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus pyrrhulina & minor*  
One 27/9.

**Pallas's Reed Bunting** *Emberiza pallasi polaris*  
One 28/9 and 3 3/10.

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