

NE Tibet w/ Oriental Bird Club, 16 June – 5 July 2014:

An at-a-glance list of 204 species of birds & 23 species of mammals.

By Jesper Hornskov ****this draft 29 Sep 2014**** ALL RIGHTS RESERVED®

Please note that the following list is best considered a work in progress. It should not be quoted without consulting the author.

Based mostly on my own field notes, this brief write-up covers the birds & mammals noted by X Andriesse, D de Boer, P Jones, I Roberts, A Samarpan, J Van Dieen & myself during a 2014 OBC Fundraiser visit to China's Qinghai province.

As all group members turned out to be very keen on photography we recalibrated the day-to-day activities to maximise opportunities - already excellent - to photograph the special birds and mammals encountered, accepting completely that this would very likely cost us a few species overall. Sure enough, the tally of 204 spp was around 20 fewer than average for the OBC Fundraisers, but bearing in mind that the trip started after the late May / early June 'stray migrants' peak & ended before most Siberian waders had started reappearing this was not bad, and given the quality of the images obtained (do keep an eye on www.orientalbirdimages.org !) everyone on the trip felt satisfied.

In addition to the birds we saw - and photographed - mammals such as Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata*, the emblematic Kiang (= Tibetan Wild Ass) *Equus kiang*, the critically endangered Przevalski's Gazelle *Procapra przewalskii*, Wild Yak *Bos grunniens*, and the superb Tibetan Antelope *Panthalops hodgsonii*, a host of pretty flowers, and scenery of the sort for which one ought to reserve the nowadays much overused word 'stunning'.

It was the 8th Oriental Bird Club Fundraiser trip in this area (another three have targeted Yunnan province, desperately neglected despite being China's biologically richest). This year we followed a slightly adjusted itinerary: as in the past we had allowed a good margin for altitude acclimatization & plenty of time to ensure that all specialities could be properly searched for - hopefully, as in 2011 & 2012, we'd be seeing **TIBETAN SANDGROUSE** *Syrrhaptes thibetana* whilst having coffee (or tea!) by the cars!

The birds, the mammals, the really quite unbeatable scenery (at this time of the year in many places absolutely blanketed in wildflowers), a very 21st century mix of local cultures, wonderful food, comfortable - from 'definitely OK' to 'surprisingly good' - accommodations & (not least) the companionship all came together to produce a trip the more memorable for the region - though in many ways an indisputable 'MUST' destination for anyone hooked on Palearctic and/or Asian birds or mammals - being so under-visited.

Anyone considering China as a natural history destination is welcome to contact the author at:

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Enquiries concerning future **Oriental Bird Club Fundraisers** - to NE Tibet, by and large following the itinerary used on the trip dealt with here, or Yunnan (our trips to China's in every way most diverse province have been very popular) - can be made to Michael Edgecombe of the OBC at [mail\(at\)orientalbirdclub.org](mailto:mail(at)orientalbirdclub.org) or directly to this author.

In the species list the concept "bird-days" is used - it is the avian equivalent of man-hours, the day totals added up - it indicates relative abundance but does not consider the "problem" of lingering

***Cheng (1987) listed a staggering 18 races for mainland China. Of these he listed just three for Qinghai: *vlangalii*, *strauchi* (for 'NE part') & *suehschanensis* as an accidental to Zekog in SE.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

150+ bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

A summering immature near Yushu was highly unexpected!

***Zheng *et al.* (2005) did not list the species for Qinghai – nearest NW Xinjiang & S Xizang.

***Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) states that in the Indian Subcontinent the species occurs as a 'winter visitor across N plains from Indus Valley (Pakistan) to E Uttar [Pradesh], with scattered records E to Assam Valley, Manipur & Chilka Lake (Orissa)'.

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

1,010+ bird-days. This attractive species was noted on four dates – main event 890 scattered across a roadside wetland on 28th.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Two adults at Koko Nor on 5th.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

157+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Singles noted on four dates.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Five males w/ one female on 22nd.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

c55 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

610 at Koko Nor on 5th.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

24+ bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

125 at Koko Nor on 5th.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Four males w/ two females at Koko Nor on 5th.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

Eight bird-days. Noted on three dates – three doing repeated fly-bys on 23rd was one of many highlights of a morning devoted to seeing birds well (and getting photos!)...

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

175+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

30 at Koko Nor on 5th.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

One on 22nd.

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*

One in flight on 22nd - 'it was looking in the wrong place if it was looking for a reedbed to hide in!'

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*

Two en route on 28th.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*

150 bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event 141 on 28th.

***In addition, three distant Egret sp on 3rd may well have been this species...

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Seven at Koko Nor on 5th.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Five on 28th.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Five on 5th.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Eight bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco Subbuteo*

Singles on two dates.

Saker *Falco cherrug*

25 bird-days. Noted on no fewer than eight dates - for most of us a welcome opportunity to familiarize ourselves with a species which is declining globally: not many trips allow you to graduate to full Saker Expert status in less than three weeks!

Black Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*

Ten bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

18 bird-days. We recorded this 'flying dragon' on nine dates – eh, hang on, 'recorded'? We were BLOWN AWAY by the views we got: TINGALING!!

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*

83+ bird-days. Noted on 13 dates.

Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

Singles on two dates.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Five bird-days. Noted on four dates – one was hunting cliffs at c4,700m on 26th ...

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*

Six bird-days. Noted on four dates.

***Formerly considered a race of Common Buzzard *B. buteo* but genetically closer to the much commoner Upland Buzzard *B. hemilasius* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005) from which it is ecologically separated & easily - well, fairly easily! - distinguished...

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

127 bird-days. Noted on ten dates - best count 47 along the way across The Roof of The World.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

18 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Four bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

15+ at Koko Nor on 5th.

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

46 adults in total. Noted on six dates. This hardy yet undoubtedly vulnerable (and 'Vulnerable': <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/143783/0>) Tibetan Plateau endemic breeder was one of the most hoped-for species, and we were repeatedly treated to great views - it was entirely appropriate that our wonderful trip ended on an upbeat note with two pairs of Black-necked Cranes at Koko Nor, each accompanied by two thriving chicks: TINGALING!

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

Ten bird-days. Noted on six dates, with a close to Best Ever encounter with a pair w/ two downy chicks en route to Yushu: 'we found ourselves next to an Upland Buzzard nest when we stopped to clean the windows of our Landcruisers, then heard Ibisbill as we were lingering to take photos. Superb show. The adults were calling constantly; one was seen bathing. When we approached the adults flew upstream right by us, landed, still calling, and the chicks ran up offering directly-across-from-us photo ops w/ soft, perfect afternoon lighting. As we were preparing to leave we watched the adults divert a dog away from the chicks, flying slowly in front of it, driving it quite mad by allowing it to keep up but not to catch up. The dog ended up swimming across the river, though possibly less as a result of the Ibisbills baiting it as because it was going there anyway – it went off... And the parent Ibisbills flew back upstream to rejoin the chicks'!

***As anyone contemplating a quick twitch for this charismatic species had better bear in mind, Ibisbills seen in Tibet feeding on a flowered-over meadow next to a rushing, icy stream – with Red-billed Choughs cawing, Blue Hill Pigeons cooing, Elliot's Laughingthrushes cheerfully whistling & domestic yaks snorting thoughtfully in the background - are more REAL than the sad one or two which still desperately attempt to cling on in competition with sickly-looking domestic ducks along the last stretches of barely acceptable water close to Beijing!

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

30+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Very likely the same two seen on both 3+4th.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

c65 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

'Spot-fronted' Sand Plover *Charadrius atrifrons*[^]

49+ bird-days. Noted on four dates.

***[^]formerly consider conspecific with Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*.

***ssp *atrifrons* has 'forehead and band through and below eye to ear coverts black, occasionally with some white mottling in front of eye; rufous-cinnamon of chest extends to flanks and breast, not bordered by black bar against white chin' while *mongolus* has forehead white, often divided by narrow black line in middle, bordered from cinnamon forecrown by narrow black line; black line runs from lores to ear coverts and white line from above eye to above ear-coverts; narrow black bar between white chin and clear-cut cinnamon-rufous chest-band'. *schaeferi* 'often has some white on forehead; intermediate between *atrifrons* and nominate *mongolus*', 'often closest to *mongolus*': BWP vol III, p169.

Western Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*
14 at Koko Nor on 5th.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*
Three migr at Koko Nor on 5th.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*
One heard on 4th.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
105+ bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Five bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
30 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*
A single adult showed well at Koko Nor on 5th.
***Previously recorded no earlier in 'autumn' than 17 July: JH pers. obs.

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus cachinnans cachinnans*
One adult 'leg colour eliminating *mongolicus*' at Koko Nor on 5th.
***ssp *mongolicus* was listed as part of Arctic Herring Gull *L. smithsonianus* in HBW Illustrated Checklist Vol 1 - '*smithsonianus* split on molecular grounds split from morphologically extremely similar European *argenteus*. Large breeding range of this ssp, from seAltai to Korea, wintering in sAsia':
S Lowe pers. com.

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
One adult on 29th.

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*
136+ bird-days. Noted on five dates – main event c140 up on the Plateau on 22nd.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
120+ bird-days. Noted on ten dates – all those seen well were the distinctive ssp *tibetana*.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*
One adult at the temporary lake on both 3+4th.

Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes thibetana*

Two pairs!

***A very satisfying encounter with an endemic which is 'on the Hardest Bird in the World shortlist along with Emperor Penguin' – nonetheless we all agreed that so spectacularly grand was the landscape that it would have been no loss at all to return the following morning, as we would definitely have done in the event no sandgrouse had obliged 1st time around!

Pallas' Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

8-9 bird-days. Noted on two dates...

***Essentially a bird of the steppes of Central Asia east to Mongolia - its occasional irruptions, during which it may reach and breed in e.g. the British Isles, adds considerably to its charisma, making it a real Dreambird! Despite its nomadic inclinations it is usually reliable at our favoured site: this time we saw drink-fighting ones and twos, but none 'feeding warily amongst the scattered, wind-burnt clumps of grass'.

Blue Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*

211+ bird-days. Noted on no fewer than 16 dates.

Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*

Eight bird-days. Noted on four dates - one of those 'has-to-be-seen-to-be-believed' species...seeing these strikingly patterned birds effortlessly sail along the towering rock faces is a visual treat, the simple beauty of 'em enhancing the grandeur of the setting.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

13 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Large Hawk-Cuckoo *Cuculus sparverioides*

One 'scoped N of Xining on 18th.

*****Indian Cuckoo** *Cuculus micropterus*

Present @ our hotel in Beijing.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

91 bird-days. Noted on 13 dates.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Ten bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

35 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Salim Ali's Swift *Apus salimali*

c110 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

***Leader (2011) concluded that the *Apus pacificus* complex should be treated as four species, at least three of which occur in China/Tibet.

***Salim Ali's Swift *Apus salimali* is 'restricted to E Tibetan Plateau and adjacent high-altitude W Sichuan' breeding at 'very high altitudes (above 3,400m)' – 'Fork-tailed Swifts' breeding near Xining, Qinghai, at c2,500m are also this form: JH *et al.* pers obs. 'Its winter distribution is apparently unknown but, at the very least, it must be an altitudinal migrant'.

The species is longer-tailed with a proportionately shallower tail fork, has different throat pattern ('narrow pale strip on the center of the throat and is narrowest at the base of the bill, where it tapers to a neat point', 'less than half the width of the other taxa'), 'the rump patch is consistently narrow', 'the crown and nape are mid-brown, contrasting conspicuously' with the glossy black mantle, and the

pale tips to the underparts are much reduced compared to *pacificus* (more comparable to *leuconyx* in this character).

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

26 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Two N of Xining on 19th.

***It is worth noting that ssp *beicki* [of Ningxia, Gansu & E Qinghai: Zheng *et al.* (2005)] is not recognized as a taxon in HBW Illustrated Checklist Vol 1, being lumped into ssp *stresemanni* [of E Xizang, W & S Yunnan, N Guizhou & Sichuan: Zheng *et al.* (2005)], but 'this latter may be split with *cabanisi* [of SW Liaoning, Hebei, Shandong, Henan, Shanxi, N Anhui & N Jiangsu: Zheng *et al.* (2005)] as Chinese Great Spotted Woodpecker': S Lowe pers com.

***In addition, the species was present in the grounds of our Beijing hotel.

Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

Two on 25th.

***"Taxonomy: needs re-evaluation. Nearctic and Palearctic races recently split into two species, *P. dorsalis* and *P. tridactylus*, without discussion of status of the very distinct *funnebris*."': Rasmussen & Anderton (2005).

***In HBW Illustrated Checklist Vol 1 '*P. funnebris* of eQinghai & wGansu to wSichuan & nYunnan is split from Three-toed Woodpecker, which by the way is relumped with the American forms...': S Lowe pers. com.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

Six bird-days. Noted on four dates – main event three on 25th, of which one was only 40m away...

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

14 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

***Of the similar Turkestan Shrike *L. phoenicuroides* Svensson *et al.* (2009) notes: 'often treated as a race of Isabelline Shrike, but adult males usually differ quite clearly, hybridization limited, and genetic difference sizeable [...]'.

Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*

39 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius (sphenocercus) giganteus*

Three bird-days. Noted on two dates - a probable breeding pair N of Yushu seen also in late May & in early June [JH pers obs] delighted & frustrated in almost equal measure as they kept their distance from us before finally posing...

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

One near Yushu en route on 28th [PJ].

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Singletons on two dates N of Xining.

****vide* Zheng *et al.* (2005) ssp *kansuensis* is restricted to NW & SW Gansu and 'Qinghai', though the only Qinghai locality for which it was listed by Cheng (1987) was Zekog. Dickinson (2003) listed it also for NW Sichuan.

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus*

Four bird-days. Noted on two dates.

***In addition, present @ the grounds of our Beijing hotel.

***Apparently (G. Pettersson pers. com.) the Iberian taxon, *C. (c.) cooki*, has been shown to be sufficiently differentiated genetically to merit elevation to full species status. In addition to the ones we saw, *kansuensis* in NE Tibet & *interposita* at Beijing, the eastern species includes a further five taxa (Dickinson 2003)...

Common Magpie *Pica pica*

29 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

***In addition, hard to miss @ the grounds of our Beijing hotel!

Tibetan Magpie *Pica (pica) bottanensis*

52 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

***The two *Pica* taxa occupy mutually exclusive ranges and display a number of vocal, morphological & habitat differences.

Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*

15 bird-days. Great encounters on two dates.

Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*

111+ bird-days. Noted on 14 dates.

***Although most closely related to *Paridae* (Dickinson 2003; B King pers com.) please let us do our bit to avoid a newly concocted English name – which the risk of keyboard distress prevents me typing here _____ - ____ - from slipping into common usage!

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*

c185 bird-days. Noted on 15 dates – main event a flock of 130 near Nangqian on 25th.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhonorax graculus*

Nine bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on three dates.

Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus*

26+ bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

15 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

One on 18th.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

14 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

***According to Zheng *et al.* (2005) ssp *tibetosinensis* is restricted to E Qinghai, SW Xizang, NW & W Yunnan, and N & W Sichuan.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

49 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

Eastern Great Tit *Parus minor*

Four bird-days. Noted on two days N of Xining.

****P. minor* is one of 3-4 'Great Tit' species in China. Keep your fingers crossed that the inappropriate name 'Japanese' Tit doesn't stick!

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris*

Three bird-days – noted on just two dates.

Songar Tit *Parus songarus*

27 bird-days. Noted on seven dates N of Xining (ssp *affinis*) & S of Yushu (ssp *weigoldicus*).

***Note that of the several 'Songar Tit' ssp maybe only *weigoldicus* merits full species status (the rest are now lumped back in with Willow Tit *Parus montanus* by e.g. IOC).

***Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) noted that "the case for treating *weigoldicus* as a full species appears particularly strong on the basis of its unusually high genetic distances from other taxa, despite weak morphological differentiation". Actually – as we couldn't help noticing (& see Collar & Pilgrim 2007) - *weigoldicus* does differ 'conspicuously' in many respects, incl vocalizations, from even *affinis*.

White-browed Tit *Parus superciliosus*

5+ bird-days. Noted on four dates - seen particularly well N of Xining on 18th.

Grey Crested Tit *Parus dichrous*

4+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Pale Sand Martin *Riparia diluta*

80 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Singles on two dates.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

22 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*

115+ bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

***In addition, a distant, unidentified House Martin on 28th may have been a stray Northern House Martin *D. urbicum*: it just didn't look quite right for Asian...

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

14 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

***ssp *gephrya* is an even better-looking bird than the *japonica* standard-issue Red-rumped we saw @ the grounds of our Beijing hotel...

Stoliczka's (= White-browed) Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae*

23 bird-days. Noted on six (!) dates – getting repeated views at point-blank range was (*please tick as appropriate*)

[] stunning!

[] very stunning!!

[] fantastically stunning!!!

[] nothing to brag about.

Crested Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile elegans*

One pair 'scoped & photographed on 27th - more would very likely have been found if we hadn't concentrated quite so hard on photography...

Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica*

Five bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Long-billed Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha maxima*

16+ bird-days. Noted on five dates.

Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris*

11 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis*

22 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*

Fairly widespread – not systematically recorded.

Elwes' Horned Lark *Eremophila elwesi*

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

***Drovetski *et al.* (2014) – in an article record-breakingly titled 'Limited Phylogeographic Signal in Sex-Linked and Autosomal Loci Despite Geographically, Ecologically, and Phenotypically Concordant Structure of mtDNA Variation in the Holarctic Avian Genus *Eremophila*[^]: PLoS ONE 9(1) – proposed splitting Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* into six species.

Of relevance in an Oriental context are:

E. elwesi of Tibet etc. (to be renamed if the uninvestigated ssp *longirostris* proves to belong to this clade).

E. penicillata including 'birds inhabiting alpine zone of Palearctic mountains from southeastern Europe to Tian Shan' (ssp *albigula* is found in Xinjiang, China).

E. flava 'breeding in the tundra from Scandinavia to Amguema River in Chukotka' (and occurring S in winter at least to Beijing).

E. brandti 'breeding in aridlands from the northwestern border of Kazakhstan to northeastern Inner Mongolia in China' (and occurring S in winter at least to Beijing).

The dust is yet to settle, but *elwesi* is as genetically distinct as Temminck's Horned Lark *E.*

bilopha...

***^To which the only possible response would be 'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious'!

Spotted Bush Warbler *Bradypterus thoracicus*

Six bird-days. Noted on two dates N of Xining - a bit of prompting encouraged one to sit up nicely in the morning sun: click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!-click!!

***Kennerley & Pearson (2010) accepts the Pere David's (or 'Baikal') Bush Warbler, comprising the taxa *davidi* (breeding in 'E Siberia from the NW Amur region south to NE China, with an isolated population in C China') & *suschkini* (breeding in 'Siberia from the Russian Altai east through Sayan Mountains to the region of Lake Baikal'), as a species, *B. davidi*, distinct from Spotted Bush Warbler, comprising the taxa *thoracicus* (breeding 'C and E Himalayas to W & S China'), *przevalskii* (breeding 'Sichuan to N Qinghai, SW Gansu and S Shaanxi') & *kashmirensis* (breeding in 'W Himalayas').

'Chinese' Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus (affinis) occisinensis*

92 bird-days. Noted on 12 days.

***Martens (2008) elevates part of Tickell's Warbler to full species status as *P. occisinensis*

http://globiz.sachsen.de/snsd/publikationen/vertebrate-zoology/vz58-2/06_Martens.pdf

Yellow-streaked Warbler *Phylloscopus armandii*

34 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

Buff-barred Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher*

16 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

37 bird-days. Noted N of Xining on three dates.

***This attractive warbler was only recently reaccepted as a valid species, and its winter quarters remain undiscovered...

Chinese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus yunnanensis*
Two N of Xining.

'Eastern' Lemon-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus (chloronotus) forresti*
29 bird-days. Noted on four days.

***Martens *et al.* 2004 (*vide* Rheindt 2006) elevated *forresti*, considered a synonym of *chloronotus* by Cheng (1987), to full species status, splitting it from *chloronotus* (of Nepal) which, with *simlaensis*, becomes Western Lemon-rumped Warbler. The two differ "dramatically in song and mitochondrial DNA (4.2% cytochrome-b divergence)": Rheindt (2006). Given that the type locality for *forresti* is Lijiang, in Yunnan (Cheng 1987) it is not obvious that "Sichuan Leaf Warbler" is preferable to 'Eastern Lemon-rumped Warbler'. "Presumably the hitherto unknown border between both species lies somewhere in Yunnan, Burma or north-eastern India.": Rheindt (2006). *Ahem?*

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*
144+ bird-days. Noted on six days.

***Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) treats both ssp as full species, noting that "although the call of *mandellii* is markedly different from [n nominate] *humei*, the whistled songs of both taxa are variable and often inseparable. While *mandellii* is genetically closer to *humei* than to *inornatus*, it is long-separated from either according to mtDNA (Irwin *et al.* 2001); its status as a full species thus remains equivocal." – NOT (yet) accepted as a full species by IOC:

<http://www.worldbirdnames.org/BOW/bushtits/>

***Nominate *humei* occurs in Qinghai on passage in autumn (JH pers obs).

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

127+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates – quite a few showed more than a trace of a 2nd wingbar...
***Zheng *et al.* (2005) includes 'Qinghai' in the range of ssp *obscuratus*, and SE Qinghai in the range of ssp *trochiloides*.

***Zheng *et al.* (2005) included 'all [of China] except Xinjiang, Xizang & Taiwan' in the range of ssp *plumbeitarsus*, considering the taxon a full species, a position shared by IOC but not by Svensson (2009).

Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris*
29 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

'Margelanic' Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia (minula) margelanica*
11 bird-days. This puzzling taxon was seen on two dates – main event ten on Canada Day.

Kozlov's Babax *Babax koslowi*
8+ bird-days. Noted on two dates.

***One of our main 'pretexts' for visiting an unsurpassably pretty area on the remote Xizang border, this restricted-range species proved comparatively obliging.

Pere David's Laughingthrush *Garrulax davidi*
Three bird-days. This N China endemic was noted on two dates.

***Only when seen well does one realize why the alternative name, 'Plain' Laughingthrush, isn't appropriate...

Giant Laughingthrush *Garrulax maximus*

28+ bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event 16 on 25th, incl three 'scoped across the river...

***This superb-looking but all-too-frequently hard to see species has an impressive range of calls, some subdued, some anything but, yet others direct or derived mimicry – duetting birds are often a striking component in the dawn chorus, and throughout the day groups travelling through the forest will mark their progress with occasional sessions of loud calling.

Elliot's Laughingthrush *Garrulax elliotii*

78+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Chinese Fulvetta *Alcippe striaticollis*

A pair w/ one juvenile photographed - a low density, low-key endemic which one needs the sort of views we got to really appreciate.

***Knowing the call AND where to listen out for it is - even more so than in the case of the skulking Kozlov's Babax – the key. Despite its universally accepted (?) name, the IOC tersely states its range as 'Tibet'.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Singles on two dates.

***Zheng *et al.* (2005) listed both ssp *tristis* & *sikkimensis* for Qinghai, without further detail.

Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

16 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Chinese Nuthatch *Sitta villosa*

Ten bird-days. Noted N of Xining on three dates.

Przevalski's Nuthatch *Sitta przewalskii*

Four bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*

Seven bird-days. Noted on five dates - finding an active (and, importantly, not overly distant!) nest was a bonus: we watched both male & female do fluttery, gliding show-off approach flights!

***'One of the most spectacular birds in the world, this species is aptly named 'rock flower' in Chinese': Harrap & Quinn (1996) – I'm not sure which Chinese dialect Harrap and/or Quinn is familiar with but both Cheng (1987) and Zheng *et al.* (2005) refer to *Tichodroma muraria* as '*Hongchi xuanbi que*', 'red-winged cliff-hanging bird'.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Four N of Xining on 17th.

Hodgson's Treecreeper *Certhia hodgsoni*

Very likely the same individual heard singing on two days S of Yushu.

***This newly elevated species 'embraces the Sino-Himalayan [taxa formerly treated as subspecies of *C. familiaris*] *hodgsoni* Brooks, 1874 (W Himalayas), *mandellii* Brooks, 1874 (E Himalayas) and *khamensis* Bianchi 1903 (SW & W China [N as far as the road between Jiuzhaigou & Sungpan in N Sichuan]': D T Tietze *et al.* 2006. Birds in SE Qinghai & E Xizang are this taxon: Cheng (1987).

Long-tailed Thrush *Zoothera dixonii*

One heard singing in the distance on 24th.

Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus*

20 bird-days. Noted N of Xining on three dates.

Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri*

117+ bird-days. Noted on 11 dates.

Chinese Song Thrush *Turdus mupinensis*

Three bird-days. Noted on two dates - diligent scanning was rewarded on 19th when a singing bird was 'scoped.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*

11 bird-days. Noted daily N of Xining...

Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis*

Three heard singing...

Himalayan Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus*

Singles on two dates – XA managed nice photos of a flitty male.

Northern Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*

26 bird-days. Noted daily N of Xining – memorable views of two pairs coming down to feed on the sun-dappled track on 17th.

***Apparently (L Svensson pers com) birds breeding in NE Qinghai – with a white brow in adult males – are *albocoeruleus*, a long neglected taxon hitherto considered of doubtful validity, but with a song distinct from both *cyanurus*' & *rufilatus*'. It is genetically closer to *cyanurus*, but has legs as long as *rufilatus*'.

Przevalski's Redstart *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*

11+ en route to Koko Nor on 2nd - TINGALING! views were enjoyed.

***The subdued song of this species – 'arguably the prettiest in the genus' – seem to consist largely of mimicry.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

127+ bird-days. Noted on 17 dates.

Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*

74+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps*

19 bird-days. Noted on seven dates – two males in a territorial stand-off on 2nd...

Guldenstadt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

Ten bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*

25 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

White-bellied Redstart *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides*

Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates – DdB did well to get a great photo...

Plumbeous Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosa*

Eight bird-days. Noted on three dates.

River Chat *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

30 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

24 bird-days. Noted on four dates – main event? hearing an impressive range of mimicry from two birds on 20th: between them they ‘did’ Redshank, Hume’s Short-toed Lark, Black Redstart, Marmot... and, not for the 1st time, whistling shepherd!

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

One male w/ two barely flying, downy & still-short-tailed fledglings on 16th.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

32 bird-days. Noted on five dates – main event no fewer than 23 on 1st, incl 13 males whose melancholy song did much to enhance our enjoyment of that morning stroll.

Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

Two males on 4th.

Eastern Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola philippensis*

One en route on 19th.

Slaty-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula hodgsonii*

27 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

Six bird-days. Noted on three dates – a brown morph bird on 18th delighted our team of photographers...

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

34 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Henri’s Snowfinch *Montifringilla henrici*

28 bird-days. Noted on six dates – an absurdly confiding pair feeding at <10m from us when we opted to NOT walk back the way we’d come...

***DNA work has shown this taxon to be more closely related to Tibetan Snowfinch than to Eurasian (with which it was lumped in the past).

Tibetan Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi*

21 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

***Rather unspectacular on the ground but truly striking in flight, this species is blessed with no less than four English names...

White-rumped Snowfinch *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*

97+ bird-days. Seen on eight dates this was the most charismatic of the six spp of snowfinch encountered – it ‘dive-bombs’ rivals, engages in strutting stand-offs, and lumbers along, all hunched up and true intentions hidden behind its highwayman’s mask...

Pere David’s Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda davidiana*

Six bird-days. Noted on three dates - a pair at their nest made us almost forget to eat our picnic breakfast...

***It is doubly misleading to call this ‘one of the most localized snowfinch species’ (as done by H Jannes in a 2011 Birdquest trip report) as

a) its range is vast, covering SE Russian Altai, Mongolia & SE Transbaikalia S to E Qinghai and W & C Inner Mongolia (Dickinson, 2003)!

b) the only Snowfinch which could be reasonably considered 'localized' is Afghan Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda theresae*, 'endemic to the N & C ranges of the Hindu Kush, Afghanistan (Shibar, Sabz & Unai Passes, Bamian [Prov]), between approximately 67° and 69°E', descending from its summer range between 2575-3000m to lower levels, and 'occasionally moves N into Badghyz and Karabil, SE Turkmenistan': Clement *et al.* (1993)!

Rufous-necked Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda ruficollis*
187+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Blanford's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*
Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates – on 3rd an adult w/ two begging juveniles seen at close range as we were having breakfast by the cars: WOW!

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*
Superb photos of one on 23rd [AS].

Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides*
35 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Rufous-browed Accentor *Prunella strophiiata*
Five bird-days. Noted on just two dates.

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*
42 bird-days. Noted on eight dates – excellent views (& photo ops!) on at least two mornings.

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*
Two males on 5th.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
19 bird-days. Noted on five dates – one of the males seen on 3rd appeared to be a *citreola* x *calcarata* intergrade.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Perhaps the same singleton on both 18+19th.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
63+ bird-days. Noted on 15 dates - sspp involved were *leucopsis* (none identified S of @ Er La pass) & *alboides* (in the Yushu/Nangqian area).
***Dickinson (2003) evidently consider without merit the idea that *lugens* is a valid species. Alstrom & Mild (2003) also concludes that various factors "suggest that the White Wagtail is best treated as a single species under the BSC".

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*
Eight bird-days. Noted on just two dates.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
37 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseus*
One on 5th.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*
Two on 2nd.

Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*

One on 17th.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*

113+ bird-days. Noted on 13 dates.

Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*

18 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti*

14 bird-days. Noted on six dates – it is perhaps its hardiness even more than its plumage that makes this a very attractive species...

Mongolian Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*

11+ bird-days. Noted on three dates – a male 'scoped drinking on 3rd was a lovely sight!

Przevalski's Rosefinch *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

We devoted a full morning to this species & were rewarded with outstanding views of seven males & two females.

***A not-to-be-taken-for-granted bird which has something to offer no matter what subspecies of birder you are: beauty, interesting behavior (notably its parachute type song-flight which we saw repeatedly), odd song, as well as taxonomic interest (it has for some years now been known to represent a monotypic family).

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

49 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

***Local breeders are ssp *roseatus* (Dickinson 2003) which differs markedly from at least the nominate...

'Chinese' Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus 'davidianus'*[^]

29 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

***[^]Tietze *et al.* (2013) seem to conclude, *contra* Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), that *davidianus* is NOT sufficiently diverged (just 2.1%) from its sister lineage *pulcherrimus* / *argyrophrys* to merit treatment as a full species: having determined (p299) that *waltoni* & *eos* form one species *C. waltoni*, they state that '*Carpodacus pulcherrimus* (F. Moore, 1856) consequently is left with only the subspecies *argyrophrys* Berlioz, 1929, *davidianus* A. Milne-Edwards, 1866, and nominate *pulcherrimus*'.

***See also www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=90229

Pink-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus waltoni*[^]

31 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

***[^]See taxonomic note under Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch, above.

Stoliczka's Rosefinch *Carpodacus stoliczkae beicki*

Nice views of 9+ on our 1st afternoon were all the sweeter for this taxon now at last being formally regarded as a full species.

Three-banded Rosefinch *Carpodacus trifasciatus*

2-3 on 25th – SE Qinghai is on the edge of the species' range.

Chinese White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus dubius*

39 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Eastern Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilloides*

26 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Caucasian Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla severtzovi*

Nine bird-days. Noted on no fewer than five dates – great views of an adult male on 23rd!
***“Treatment of *severtzovi* as a subspecies of (Caucasian) Great Rosefinch *C. rubicilla* (of Caucasus) is unjustified given differences in plumage [Caucasian is much brighter red overall, and lacks whitish spots on the crown: Rasmussen 2005], habitat and (apparently) vocalisations (Dement’ev *et al.* 1970)...”: Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Tietze *et al.* (2013), however, established that *severtzovi* genetically is insufficiently differentiated from *rubicilla* to merit treatment as a separate species. What a bummer!

Red-fronted Rosefinch *Pyrrhospiza punicea*

Five bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Roborovski’s Rosefinch *Kozlowia roborowskii*

Nine at Er La pass – a long session with adult males, females AND juveniles.

Crimson-browed Finch *Pinicola subhimachala*

One adult male on 25th – came in to playback but unfortunately (and unusually) very quickly lost interest...

Grey-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythaca*

17 bird-days. Noted on three dates – a male ‘scoped up in a ridgetop dead tree got the morning off to a great start on 17th...

White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carniceps*

34 bird-days. This somewhat nomadic species was noted on seven dates.

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*

Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Eastern Rock Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii*

59+ bird-days. Noted on 11 dates.

Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides*

Three on 16th.

Kozlov’s Bunting *Emberiza koslowi*

Seven bird-days. Noted on two dates – one male in particular proved incredibly obliging on 24th:
WHAT A BIRD!

***Only when this highly localized and hard-to-get-to Restricted Range endemic species is 'in the bag' does anyone allow themselves a sigh of relief and a pleasant 1st taste of 'we've done it!'. And did we do it!? Superb views, views that could not possibly have ben improved upon, and ditto photo opportunities of males & females - well worth the efforts, and arguably the Most Special Bird of the Trip.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

One heard singing on 1st.

Mammals:

Sequence and taxonomy follows "A Guide to the Mammals of China", Smith & Xie (ed.) 2008.

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*

71+ animal-days. Noted on 14 dates – an adult w/ a baby, playfighting on the grassy slope across from where we'd taken up position, got our marmoting off to a fine start on 17th...

Midday Gerbil *Meriones meridianus*

One on 1st [IR].

Gansu Pika *Ochotona cansus*

c11 animal-days. Noted on two dates.

Plateau Pika *Ochotona curzoniae*

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

*****Chinese Red Pika** *Ochotona erythrotis*

A pika heard on 4th was perhaps this species rather than *O. gloveri*...

Glover's Pika *Ochotona gloveri*

Singles noted on three dates.

Tsing-Ling Pika *Ochotona huangensis*

One in forest N of Xining on 19th – gone in a flash...

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*

17 animal-days. Noted on seven dates.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*

One on 16th.

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata*

23 animal-days. Noted on four dates.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Five animal-days. Singletons noted on five dates.

*****Asian Badger** *Meles leucurus*

One dead on the road on 22nd...

***The Asian species is clearly NOT distinguished from its Eurasian counterpart by its better traffic awareness...

Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica*

Singles on 22+27th.

Kiang *Equus kiang*

c392 animal-days. Noted on four dates. It was a real pleasure to watch these dignified 'donkeys' - in the absence of hunters they (and most other large mammals on the Plateau, even the mythical Chiru) are fairly confiding, and in a couple of cases it would have been possible to get good-to-decent photos even without the help of long lenses!

Siberian Roe *Capreolus pygargus*

One heard on 17th.

MacNeill's (Red) Deer *Cervus macneilli*

One male w/ antlers still growing on 23rd.

***Groves (2005) concluded that two Shou taxa merit full species treatment - *Cervus wallichii* & *Cervus macneilli*. They 'retain many features' 'that characterized the primitive basal stock of the entire red deer/wapiti/sika/rua group'.

****macneilli* is 'the pale red-grey deer of the eastern margins of the Tibetan plateau': Groves (2005).

Gansu Red Deer *Cervus (elaphus) kansuensis*

Four females – a singleton quite close & three together on a distant ridge - on 2nd.

***In N Tibet the respective ranges of *Cervus kansuensis* and *Cervus canadensis alashanicus* are unclear, as is their taxonomic status. The type locality for *kansuensis* is Lintan (= Xincheng: 34° 42'N, 103° 21'E), not far NE of where Schafer collected undoubted *macneilli*.

****vide* Groves (2005), *kansuensis* is 'quite distinct, the winter pelage being especially different: *macneilli* stags are very light, creamy grey, while *kansuensis* stags are deep steely grey. The black on the croup [...] is much more conspicuous in *kansuensis*.'

***Subsequently (Groves & Grubb: *Ungulate Taxonomy* (2011)) it was felt, however, that *kansuensis* is

probably NOT a valid taxon. There are specimens from S Koko Nor Range 37°N 100°E & from Tatung Shan 37°15'N 100°E, and there are sight records from Qilian Shan.

White-lipped Deer *Przewalskium albirostris*

125 animal-days – 19 (females w/ 8+ not-very-small youngsters which came out of the forest onto the slope opposite our vantage point at c17h50) on 24th, and a herd of no fewer than 106 ('two small-antlered males; rest young animals + females w/ small young') on 28th: BINGO!

Goitred Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*

4+ on Canada Day – a full-horned male posed for photographs!

Tibetan Gazelle *Procapra picticaudata*

357 animal-days. Noted on six dates.

Przevalski's Gazelle *Procapra przewalskii*

Nine on 2nd – at least six were males: from not too far away the fish hook twist to the point of the horns was obvious in the nice afternoon sunlight.

***The species has recently be 'downgraded' to 'merely' Endangered (following the discovery of additional herds in 2003) although the world population may be no more than 350-400 mature individuals. See <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/18230/0>

***Our animals appear to represent an additional 'undiscovered' population.

Wild Yak *Bos grunniensis*

8+ on 29th – one in particular made a lasting impression as it watched us across a gravelly river bed, with an expression that suggested it was severely affected by the altitude (or perhaps just one thought away from articulating The Meaning of (Bovine) Life in a single well-formed sentence!)...

Tibetan Antelope (= Chiru) *Panthalops hodgsonii*

119 animal-days along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road.

Blue Sheep *Pseudois nayaur*

127+ animal-days. Noted on seven dates... of several nice encounters perhaps eight females each with a newborn nimbly and unhurriedly ascending a steep cliff next to the road was the most memorable.

***Given how important a prey this species is to Snow Leopard (Schaller, 1998: pp204-5) we felt almost aggrieved that we failed to spot one.