

# NE Tibet w/ OBC, 23 May – 11 June 2016

*An at-a-glance list of 217 species of birds & 26 species of mammals.*

By Jesper Hornskov \*\*\**this draft 18 Aug 2016*\*\*\* 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 P Clement, F & P Crome, M Heegaard, B & D Henderson, B McBride, A Petersen, R Rolfe & myself in NE Tibet, China's Qinghai province, during 20 days in the field.

It was the 10<sup>th</sup> Fundraiser to this unique part of the Oriental realm - a further three have targeted the very different Yunnan, China's most biodiverse province - and I would like to sincerely thank everyone for their spirited participation, and for in this way supporting and contributing to Oriental Bird Club's Conservation Fund.

Our trip aimed to see as many of the unique birds of the Tibetan highlands as we could, but searching for birds typically allows one to pay close attention to mammals as well, and it is hopefully of interest what we saw at a time of the year when few dedicated mammal-watchers visit this mysterious land. Despite the timing of our trip we saw relatively few migrants – some years are better than others in this respect, and we did not prioritize searching for migrants - but we did see many of the key specialities extremely well.

We recorded 217 spp of birds & no fewer than 26 spp of mammals, incl HIMALAYAN MARMOT *Marmota himalayana*, WOLF *Canis lupus*, the Pika-hunting TIBETAN FOX *Vulpes ferrilata*, TIBETAN WILD ASS *Equus kiang*, WHITE-LIPPED DEER *Przewalskium albirostris*, PRZEVALSKI'S GAZELLE *Procapra przewalskii* (world population c500!), WILD YAK *Bos grunniensis*, an unwary CHINESE SEROW *Capricornis milneedwardsii*, good numbers the emblematic TIBETAN ANTELOPE *Panthalops hodgsonii*, and plenty of rock-loving BLUE SHEEP *Pseudois nayaur*.

Add to that the unbeatable scenery, interesting plants (incl must-see, flowering Rhododendron), some nice butterflies, and an intriguing amalgam of local cultures. In fact no component of a good trip was missing - not even comfort (nearly all our overnights were in 'surprisingly good' hotels) or good food (our field breakfasts were tasty and would certainly have met with the enthusiastic approval of any passing nutritionist, and many dinners were rated 'excellent').

A few additional species of birds were noted @ Beijing before and after the main trip - nothing unusual but interesting nonetheless (during migration we've seen as many as 40+ spp in the grounds of our hotel in an hour and a half pre-breakfast, but this time flight schedules prevented most of us from achieving much here...).

Our photographers worked diligently, making the most of the often exquisite light – I hope their images will be made available on [www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org) as soon as possible...

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 Chris Goodie of the OBC at 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 birds or, far from unimportant in a non-scientific context such as a birding holiday abroad, how satisfying the encounters were. 25 bird-days for e.g. Spoon-billed Sandpiper could be one distant flock of migrating birds, gone in a flash, or one bird lingering for 25 days, offering the observers point-blank views anytime in that period...

The sequence of the bird list follows *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World – 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Dickinson 2003), in my opinion by still the most useful one-volume checklist.

Initials in brackets after a few single-observer sightings does not imply that I have doubts as to the correctness of the ID.

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## **Species list:**

### **Severtzov's Grouse** *Tetrastes sewerzowi*

A pair was seen well 'at the end of the trail' N of Xining on 24<sup>th</sup>.

### **Szechenyi's Monal Partridge** *Tetraophasis szechenyi*

3+ near Nangqian on 31<sup>st</sup> – only those without a camera failed to obtain photos: this often hard-to-see species put on a fabulous performance for us!

### **Tibetan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

We 'recorded' several, but one 'scoped W of Koko Nor will be remembered: it stayed in view as we made our way up a pretty valley, throwing all its considerable bulk into producing the clucking-and-curlew sounds which reached us only with delay...

### **Przevalski's Partridge** *Alectoris magna*

Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates – main event three 'scoped on our last afternoon (phew!).

### **Tibetan Partridge** *Perdix hodgsoniae*

11+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

### **Blood Pheasant** *Ithaginis cruentus*

11+ bird-days. Noted on two dates, with a pair 'scoped from up close on 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **White Eared Pheasant** *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

37+ bird-days. Noted on four dates near Nangqian - close encounters as well as prolonged 'scope views of more distant birds: TINGALING!

### **Blue Eared Pheasant** *Crossoptilon auritum*

Seven bird-days. Noted on three dates N of Xining - two birds found within half an hour of starting to look N of Xining on 23<sup>rd</sup>: great views, so, 'EASY'!? Well, actually, you know, on some previous trips it has played out quite differently, confirming it is preferable to allow quite a bit of time – having had such good views everyone understood just how really bad it would have been to have missed this species!

**Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus*

47 bird-days. Noted on six dates - a very different creature from the standard issue, introduced Ringnecks familiar from Europe & N America.

\*\*\*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*

c40 adults on both stops at Koko Nor, with c25 goslings having emerged by 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Bar-headed Goose** *Anser indicus*

c4,500 bird-days. Noted on six dates – main event a record c4,320 at a roadside wetland on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*

Two at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup> – no signs of ugly ducklings...

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

Five at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*

303+ bird-days. Noted on 13 dates.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

Seven bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

Seven – incl two smart drakes – on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

18 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Chinese Spotbill** *Anas zonorhyncha*

Three at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

Eight males on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*

Six – incl a near-immaculate drake – at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Teal** *Anas crecca*

Six bird-days. Noted on two dates.

**Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*

57+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*

40 bird-days. Noted at Koko Nor on both 26+10<sup>th</sup>.

**Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*

110 bird-days. Main event 105 at a roadside wetland on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

140 at Koko Nor on 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Goosander** *Mergus merganser*

Ten bird-days. Noted on four dates - nice 'scope views of a female hauled out on a sand bar, clear water flowing by and Giant Laughingthrushes whistling away on the far bank!

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Three at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

195 bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event 125 at a roadside wetland on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*

59+ bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event 40+ at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*

One en route on 29<sup>th</sup> (RR, MH)

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

c15 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

**Eastern Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus coromandus*

47 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

Four bird-days. Noted on two dates.

**\*\*\*Great Egret** *Ardea alba*

An egret seen en route near Golmud on 6<sup>th</sup> was probably this species.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

Five bird-days. Noted on two dates.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

12+ bird-days. Noted on two dates.

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

Singles were noted on six dates

**Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*

Three bird-days. Noted on two dates – we all enjoyed 'scope views of a perched bird on 11<sup>th</sup> (before it took off and started showing off its flying skills!).

**Saker** *Falco cherrug*

22 bird-days. Noted on eight dates – superb views, incl of three nestlings, but there seems to be a fairly rapid decline in numbers despite Tibet being the species' stronghold: it's getting to the stage where not even a NE Tibet trip 'offers a chance to graduate to full Saker Expert status in three weeks!'

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

11 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

**Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus*

35+ bird-days. Noted on ten dates – some superb encounters! On 27<sup>th</sup> a minimum of five birds jump-started our Lammergeier-ing, with first a 2<sup>nd</sup> c-y directly overhead in good light, then an adult more distantly, then two adults doing synchronized flying, and finally a 3<sup>rd</sup> c-y; later on we saw one doing repeated bone drops, behavior aimed at smashing the bones down to an ingestible size: simply a species one doesn't tire of watching!

**Himalayan Griffon** *Gyps himalayensis*

280 bird-days. Noted on 17 dates.

**Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*

Singles on two dates – a 2<sup>nd</sup> c-y bird on 8<sup>th</sup> was best-ever views of the species for most of us...

**Pallid / Montagu's Harrier** *Circus macrourus* / *C. pygargus*

One female / 2<sup>nd</sup> c-y migr N of Xining in the afternoon of 24<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*...pretty frustrating as either, as far as can be discovered, would have been a 1<sup>st</sup> for Qinghai!

\*\*\*Interestingly, Zheng *et al.* (2011) listed Pallid Harrier for Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, S Xizang, Sichuan, Chongqing, Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Guangxi & Hainan', and Montagu's Harrier for 'Shandong, Xinjiang, Fujian & Guangdong' – one can't help feeling that E & C China records of both species would benefit from verification.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

Eight bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

**Himalayan Buzzard** *Buteo burmanicus*

8-9 bird-days. Noted on five dates - repeated encounters allowed us to get a feel for the jizz of this little known taxon.

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

**Upland Buzzard** *Buteo hemilasius*

163 bird-days. Noted on ten dates - main event 49 along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road.

**Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis*

Nine bird-days. Noted on two dates – brilliant light ensured that a gathering of eight 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c-y birds on 4<sup>th</sup> was a joy to watch.

**Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*

A 2<sup>nd</sup> c-y bird seen directly overhead with Steppe Eagles on 4<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*A rare bird, especially in summer...

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*

20 bird-days. Noted on eight dates. Great to be in a part of the world where seeing this classy Holarctic species is just – normal!

**Eurasian Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

Two heard at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

Two at a roadside wetland on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Coot** *Fulica atra*

120+ bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event c100 at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Black-necked Crane** *Grus nigricollis*

24 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

\*\*\*Widespread overgrazing - of hills and wetlands alike - is bound to spell trouble for this emblematic species... Nonetheless it was heartening to see a pair on our very last day on the Plateau, 'by some margin the best of the trip' and thereby providing yet another TINGALING moment.

**Ibisbill** *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

Seven bird-days. Noted on five dates – as we kept our distance a momentarily alarmed bird quickly settled down to resume incubating on the shingle bank of a little river...

\*\*\*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 may still desperately attempt to cling on in competition with sickly-looking domestic ducks along the last stretch of barely acceptable water close to Beijing!

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

12+ bird-days. Noted on two dates, with one seen sitting on its nest at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*

Eight adults in full summer plumage at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Four at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**'Spot-fronted' Sand Plover** *Charadrius atrifrons*<sup>^</sup>

32 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

\*\*\*<sup>^</sup>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.

**Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultia*

One 'scoped at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Western Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

Nine at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

Two adults in full summer plumage at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*

235+ bird-days. Noted on nine dates – main event 150+ at the roadside wetland on 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

Three at Kpoko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii*

Two at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*

One at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*

c88 bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event 31 at a small estuary on 28<sup>th</sup>: prolonged 'scope views of loafing and flying birds allowed us to brush up on the ID also of immatures, more 'Herring'-Gull-like than the also-present, fairly straight-forward adults in full summer plumage.

**Brown-headed Gull** *Larus brunnicephalus*

39 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

**Common Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus*

A 2<sup>nd</sup> c-y at Koko Nor on 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

110+ bird-days. Noted on 12 dates.

**Whiskered Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida*

14 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Tibetan Sandgrouse** *Syrrhaptes thibetana*

3+ bird-days. Superb views of two dates!

\*\*\*Two outstanding encounters with an endemic which is 'on the Hardest Bird in the World shortlist along with Emperor Penguin' - prolonged views of a female as close as <50m in lovely light, *and* a fly-by: perfect early morning sunlight against distant snow peaks, calling away...

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 1<sup>st</sup> time around!

**Pallas's Sandgrouse** *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

Five birds W of Koko Nor on 9<sup>th</sup> – we spent the time needed to get great views.

\*\*\*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 ones and twos in flight, but none 'feeding warily amongst the scattered, wind-burnt clumps of grass'.

**Blue Hill Pigeon** *Columba rupestris*

455+ bird-days. Noted on 18 dates – main event c250 @ newly ploughed fields along Koko Nor on 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Snow Pigeon** *Columba leuconota*

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

**Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis*

12 bird-days. Noted on just two dates: two ssp *meena* on 7<sup>th</sup>, and ten ssp *orientalis* on 11<sup>th</sup>.  
\*\*\*Despite *meena* being the expected ssp in the Qaidam basin (JH pers obs) Zheng *et al.* (2011) listed it for only 'W & N Xinjiang, and W Xizang'; ssp *orientalis* was listed for 'all [of China] except Xinjiang & Taiwan'.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

52+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*

50 bird-days. Noted on 12 dates. At least two were the hepatic morph.

**Himalayan Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus*

One heard giving its diagnostic four note song N of Xining on both 24+25<sup>th</sup>.  
\*\*\*Himalayan vs Oriental: split following e.g. [www.xeno-canto.org](http://www.xeno-canto.org) (Aug 2016), and IOC (Aug 2016: '[Oriental Cuckoo] *Cuculus optatus* is split from *C. saturatus* (King 2005, Payne 2005); BLI and AOU recognize. Assumes English name of Oriental Cuckoo. See also Xia *et al.* 2016'.  
\*\*\*IOC (2016) gives the range of *saturatus* as 'Himalayas to Taiwan', while Xeno-canto maps it into NC China (N Sichuan, Qingling Mts, Henan).  
\*\*\*Xeno-canto is yet to re-label in line with the new arrangement – I noticed a 2002 *optatus* recording from N Hebei still tagged *saturatus*...  
\*\*\*Zheng *et al.* (2011) accepts the split but lists neither for Qinghai, and it is not clear if both occur... A good working hypothesis would be that late spring / early summer birds in suitable breeding habitat are *saturatus* (as its song confirmed ours to be), while September birds away from breeding sites (three records: JH pers obs) are *optatus*.

**Eurasian Eagle-Owl** *Bubo bubo*

Singles on two dates.

**White-throated Needletail** *Hirundapus caudacutus*

One over a distant ridge N of Xining on 24<sup>th</sup> – a widespread species, but very rarely recorded in NE Tibet.

\*\*\*Zheng *et al.* (2011) included Qinghai in the range of ssp *caudacutus*, and listed ssp *nudipes* for 'E Xizang, NW Yunnan & Sichuan'.

**Common Swift** *Apus apus pekinensis*

70+ bird-days. Noted on four dates – main event a modest 50+ at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.



**Salim Ali's Swift** *Apus salimali*

c100 bird-days. Noted on seven 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).

\*\*\***Fork-tailed / Salim Ali's Swift** *Apus pacificus* / *A. salimali*

Singles in two spots N of Er La on 27<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*The occasional *pacificus* does occur: one seen well at Koko Nor on 3 July 2015 (JH *et al.* pers obs) should serve as a warning not to tick Salim Ali's Swift on range!

**Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*

18 bird-days. Noted on 11 dates.

**Chinese Pied Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos cabanisi*

Eight bird-days. Noted on three dates.

\*\*\*Split from Great Spotted Woodpecker *D. major* following Perktas & Quintero (2013)

\*\*\*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 (S. Lowe, pers com), being lumped into ssp *stresemanni* [of E Xizang, W & S Yunnan, N Guizhou & Sichuan: Zheng *et al.* (2011)]; the range of nominate *cabanisi* is SW Liaoning, Hebei, Shandong, Henan, Shanxi, N Anhui & N Jiangsu: Zheng *et al.* (2011)...

**Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus funebris*

Three near Nangqian on 2<sup>nd</sup> – prolonged views through the 'scope...

\*\*\*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 *funebris*:

Rasmussen & Anderton (2005).

\*\*\*In HBW Illustrated Checklist Vol 1 '*P. funebris* 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*

Singles on three dates – most were heard-onlies.

**Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Picus canus*

Six bird-days. Noted on five dates.

**Long-tailed Minivet** *Pericrocotus ethologus*

5+ bird-days. Noted near Nangqian on two dates – four sitting out on 1<sup>st</sup> and heard again in the same place the next day.

**Tiger Shrike** *Lanius tigrinus*

One adult male near Er La pass on 27<sup>th</sup> – great ‘scope views at close range.

\*\*\*There are at least four previous records for Qinghai, all between 23 May and 17 June (JH et al. pers obs).

**Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus*

23 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Grey-backed Shrike** *Lanius tephronotus*

55 bird-days. Noted on 12 dates.

**Tibetan Grey Shrike** *Lanius (sphenocercus) giganteus*

Two on 6<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*IOC (2016) is finally lumbering towards accepting *giganteus* as a full species: ‘Tibetan Grey (or Giant) Shrike *L. giganteus* may be split from Chinese Grey Shrike (Svensson et al. 2009, Olsson et al. 2010, Panov et al. 2011); await improved resolution of this complex’

**Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Five bird-days [AP]: four N of Xining on 25<sup>th</sup> & one on 10<sup>th</sup> – depending on how the weather has played out, late May and early June can be a good time to see this long-distance migrant on the Plateau.

\*\*\*Zheng et al. (2011) did NOT include the species for Qinghai, listing ssp *cathoecus* for ‘all [of China] except Xinjiang, Qinghai & Taiwan’.

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius*

Eight bird-days. Noted N of Xining on two dates.

\*\*\*vide Zheng et al. (2011) the distinctive 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*

34 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

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

\*\*\*The Iberian taxon, *C. (c.) cooki*, has been shown to be sufficiently differentiated genetically to merit elevation to full species status. Dickinson (2003) included a further five taxa in the eastern species in addition to the ones we saw, *kansuensis* in NE Tibet & *interposita* at Beijing, but IOC (2016) lumps all but *japonica*, following Kryukov et al. (2004).

**Common Magpie** *Pica pica serica*

45 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

\*\*\*IOC (2015): ‘MtDNA phylogeny suggests that Eurasian Magpie comprises several potential species including Korean Magpie *P. sericea*, Mahgreb Magpie *P. mauritanica* and Asir Magpie *P. asirensis*. Korean Magpie should be split to address paraphyly with NA species (Lee et al. 2003).’ – presumably DNA material was not available for *bottanensis*...

**Tibetan Magpie** *Pica bottanensis*

60 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*

Just two between us, both on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*  
151+ bird-days. Noted on 17 dates.

**Alpine Chough** *Pyrrhonorax graculus*  
Nine on 3<sup>rd</sup> – on our circuit rarely seen away from SE-most Qinghai...

**Daurian Jackdaw** *Corvus dauuricus*  
c110 bird-days. Noted on six dates – one ‘scoped leaving roost near Xining on 26<sup>th</sup>’ was practically the 1<sup>st</sup> bird of the day.

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus pastinator*  
Six N of Xining on 11<sup>th</sup>.  
\*\*\*ssp *pastinator* differs from the nominate – which in China occurs only in ‘Xinjiang’ (Zheng *et al.*, 2011) - in lacking ‘bare chalky white facial skin [...] and has a more sharply pointed bill’: Brazil (2009).

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone*  
12 @ our lunch stop village N of Xining on 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Large-billed Crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos tibetosinensis*  
21 bird-days. Noted on eight dates – great photo ops of three attracted to our nutritious field breakfast on 1<sup>st</sup>!  
\*\*\*IOC (2015) accepts the split of the taxa *levaillantii* (of ‘N India to N Malay Peninsula’) ‘as ‘Eastern Jungle Crow’, and *culminatus* (of ‘Peninsular India, Sri Lanka’) as ‘Indian Jungle Crow’, both monotypic species; Zheng *et al.* (2011) listed *levaillantii* only for ‘S Xizang’, and gave the range of *tibetosinensis* as ‘SW Xizang, E Qinghai, NW & W Yunnan, and N & W Sichuan’.

**Common Raven** *Corvus corax*  
52 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

**Hume’s Groundpecker** *Pseudopodoces humilis*  
66+ bird-days. Noted on 12 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!

**‘Eastern’ Great Tit** *Parus minor*  
6+ bird-days.  
\*\*\*Zheng *et al.* (2011) listed ssp *minor* for E Qinghai, and ssp *tibetanus* for S Qinghai.  
\*\*\*IOC (2016) persists in using the English name ‘Japanese Tit’ for this species, despite Japan constituting only a small part of its range, and being home to just four out of the eight (down from nine as recently as 2015!) recognized ssp. Three of which, moreover, are so distinctive that they may yet prove full species!

**Rufous-vented Tit** *Parus rubidiventris*  
38 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

**Willow Tit** *Parus montanus affinis*  
28 bird-days. Noted N of Xining on four dates.

\*\*\*'Songar Tit *P. songarus*' is now lumped back in with Willow Tit *P. montanus*: IOC (2015).

**Sichuan Tit** *Parus weigoldicus*

15 bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on four dates.

\*\*\*Note that of the several 'Songar Tit' spp only *weigoldicus* merits full species status (the rest are now lumped back in with Willow Tit *P. montanus* by e g IOC (2015)).

\*\*\*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*

Ten bird-days. This charismatic endemic was noted on four dates.

\*\*\*No subspecies have been described, but Harrap & Quinn (1996) notes that 'birds from NW Sichuan and southern Qinghai are reported to average less pure grey on the upperparts (more brownish-grey and olive-grey), and darker, richer, more brick-brown on breast and belly than those from Gansu'.

**Grey Crested Tit** *Parus dichrous*

Nine bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*

Singles on 4+7<sup>th</sup>.

**Pale Sand Martin** *Riparia diluta*

62+ bird-days. Noted on seven dates – two 'scoped on a fence on 26<sup>th</sup>!

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

11 bird-days. Stray migrants were noted on six dates.

**Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

85+ bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

**Asian House Martin** *Delichon dasypus*

290+ bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

**White-browed Tit-Warbler** *Leptopoecile sophiae*

33 bird-days. Noted on eight dates – getting repeated views & point-blank range photo ops was (*please tick as appropriate*)

[ ] stunning.

[ ] very stunning.

[ ] fantastically stunning.

[ ] nothing to brag about.

**Crested Tit-Warbler** *Leptopoecile elegans*

Two males showing intermittently in a dense spruce across a narrow river on 1<sup>st</sup> – a bit far through binoculars but brilliant through the 'scope!

**Mongolian Lark** *Melanocorypha mongolica*

11 bird-days. Superb views on two dates included one 'scoped displaying on the ground at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*Interestingly, IOC (2015) moves 'White-winged Lark from *Melanocorypha* to *Alauda*' following Alström *et al.* (2013), but without comment leaves Mongolian Lark in *Melanocorypha*!

**Long-billed Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha maxima*

Four bird-days. Noted on just two dates – after seeing two extremely well at Koko Nor on 26<sup>th</sup> it simply wasn't a priority to see more...

**Hume's Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella acutirostris*

16 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

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

21 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

**Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula*

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*'<sup>^</sup>: 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*...

\*\*\*<sup>^</sup>To which the only reasonable response would be 'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious'!

**Tarim Hill Babbler** *Rhopophilus albosuperciliaris*

16 close to Golmud on 7<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*The much-loved CHINESE HILL WARBLER *Rhopophilus pekinensis* turns out to be two monotypic species (Leader *et al.* 2013: Forktail 29, pp31-36): *Rhopophilus pekinensis* & *R. albosuperciliaris*, with the proposed English names BEIJING BABBLER & TARIM BABBLER, respectively... Seeing that Beijing is only a tiny dot on the map of the former's vast range (from N Korea to NE Tibet), and that the latter is *not* endemic to Xinjiang's Tarim Basin (as our sightings confirm, its range extends into Qinghai's Qaidam Basin) perhaps the best selling point for these names are that they confine the 'Chinese Bush-dweller' of Handbook of the Birds of the World (VolXII, p281: Collar & Robson 2007) to history?

The two are easily distinguished – *pekinensis* has a striking whitish iris, broad-ish streaking on the mantle & extensive orangey streaking on the flanks, while *albosuperciliaris* has a dark iris, narrower & less extensive streaking above, and much less orange markings on the flanks. Both

species 'have a wide repertoire of vocalizations', but at least one song type is distinctively different.

**Spotted Bush Warbler** *Bradypterus thoracicus*

One heard singing – disappointingly, and unusually, it did not respond to taping - N of Xining on 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus weigoldi*

Three in full look-at-me! mode on 10<sup>th</sup>: 'even if you were used to seeing Dusky Warbler these were memorable views' – and most of us of course weren't!

\*\*\*Martens *et al.* (2008) unconvincingly aligned the reasonably distinctive but oddly localized taxon *weigoldi* with Smoky Warbler *P. fuligiventer* [rather than with *P. fuscatus*]:

[http://globiz.sachsen.de/snsd/publikationen/vertebrate-zoology/vz58-2/06\\_Martens.pdf](http://globiz.sachsen.de/snsd/publikationen/vertebrate-zoology/vz58-2/06_Martens.pdf)

\*\*\*Zheng *et al.* (2011) references the Martens *et al.* (2008) article but appears to disagree (as have in the past those of us familiar with nominate *fuscatus*) that *weigoldi* is better considered a race of Smoky Warbler *P. fuligiventer*, a change IOC (2015) on the other hand accepts without comment.

**'Chinese' Tickell's (= Alpine) Warbler** *Phylloscopus occisinensis*

82 bird-days. Noted on 13 dates.

\*\*\*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](http://globiz.sachsen.de/snsd/publikationen/vertebrate-zoology/vz58-2/06_Martens.pdf)

**Yellow-streaked Warbler** *Phylloscopus armandii*

44 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

**Buff-barred Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus pulcher*

11 bird-days. Noted at four dates.

**Gansu Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

80+ bird-days. Noted on four dates this real gem-with-wings was a delight to get to know: the key *Phylloscopus* to look for in this part of the world, it was only recently reaccepted as a valid species, and its winter quarters remain undiscovered...

**Chinese Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus yunnanensis*

Six bird-days. Noted N of Xining on three dates – particularly instructive views of one on 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Eastern Lemon-rumped Warbler** *Phylloscopus forresti*

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

\*\*\*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*

160+ bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

\*\*\*Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) treats both sspp 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/>

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

140+ bird-days. An easy to see species noted on 11 dates.

**Large-billed Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus magnirostris*

19 bird-days. Noted N of Xining on two dates.

**‘Margelanica’ Whitethroat** *Sylvia margelanica*

Four on 7<sup>th</sup> – one ‘scoped at point-blank range!

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

Two on 2<sup>nd</sup> – one took a really long time to let us know it WAS around on a hillside where earlier OBC groups had located it...

\*\*\*Collar (2006) elevated *odicus* (of NE and E Burma, N Indochina, S Yunnan and Guizhou (except N), *decarlei* (of ‘E Xizang’, SW Sichuan, and NW Yunnan), *dedekensi [sic]* (of ‘(N)E Xizang’, W Sichuan, and NW Yunnan), *gravivox* (of S Gansu, S Shaanxi, S Shanxi, NW Henan, and N Sichuan), and *cowensae* (of C and E Sichuan, N Guizhou, and W Hubei) to species status on morphological grounds, a ‘new arrangement, which clearly rests on uncertain foundations and is in need of considerable fortification (which is not supplied by morphometric analysis, as this shows as much variation within the new species as between them, notably a remarkably long tail in *dedekensi [sic]*...’). In the absence of DNA analysis and a thorough study of the notoriously varied vocalizations of these birds, such rearrangement seems fairly meaningless...

**Kozlov’s Babax** *Babax koslowi*

15+ bird-days. Noted on four dates – a classic encounter was three birds ‘scoped below the road as the morning sun started to warm up their steep hillside (a development also appreciated by the patient OBC team!).

**Pere David’s Laughingthrush** *Garrulax davidi*

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

\*\*\*Only when seen well does one realize why the alternative name, ‘Plain’ Laughingthrush, isn’t entirely appropriate...

**Giant Laughingthrush** *Garrulax maximus*

31+ bird-days. Noted on four dates – one ‘scoped as it sat out across the river, singing & fanning its tail.

\*\*\*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 at this time of the year pairs travelling through the forest will mark their progress with occasional sessions of loud calling.

**Elliot’s Laughingthrush** *Garrulax elliotii*

102+ bird-days. This attractive W China / E Tibet endemic was noted on ten dates.

**Chinese Fulvetta** *Alcippe striaticollis*

Two on 1<sup>st</sup>: 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 Kozlov's Babax – the key to locating this subtly attractive but, alas, skulky key endemic. Despite its universally accepted name (?), the IOC tersely gives its range as 'Tibet'.

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

17 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

**Northern Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

11 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Chinese Nuthatch** *Sitta villosa*

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

**Przevalski's Nuthatch** *Sitta przewalskii*

13 bird-days. Noted on five dates – several were heard-onlies but everyone got prolonged 'scope views of this emblematic species.

**Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*

Nine bird-days. Noted on two dates.

\*\*\*'One of the most spectacular birds in the world, this [monotypic family] 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.* (2011) refer to *Tichodroma muraria* as '*Hongchi xuanbi que*', 'red-winged cliff-hanging bird'.

\*\*\*'Placed [...] in its own family by Voous (1977), as 'the extraordinary adaptations to extreme mountain conditions... might not immediately have justified the recognition of a family of its own, but they surely mark the arrival at a new structural and ecological level with promising possibilities': Harrap & Quinn (1996) – a sort of Honorary Family-hood, but upheld by IOC today.

**Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

Seven bird-days. Noted N of Xining on two dates.

**Hodgson's Treecreeper** *Certhia hodgsoni*

One seen well on 2<sup>nd</sup>.

\*\*\*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).

**Crested Myna** *Acridotheres cristellatus*

One within the Xining city limits on 23<sup>rd</sup> – it will be interesting to see if this marginal / feral species gains a foothold the way it has around Beijing...

**Daurian Starling** *Sturnus sturninus*

One in poplars W of Koko Nor on 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Rosy Starling** *Sturnus roseus*



One adult [MH, JH, AP] digiscoped on 7<sup>th</sup>.

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

Three bird-days: one near Xining on 23<sup>rd</sup>, and an adult w/ a juvenile W of Koko Nor on 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Chestnut Thrush** *Turdus rubrocanus*

22 bird-days. Noted on six dates – one near Nangqian on both 1+2<sup>nd</sup> was a pleasant surprise (no previous records!: JH pers obs).

**Kessler's Thrush** *Turdus kessleri*

94 bird-days. Noted on 14 dates.

**Chinese Song Thrush** *Turdus mupinensis*

Three bird-days. Noted N of Xining on two dates – great 'scope views of two songsters on 11<sup>th</sup> made an irrelevance of a flighty individual on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Siberian Rubythroat** *Luscinia calliope*

Ten bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**'Tibetan' Rubythroat** *Luscinia (pectoralis) tschebaiewi*

24 bird-days. Noted on four dates, with prolonged 'scope views of singing males a real treat. \*\*\*^Liu *et. al* (2016) – who follow IOC (2016) in listing the rubythroats, along with Firethroat and Black-throated Robin in a separate genus, *Calliope* - demonstrate that '*Calliope pectoralis*' is best considered two species, but inexplicably favour the English name 'Chinese' Rubythroat over the geographically far more accurate 'Tibetan'...

**Himalayan Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger rufilatus*

One briefly on 1<sup>st</sup>...

**Northern Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus*

52 bird-days. Noted N of Xining on four dates – a flitty male 'scoped on 11<sup>th</sup> is the one most of us will remember.

\*\*\*Apparently (L Svensson pers com) birds breeding in NE Qinghai – with a white brow in adult males – are *alboceruleus*, a long neglected taxon hitherto considered of doubtful validity (and still not listed by IOC (2015)), 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*

Two males and a female delighted W of Koko Nor on 8<sup>th</sup> – and the more so as they took a while to appear.

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

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

104+ bird-days. Noted on 16 dates.

**Hodgson's Redstart** *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*

31 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

**White-throated Redstart** *Phoenicurus schisticeps*

26 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

**Daurian Redstart** *Phoenicurus aureus*

A pair at Xining on 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Guldenstadt's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

27 bird-days. Noted on four dates – main event 23 at >4800m on 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Blue-fronted Redstart** *Phoenicurus frontalis*

31 bird-days. Noted on 13 dates – a snow-induced fall of no fewer than 12 birds on 25<sup>th</sup> included some tame males.

**White-bellied Redstart** *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides*

Five singing N of Xining on 11<sup>th</sup> – somewhat against the odds we saw one of them... and still more against the odds it was an immaculately plumaged adult (the sometimes all-brown immatures seem somewhat less skulky than the full adults!): TINGALING!

\*\*\*IOC (2016) lists this species as *Luscinia phaenicuroides* following Sangster *et al.* (2010).

**Plumbeous Redstart** *Rhyacornis fuliginosa*

One female on 1<sup>st</sup> was all we managed.

**River Chat** *Chaimarrornis^ leucocephalus*

30 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

\*\*\*^IOC (2016) lists the species as '*Phoenicurus leucocephalus*', following Voelker (2010) & Sangster *et al.* (2010) – the genus *Chaimarrornis* disappears completely!

**'Siberian' Stonechat** *Saxicola torquatus przewalskii*

Three seen well W of Koko Nor on 10<sup>th</sup> – a pair plus a single male...

\*\*\*IOC (2015) treats ssp *hemprichii*, *variegatus*, *maurus*, *indicus* & *przewalskii* as 'Siberian Stonechat', and further elevates ssp *stejnegeri* of 'E Siberia and E Mongolia to Korea and Japan' as 'Stejneger's Stonechat' based on Zink *et al.* (2009) mtDNA analysis, though with the caveat '[this] may be premature; further resolution of this stonechat complex is needed'.

**Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*

57 bird-days. Noted on four dates – main event 37 in the morning of 9<sup>th</sup>: they put on a good show, and sang full blast...

**Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka*

Four bird-days. Noted near Xining on two dates.

**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*

15 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

**Common Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis*

A pair was seen very well on 8<sup>th</sup>.

**Sooty Flycatcher** *Muscicapa sibirica*

Four bird-days. Two near Nangqian on both 1+2<sup>nd</sup>.

\*\*\*Work on vocalizations may well lead to suggestions that the distinctive *rothschildi* be elevated to full species status...

**Slaty-backed Flycatcher** *Ficedula hodgsonii*

63 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

**White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus*

12 bird-days. Noted on seven dates – both white-throated morph birds and the less well known all-brown morph were seen...

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

12 roosting under an Upland Buzzard nest on 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

**Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia*

c30 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

**Henri's Snowfinch** *Montifringilla henrici*

26 bird-days. Noted on four dates, incl an tame pair which interrupted a 4800m field breakfast – WOW! views were had by all.

\*\*\*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*

13 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

\*\*\*Doubleplusunspectacular on the ground but truly striking in flight, this species is blessed with no fewer than four English names...

**White-rumped Snowfinch** *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*

78+ bird-days. Noted on nine dates this proved the most charismatic of the snowfinches encountered – the species '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*

Three bird-days. Noted on just two dates.

\*\*\*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 that could be reasonably said to be '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*

191+ bird-days. Noted on ten dates.

**Blanford's Snowfinch** *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*

26 bird-days. Noted at six sites... this high specialized species in the end proved incredibly obliging.

**Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris*

Three on 3<sup>rd</sup> – quite satisfactory ‘scope views (fortunately, as the terrain prevented safe approach!)

**Robin Accentor** *Prunella rubeculoides*

44 bird-days. Noted on six dates – main event 24 in the morning of 28<sup>th</sup>: there was hardly a moment when one of these tough birds weren’t in view.

**Rufous-browed Accentor** *Prunella strophiate*

32+ bird-days. Noted on ten dates.

**Brown Accentor** *Prunella fulvescens*

56+ bird-days. Noted on seven dates – main event 18 in the buckthorn thickets on 4<sup>th</sup>: singing and pursuit-fighting at fever pitch!

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola*

Noted on eight dates. Three males W of Koko Nor on 9<sup>th</sup> included one ssp *citreola*.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

One N of Xining on 25<sup>th</sup>.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

39+ bird-days. Noted on ten dates - sspp involved were *leucopsis* (none identified S of @ Er La pass) & *alboides* (in the Yushu/Nangqian area).

\*\*\*Alstrom & Mild (2003) concluded that various factors “suggest that the White Wagtail is best treated as a single species under the BSC”.

**Richard’s Pipit** *Anthus richardi*

Four bird-days. Noted on three dates.

**Blyth’s Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii*

Three bird-days. One still as far S as Yushu on 29<sup>th</sup> was of note.

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni*

31+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

**Rosy Pipit** *Anthus roseus*

36 bird-days. Noted on four dates – a snow-induced fall of no fewer than 25 birds on 25<sup>th</sup> included some very ‘scopable, pink-throated individuals: TINGALING!

**Oriental Greenfinch** *Carduelis sinica*

Nine bird-days. Noted on three dates – two strays at c3900m on 27<sup>th</sup> were of note.

**Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris*

104+ bird-days. Noted on nine dates – c20 on 28<sup>th</sup> seemed quite content to use a plastic tree for roosting...

**Plain Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte nemoricola*

30 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

**Brandt’s Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte brandti*

c17 bird-days. Noted on four dates - it is perhaps its hardiness even more than its plumage that makes this a very attractive species...

\*\*\*Sadly, our attempt to find Sillem's Mountain Finch *L. sillemi* did not bear fruit...

### **Przevalski's Finch** *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

Excellent views on two dates!

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

\*\*\*We have now noted this species at no fewer than 11 sites!

### **Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*

25 bird-days. Noted on five dates – seeing a pair at close range, drinking & bathing, at the entrance to the pretty valley we spent most of 30<sup>th</sup> in was simply wonderful.

### **Beautiful Rosefinch** *Carpodacus pulcherrimus*<sup>^</sup>

12 bird-days. Noted on five dates – two males were part of a snow-induced fall of on 25<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*<sup>^</sup>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*'.

### **Pink-rumped Rosefinch** *Carpodacus waltoni*

43 bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on four dates.

\*\*\*See taxonomic note under Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch, above.

### **Stoliczka's Rosefinch** *Carpodacus stolickaie beicki*

Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates - and what views!

\*\*\*...all the sweeter for this taxon now at long last being formally regarded as a full species.

### **Three-banded Rosefinch** *Carpodacus trifasciatus*

It took us two attempts to find a female – SE Qinghai is on the edge of the species' range: seeing it was a bonus, and seeing it so well was a bonus on top of a bonus!

### **Chinese White-browed Rosefinch** *Carpodacus dubius*

64 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

### **Eastern Great Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rubicilloides*

36 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

\*\*\*Several memorable photo op encounters with full-blown red males, rewarding in their own right, left us well prepared to recognize a male Caucasian Great Rosefinch...

### **Caucasian Great Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rubicilla severtzovi*

Six bird-days. Noted on three dates.

\*\*\*"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* – of ‘E Kazakhstan to WC China, the Himalayas and N Pakistan’: IOC (2016) - genetically is insufficiently differentiated from *rubicilla* to merit treatment as a separate species. What a bummer!

**Red-fronted Rosefinch** *Pyrrhospiza*<sup>^</sup> *punicea*

Three on 6<sup>th</sup> – despite the distance, quite acceptable ‘scope views of a fine male...

\*\*\*Dickinson (2003) included ‘our’ area in the range of ssp *longirostris*.

\*\*\*^IOC (2015) listed the species as *Carpodacus puniceus*, without comment.

**Roborovski’s Rosefinch** *Kozlowia*<sup>^</sup> *roborowskii*

16 bird-days. This extreme altitude specialist was seen well - AND photographed! - on two dates.

\*\*\*^reassigned to *Carpodacus* by IOC (2015), following Zuccon *et al* (2012) & Tietze *et al* (2013), contra Dickinson (2003), who agreed with Vaurie (1959) and Cheng (1987) that ‘this genus [*Kozlowia*] should be retained.’

**Red Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra*

18 bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates – we ‘scoped a male feeding on the forest floor...

**Grey-headed Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula erythaca*

37 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

**White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas carniceps*

22 bird-days. This somewhat erratic species was noted on seven dates.

**Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos*

Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates – two males w/ a female engaged in some territorial / pair bonding activity next to the road on 7<sup>th</sup> was an extremely welcome end to a loooong wait for MH...

**Eastern Rock Bunting** *Emberiza godlewskii*

31 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

**Meadow Bunting** *Emberiza cioides*

Seven bird-days. Noted near Xining on two dates – great views through the ‘scope!

**Kozlov’s Bunting** *Emberiza koslowi*

Ten bird-days. Noted near Nangqian on two dates – on the first day this enigmatic (and outrageously pretty!) species proved tricky but everyone ‘went the extra mile’ without complaint. Later we made a point of visiting another site where – on that particular day – they proved easier: what views!

\*\*\*Only when this highly localized and hard-to-get-to Restricted Range endemic is ‘in the bag’ will birdwatchers allow themselves a sigh of relief and a pleasant 1<sup>st</sup> taste of ‘we’ve done it!’. And did we do it!? Superb views, views that could hardly have been improved upon, and ditto photo opportunities – would have been worth far more of a trek: arguably the Most Special Bird of the Trip.

**Black-faced Bunting** *Emberiza spodocephala*

Seven bird-days. Noted on just two dates – unfortunately, only those of us who on 7<sup>th</sup> resisted the temptation to call it a day saw it properly...

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Mammals:**

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

### **Rhesus Macaque** *Macaca mulatta*

15+ on 2<sup>nd</sup> – a superb sighting as the troupe hung out on a sun-drenched cliff top: the youngsters were chasing each other, tumbling about & taking turns hanging off a low branch, while the adults got on with their preening.

### **Himalayan Marmot** *Marmota himalayana*

121+ animal-days. Noted on 15 dates.

### **Blyth's Mountain Vole** *Neodon leucurus*

11+ animal-days. Noted on three dates.

### **Vole sp.**

Two under a buckthorn ticket on 4<sup>th</sup> – seen quite well: 'uniform dark brown, incl inside of ears. Short tail same brown. No pale rim to ears. Seen copulating after much chasing-around and disappearing from view'... but what was it?? (to be continued)

### **Tibetan Dwarf Hamster** *Cricetulus tibetanus*

Seven animal-days. Noted on two dates – often inquisitive but a fast mover so hard to photograph...

### **Gansu Pika** *Ochotona cansus*

Three animal-days. Noted on two dates.

### **Black-lipped (= Plateau) Pika** *Ochotona curzoniae*

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

### **Glover's Pika** *Ochotona gloveri*

Nine animal-days. Noted S of Yushu on four dates.

### **Tsing-Ling Pika** *Ochotona huangensis*

Two singles on 24<sup>th</sup> – superb views of one@ stone heap in the open ('sang once') as we were heading down to the road.

### **Woolly Hare** *Lepus oiostolus*

47 animal-days. Noted on 13 dates.

### **Tolai Hare** *Lepus tolai*

One near Xining on 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Wolf** *Canis lupus*

Singles on two dates – first a brief look only for MH, JH & AP, then a very satisfying encounter with a female making its way up a forested slope...

### **Tibetan Fox** *Vulpes ferrilata*

21 animal-days. Noted on seven dates.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*

12 animal-days. Noted on four dates – seeing five playful, home-alone cubs on 9<sup>th</sup> was a treat.

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

Brief views of one ducking in and out of severe haze on 5<sup>th</sup> [JH].

**Mountain Weasel** *Mustela altaica*

One flitting deep in dwarf willows on 28<sup>th</sup> [MH, AP].

**Kiang** *Equus kiang*

950 animal-days. Noted on four dates - main event 280 in one valley on 29<sup>th</sup>, all head-down grazing frantically before the domestic yaks appeared on the scene: it was a real pleasure to watch these dignified 'donkeys' - in the absence of hunters they (and other large mammals on the Plateau) are fairly confiding, and in a couple of cases we were able to get good-to-decent photos even without the help of long lenses!

**MacNeill's (Red) Deer** *Cervus macneilli*

29 animal-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates.

\*\*\*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/rusa group'.

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

**Gansu Red Deer** *Cervus (elaphus) kansuensis*

Six W of Koko Nor on 8<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*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*

144 animal-days. Noted on three dates.

\*\*\*'The species previously ranged across much of the eastern Tibetan Plateau, [but now] occurs in fragmented populations in northwestern and southwestern Gansu, eastern and central, and southern Qinghai, eastern [Xizang], western Sichuan, and northwest Yunnan'.

'There is no [official] global population estimate', [though] 'Wang (1998) estimated a total population of some 7,000': see <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/4256/0>

**Goitred Gazelle** *Gazella subgutturosa*

c14 animals on 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Tibetan Gazelle** *Procapra picticaudata*

1,392 animal-days. Noted on seven dates.



\*\*\*In the absence of human hunters these nimble creatures are fairly confiding (if still jumpily high-strung, no doubt on account of the healthy population of wolves roaming the highlands... in August 2005 we were even privileged to watch four particularly mean-looking wolves undertake a successful chase, killing and ripping apart their victim).

**Przevalski's Gazelle** *Procapra przewalskii*

Four males on 8<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*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>

**Wild Yak** *Bos grunniensis*

15 animal-days. On the fairly long list of most-hoped-for mammals, these impressive creatures were seen well on two dates...

**Chinese Serow** *Capricornis milneedwardsii*

An absurdly confiding individual was seen on 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Tibetan Antelope** *Panthalops hodgsonii*

272 animal-days. Noted on two dates - seeing 268 individuals in a day along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road was truly something to remember...

**Blue Sheep** *Pseudois nayaur*

202 animal-days. Noted on no fewer than seven dates. 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, and we were only half-joking when we speculated that some snow leopard probably saw *us*...