



Tibetan Bunting, one of the many special birds seen on this tour (Hannu Jännes).

ULTIMATE TIBET & XINJIANG

12 JUNE–3 JULY 2016

LEADER: HANNU JÄNNES

The Ultimate Tibet & Xinjiang tour to Qinghai, Xizang, and the much less visited Xinjiang Provinces, proved extremely successful, producing a fantastic range of Tibetan Plateau specialities, including every plateau endemic apart from Sillem's Mountain Finch, which is currently more or less inaccessible. They included the much sought after Lord Derby's Parakeet as well as Tibetan Eared Pheasant, Szechenyi's Monal Partridge (or Buff-throated Partridge), Giant and Tibetan (or Kozlov's) Babaxes, Brown-cheeked (or Prince Henri's) Laughingthrush, Ground Tit (or Groundpecker), Tibetan (or Kozlov's) Bunting, Tibetan (or Roborovski's) Rosefinch and the strange Przevalski's (or Pink-tailed) Finch, the sole member of its family. In addition, our brief visit to the deserts of Xinjiang yielded four important dry country birds with Biddulph's Ground Jay, White-winged Woodpecker, Tarim Babbler and Saxaul Sparrow. Add to these a number of highly sought after, but more widespread, species, like Blue and White Eared Pheasants, Tibetan Snowcock, Przevalski's, Daurian and Tibetan Partridges, Ibisbill, Tibetan and Pallas's Sandgrouse, the handsome Mongolian and gigantic Tibetan (Long-billed) Lark, Siberian and White-tailed Rubythroats, the very range restricted Przevalski's (or Ala Shan) Redstart and seven other *Phoenicurus* redstarts, Wallcreeper, Chinese and Przevalski's Nuthatches, Henderson's Ground Jay, six species of snowfinch and ten species of rosefinch and you are a long way to understanding why tours to 'the Roof of the World' are so popular!

Much to the surprise of many participants, mammals are also well represented on this tour, and we had great views of Pallas's Cat, Grey Wolf, Tibetan and Goitered Gazelle, Tibetan Antelope, Blue Sheep, the attractive Kiang, three species of pika, Tibetan Fox and many cute Himalayan Marmots. As well as these avian



Mammals are also well represented on this tour. Here a small group of the attractive Kiang (Hannu Jännes).

and mammalian highlights there is the privilege of travelling in this remote part of China with its breathtakingly beautiful high landscapes, the chance to see the fascinating lifestyles and cultures of the local peoples, and, of course, the often great food. Our group was perhaps a slightly less agile than average for Birdquest, instead of climbing up and down steep mountain slopes we opted for the easier 'scanning from the road' method, which worked-out well and still allowed us to get great views of species like Blood Pheasant, White Eared, Blue Eared and Tibetan Eared Pheasants, Tibetan Snowcock (with two amazing encounters) and Szechenyi's Monal Partridge. And for anyone feeling uneasy about climbing at nearly 5000 meters for the rather unpredictable Tibetan Sandgrouse, the good news is that there is now a site along our route, where you can reach this much wanted mega by a walk on the level at under 4500 meters!

Our exploration of the Tibetan Plateau began with an early afternoon meet at Xining airport from where we headed to Huzhu Bei Shan, stopping on route at a supermarket to buy breakfast supplies. It was getting quite late by the time we reached our good accommodation, but we still managed a short evening excursion, which produced great views of a Wallcreeper and some commoner birds like Asian House Martin, Willow (or Songar) Tit, a gorgeous male Siberian Rubythroat, Hodgson's, Plumbeous and White-capped Redstarts, a couple of Grey-headed Bullfinches and Godlewski's Bunting.

Next day we birded Huzhu Bei Shan which lies close to the border with Gansu province and is one of the most heavily forested areas in northeastern Qinghai. Our main target was the striking Blue Eared Pheasant, and we were not to be disappointed, obtaining good scope views of three individuals during the morning. The scenery was spectacular, as it would be throughout the tour, and in addition to our main target, we observed a marvellous selection of good birds during our two day stay including Himalayan Buzzard, the stunning White-throated Redstart, White-browed and Crested Tit-warblers, Verreaux's Monal-Partridge (unfortunately heard only), Chestnut Thrush, Spotted Bush Warbler, Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Chinese White-browed Rosefinch, Chinese and Przevalski's Nuthatches, several Red-flanked Bluetails of the isolated subspecies *albocoeruleus*, White-browed Tit and both Elliot's and Plain (Père David's) Laughingthrushes. For those interested in the leaf warbler complex we had a memorable walk in a forested valley on our first day, where we logged in Chinese, Gansu, Large-billed, Hume's and Alpine Leaf Warblers and Greenish, Yellow-streaked and Buff-barred Warblers, with most seen very well. More widespread birds included Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Jay, Large-billed Crow, Amur Wagtail, Rufous-breasted and Brown Accentors, Olive-backed Pipit, Kessler's Thrush, Black, Blue-fronted and White-bellied Redstart, White-throated Dipper, Eurasian Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Rufous-vented Tit, White-winged Grosbeak and Twite.



Male White-winged Grosbeak (Hannu Jännes).

After Huzhu Bei Shan we drove back to Xining for a one night stay stopping on route at a patch of forest where, to my surprise, we found two Silver-throated Bushtits (a split from Long-tailed Tit), that were a write-in

The next morning we visited the eroded hills in the outskirts of Xining trying to find Pale Rosefinch, and were pretty sure we saw two calling birds fly over us at dawn, but sadly couldn't nail the identity with 100% certainty. A four hours search in the area didn't produce any more sightings of the finch, but we did manage to see Pied Wheatear as a new bird for the list. Then we headed for the Plateau itself, where the first stop was at the wetland at the east end of the Qinghai Lake, where we spent pretty much the rest of the day. Here we found a number of new birds including Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes, Greylag and Bar-headed Geese, Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Ferruginous and Tufted Ducks, Common and Red-crested Pochards, our first Black-necked Cranes, Pallas's Gulls, many Ground Tits, Horned, Hume's Short-toed and several splendid Mongolian Larks, Isabelline Wheatears, White-rumped, Rufous-necked and, last but not least, three Père David's (or Small) Snowfinches. In the afternoon we met some researchers who were on a mission to collect DNA samples of a local form of species X (sorry, can't say more, but some splitting is apparently on the way) and they gave us a hint about Przewalski's Gazelles not too far away. Unfortunately we couldn't locate the gazelles, but managed to find two immature Steppe Eagles, a Golden Eagle and several Rufous-necked Snowfinches during our afternoon game drive. From Lake Qinghai we drove directly to our hotel in Chaka, which was to be our home for the next three nights.

As another group of birders were heading for our main birding site in the Chaka area, we decided to head back towards Lake Qinghai, and spent a lovely morning checking the bush adorned valleys and hill sides.



Pink-tailed Finch, one of the most wanted birds on this tour (Hannu Jännes).

Best birds here included Pink-tailed Finch, a pair of Przevalski's (or Ala Shan) Redstarts, Smoky Warbler, very photogenic Red-fronted Rosefinches, Tibetan Snowfinches, Lammergeiers and Robin Accentors. In the afternoon we checked sites in the semi-deserts around Chaka salt lake and found, among other birds, a pair of Henderson's Ground Jays, a couple of Isabelline Shrikes, two White-cheeked Starlings, a family of Blanford's Snowfinches and, at the lake itself, many Pied Avocets, Kentish Plovers and Lesser Sand Plovers.

A new day found us in a steep sided valley near Chaka searching for the special birds we still needed in the area. One of the first birds we found was a singing Pine Bunting, and we also noted a singing Common Rock Thrush, a rather distant Chinese Grey Shrike (of the form *giganteus*, which is a potential split) and a group of Blue Sheep. One of the key birds here is the Przevalski's Partridge, which this time played hard to get, but in the end we managed to scope a couple of calling individuals on the steep, rocky slopes. Later, when heading back to our vehicle, we had another Przevalski's Partridge together with a showy pair of Daurian Partridges, another important target bird in this valley. We then drove further into the mountains trying to locate snowcocks in the scenic valleys, but drew a blank.



Male and female Red-fronted Rosefinches (Hannu Jännes).



We had great views of Przewalski's Partridge near Chaka (Hannu Jännes).

One of the better birds on our snowcock drive was a very responsive Przewalski's Partridge, which circled our vehicle like a mad thing! In the afternoon we checked a large wetland nearby, where we located Mallards, Eastern Spot-billed Ducks, our first Black Kite and 16 Pallas's Gulls. Then it was time to drive to Gonghe, where we were to spend the night.

A couple of hours birding on the outskirts of Gonghe the next morning produced two Mongolian Finches, which provided excellent views, a showy Desert Whitethroat (of the form *margelanica*), two Black-faced Buntings, Eurasian Wryneck, Crested Lark, Eastern Yellow Wagtail and two female House Sparrows, a major rarity on this itinerary. Then it was time to head south towards Maduo, where we would stay for the night. On the way we had a stop for a couple of hours on the Er La pass (4490m asl) in the rain, the main site for Tibetan Sandgrouse. Luckily we didn't need to worry about the sandgrouse this time, as we had other plans for the species, but we still spent couple of hours finding a breeding pair of Güldenstädt's Redstarts, Saker Falcon and Henri's Snowfinch. Later in the journey to Maduo we counted 101 Kiangs from the bus.



Mongolian Finch and Crested Lark in the outskirts of Gonghe (Hannu Jännes).



Male and female Tibetan Rosefinch at Bayankala Shan (Hannu Jännes).

A very early start next morning for our long journey over the outer plateau to Nangqian, a road trip of about 500 kilometres. Despite the very long drive, we managed some birding including a stop at Bayankala Shan pass (ca4750m asl), where we had quality time with several photogenic Tibetan Rosefinches, and also had great views of Henri's Snowfinch, Brandt's Mountain Finch and Gldenstdt's Redstart. On our journey we also watched two Grey Wolves chasing a Tibetan Fox, counted a total of 90 Upland Buzzards by the roadsides, found several singing White-tailed Rubythroats on a bushy hillside, had excellent views of three Great Rosefinches and had a total of 5 Ibisbills including a very showy adult with two cute chicks.

On our first morning at Nangqian we decided to visit the Beizha Forest about a 90 minute drive away. Luckily the overnight rain, which is regular feature of this area, eased off just as we reached our first birding spot, and after a picnic breakfast attended by Daurian Jackdaws, we were ready to begin serious birding. As we were standing on the road and mentally preparing for an uphill walk to a traditional gamebird valley, we established contact with a Szechenyi's Monal Partridge on a steep hillside close by, and soon found the bird in the lower branches of a conifer, from where it called loudly and gave us prolonged good scope views! Next stop was for a calling Maroon-backed Accentor, which unfortunately proved to be in an unreachable site on the wrong side of a large river from where it refused to show itself.



Great Rosefinch (Hannu Jännes).



Tibetan Partridge at Kanda Shan (Hannu Jännes).

Later a walk along a track on a forest clad slope was surprisingly productive and included a really excellent Giant Laughingthrush, my best ever views of a pair of Crested Tit-warblers, really co-operative Grey-crested Tit and Sichuan Leaf Warbler, the only Northern Goshawk of the trip, Himalayan Buzzards, a Black Woodpecker, and, after playback, exceptionally good views of a drumming male Three-toed Woodpecker of the dark-bellied subspecies *funebria*. In addition we heard, or had fleeting views of Red Crossbill, Przevalski's Nuthatch, Tibetan Serin and Three-banded Rosefinch during our walk. A fair amount of time was also spent studying a relaxed troop of Tibetan Macaques, including couple of very cute youngsters. Later we shared a clearing with a group of local people, who after singing us Tibetan songs and taking lots of group photos, gave us Tibetan bread and large pot of locally made yak yoghurt, which tasted heavenly with honey and the bread. A brief scan at the lunch spot located a target bird for the day with three White Eared Pheasants walking the forested hill side, and later we paid a brief visit to the impressive Ga'er Monastery

The new day saw us at a high altitude pass with a breath-taking vista, where our main target, Tibetan Bunting, was secured as soon as we stepped out of the bus. Whilst admiring this very special Tibetan endemic we heard distant calls of a Tibetan Snowcock and whilst scanning the distant mountain slope, and at the same time using playback, a pair of Tibetan Snowcocks flew in from behind us and gave us, after some manoeuvring, really stunning views. The male of the pair seemed especially interested in us and came walking on the road maybe 30-40 meters from us. Later it started to rain and we moved down the Kanda Shan gorge area for shelter and new exciting birds. Our main targets here included Tibetan Babax, Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler and Tibetan Partridge, all which we saw very well. In addition we had great scope views of a male Blood Pheasant, and, lower down the valley, we encountered a family party of Chinese Fulvetta, a new bird for us, and a single Ibisbill in a roadside stream. During the day we also visited a small monastery, where some of us enjoyed milk tea with giggling nuns!

On our last day in the Nangqian area we went back to Beizha Forest, where we finally managed to have good views of Hodgson's Treecreeper and Three-banded Rosefinch, species we had only heard or glimpsed earlier. It was also good to see a really showy group of five White Eared Pheasants, a sizeable group of Red Crossbills, Przevalski's Nuthatch, Chinese Fulvetta, a couple of Crested Tit-warblers and Tibetan Serin.



A view over the Mekong River (Hannu Jännes).

Next day was mostly for travel as the plan was to transport ourselves to Qumarleb, a journey of over 400 kilometres, for the night but we still managed a little birding. After an early start we had our first short stop at daybreak at a bend in the road where a family of very cute Little Owls had their home. Next stop was for a photogenic roadside Ibisbill and then we had a picnic breakfast and some birding in a truly beautiful area in a remarkably gorgeous weather. Best birds here included showy Streaked and Red-fronted Rosefinches and about ten Snow Pigeons. Later we had great views of a male Great Rosefinch, before it was time for lunch and a little shopping in Yushu. Rest of the day was devoted to travelling but we had couple of short stops at a huge wetland, where we counted 30 Black-necked Cranes and many Eastern Cattle Egrets, a new bird for the list. Somewhat late in the evening, whilst driving through a high pass we spotted magnificent male Pallas's Cat walking slowly up a mountain slope, stopping regularly to mark its territory. Whilst admiring the cat, my first on a Birdquest tour, which gave great scope views, our local guide had a chance to check directions with the local people and it turned out that we had taken a wrong turn at some point causing us to follow the wrong road for around 50 kms! A classic example of blessing in disguise? When we got back to civilisation it was so late that instead of driving all the way to Qumarleb we decided to stay in the city of Zhi Duo for the night. As we waited for a late dinner at the hotel's restaurant a massive thunder storm hit the city and caused a power cut, which paralyzed the whole city including the hotel's kitchen. As it seemed to take ages before the hotel's own generator could be started we decided to skip the dinner and have a well-earned rest.

An early start in the dark (the electricity was still not working) saw us in Qumarleb early, where we enjoyed a good breakfast in a local restaurant before continuing our journey cross the wild country of the high plateau to our next destination Budongquan. During the day we crossed the immense Kekexili Nature Reserve, a truly wonderful area for wild mammals, where we encountered eight Tibetan Foxes, 84 Tibetan Gazelles, 135 Kiang, and, most importantly, eight handsome Tibetan Antelopes, a new mammal for us. Avian highlights included a flock of Lesser Sand Plover, six Saker Falcons and a trio of Tibetan Larks. We reached Budongquan, merely a truck stop along the Golmud-Lhasa highway, around 6 pm, and were accommodated the best, but still very basic guesthouse in town, which was supposed to be our home for the next two nights

Because of the high altitude (4600m asl) and a rather nasty cough that was circulating amongst us, the night was a restless one with very little sleep for most. In the morning, whilst having an early breakfast, the



Picnic breakfast in the Altun Mountains (Hannu Jännes).

understandably somewhat grumpy group requested a change of itinerary. Apparently one night in the "Budongquan Hilton" was going to be enough! Obviously I had nothing against this change as long as we could nail Tibetan Sandgrouse, one of the most important target birds of this tour, during the day. The conditions with heavy rain and strong winds, didn't look very promising for the sandgrouse walk, and we actually had to wait couple of hours in, or near, the vehicle before the weather cleared up enough for us to start the search. The first leg of our walk didn't produce anything, and it was only on the way back when we saw a single bird fly by before immediately walking into a group of four male sandgrouse that showed well before taking off and whilst following these birds in flight we spotted three more flying birds! What an amazing piece of luck! When we got back to the vehicle the rain picked up again and it was time to head for the lowlands and we reached our good hotel in Golmud after driving through some pretty impressive valleys and high passes.

As the change of itinerary had gained us an extra day, we decided to split the 750 kilometres road trip to Ruoqiang by stopping for one night at roughly halfway in the oil city of Hua Tu Gou. The drive through the Qaidam (or Zaidam) Depression is scenically quite impressive, but unfortunately rather birdless. Couple of longer roadside birding stops produced, among other birds Common Shelduck, two Long-legged Buzzards, many Citrine Wagtails of the grey-backed nominate subspecies and one Goitered Gazelle, all of which were new for us.

The second leg of our drive to Ruoqiang included crossing the impressive Altun Mountains that mark the border between Qinghai and Xinjiang, the north western most province of China, where we had a picnic breakfast. Later, on the other side of the mountains we stopped for a walk in the flat semi-desert, which yielded 61 Pallas's Sandgrouse with good "on the deck" views and a male Desert Wheatear. We reached Ruoqiang, at the edge of the forbidding Taklimakan Desert, early enough for us to spend couple of early evening hours checking the gardens on the outskirts of the city, where we had good views of Desert Whitethroat and several Saxaul Sparrows, and much briefer views of Barred Warbler and two Tarim Babblers.



The peculiar Ground Tit is a common species on the Tibetan plateau (HannuJännes).

Next morning found us in dry country near Ruoqiang exploring the southern edge of the Taklimakan desert that occupies much of the Tarim Basin. The habitat on the roadside had changed a lot since my previous visit, and the Biddulph's Ground Jays were not in the area, where I had had them two years previously.

Therefore the only thing left for us to do was to drive further along the road and hope for the best. After an intensive search we suddenly came across a juvenile Ground Jay right by the roadside, and soon found an adult bird too! The second main target bird for the morning was the White-winged Woodpecker, which proved easy to find once we got into the right habitat and we had really good views. On the way back to our hotel for lunch and a siesta(!), we checked a large wetland, where we added Great Cormorant, Black-headed Gull and Little Tern to our bird list. A late afternoon foray in very hot and windy weather on the outskirts of the city gave us great views of the Tarim Babbler and it was also good to connect with several Desert Finches, which only one of us had glimpsed the previous day.

On the way back to Golmud the next day we spent some time at a couple of road side wadis, where we had more, about 40, Pallas's Sandgrouse, two Desert Whitethroats, Desert Wheatears and two Goitered Gazelles. After reaching Golmud late in the evening we enjoyed dinner and had a short rest before heading, at 01:30 am, for the railway station and our train to Lhasa. The plan was to say goodbye to our guide and driver, and meet another guide in Lhasa, but this was obviously a problem for the railway authorities who claimed that there was a new rule (apparently issued the previous day!) that foreign tourists are not allowed to travel on the train without being accompanied by an official Chinese tourist guide! A lot of negotiation and ultimately shouting by our guide's side finally did the trick, and we were allowed to enter the train on our own just before it was about to depart. As we were travelling in the second class (apparently the first class tickets are very difficult to get hold of), which was fully booked, and there were lots of people without seats sleeping on the floor, the 15 hour train journey was definitely not one of my most pleasant travel experiences. Anyway, we finally reached Lhasa at 5.30 pm and, after formalities at the railway station, we were whisked away to our pleasant hotel for food and a well-deserved rest.



Part of the group scanning hard for Tibetan Eared Pheasant and Tibetan Snowcock near Lhasa (Hannu Jännes).

Our first birding excursion in Xizang (Tibet proper) was out of Lhasa to Shuksep Nunnery or Xiong Si as it is called in Chinese. The access to the best birding area is very easy nowadays thanks to the recently built road that takes you straight to the doorstep of the nunnery. While enjoying breakfast at daybreak in the small car park, we had great views of Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush, a Tibetan endemic, and we found our first group of Tibetan Eared Pheasants feeding on a distant hill side. A couple of hours birding in and around the nunnery rewarded us with good views of two family groups of Tibetan Eared Pheasants, Tibetan Partridge, Tibetan Blackbird, Pink-rumped and Streaked Rosefinches, White-winged Grosbeak, Brown Accentor, Godlewski's Bunting and a first-summer male Crimson-browed Finch, a great bonus species. We also had an amazingly close encounter with three Tibetan Snowcocks and, just as we were leaving the area, we came across a group of Eared Pheasants that were so tame (they have become used to being fed by the nuns) that we could get close enough for 'head shots' with the cameras.



Tibetan Eared Pheasant (Hannu Jännes).



We had amazing views of Tibetan Snowcocks at Shuksep monastery near Lhasa (Hannu Jännes).

Next on our agenda was a visit to Lhasa River, which this time didn't really produce anything of interest. Then it was back to the city for some cultural 'musts'. After a good lunch we went to the Jokhang Temple, the most important religious site in the city and the focus for pilgrims from all over Tibet, and spent the rest of the day pottering around Lhasa like ordinary tourists.

Next morning, straight after the breakfast, we headed to one of the city parks, where our next target bird, Lord Derby's Parakeet, occurs in small numbers. The morning was rainy and it took some time before we managed to locate the species, but in the end we had great scope views of one individual, and couple of more birds were seen briefly in flight. After our success with the parakeet we rushed to the vast and amazing Potala Palace, the centrepiece of Lhasa. Even though it has a museum-like quality now that its chief resident is no longer present, it is still an extraordinary and very special place. After this and lunch we still had a few hours left for birding, and we headed back to the valley of the Shuksep monastery and birded a stretch of the approach road. A pleasant walk, but not very productive in birding terms. The next day was our final one and time to head for the comforts of home after our long, and remarkable, journey across 'The Roof of the World'

'BIRDS OF THE TRIP' WINNERS:

1st: Przevalski's (or Pink-tailed) Finch

2nd: Tibetan Snowcock

3rd: Ibisbill

4th: Tibetan (or Roborovski's) Rosefinch, Tibetan Eared Pheasant

5th Biddulph's Ground Jay, Tibetan Antelope



One of the many picnic breakfasts we enjoyed on this tour, this time in the outskirts of Xining (Hannu Jännes).



Picnic a`la Birdquest (Hannu Jännes).



Dried fish and black bean sandwich, one of the all-time favourites! (Hannu Jännes!)



A wetland near Chaka (Hannu Jännes).

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* 40 at Lake Qinghai.

Bar-headed Goose ◊ *Anser indicus*

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* A few in Xinjiang.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Widespread and common.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Eastern Spot-billed Duck (Chinese S-b D) *Anas zonorhyncha* Two near Chaka.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* 20 at Lake Qinghai. and one between Yushu and Qumarleb.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* 25 at Lake Qinghai, and 300 near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.

Common Pochard *Aythya farina* 30 at Lake Qinghai.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* Three at Lake Qinghai and three on the way to Qumarleb.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* Four at Lake Qinghai.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser*

Verreaux's Monal Partridge ◊ (Chestnut-throated P) *Tetraophasis obscurus* (H) Heard at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Széchenyi's Monal Partridge ◊ (Buff-throated P) *Tetraophasis szechenyii* One at Beizha Forest.

Tibetan Snowcock ◊ *Tetraogallus tibetanus* Amazing views at Kanda Shan and at Shuksep near Lhasa.

Przevalski's Partridge ◊ (Rusty-necklaced P) *Alectoris magna* Magnificent views near Chaka, also heard in Xining.

Daurian Partridge ◊ *Perdix dauurica* A showy pair gave good scope views near Chaka.

Blood Pheasant ◊ *Ithaginis cruentus* Great views of a male near Nangqian. Also two for the leader at Beizha Forest.



Tibetan Eared Pheasants were pretty tame at Shuksep near Lhasa (Hannu Jännes).

White Eared Pheasant ◊ *Crossoptilon crossoptilon* Great views in the Nangqian area.

Tibetan Eared Pheasant ◊ (Elwes's E P) *Crossoptilon harmani* Common and very tame at Shuksep near Lhasa.

Blue Eared Pheasant ◊ *Crossoptilon auritum* Great views of three at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Common Pheasant (Ring-necked P) *Phasianus colchicus* Common in the Xining-Huzhu Bei Shan region.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Black-necked Grebe (Eared G) *Podiceps nigricollis*

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* 20 near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* Several encounters with this magnificent bird.

Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon Vulture) *Gyps himalayensis* Fairly common and widespread in Qinghai and Tibet.



Fearless Tibetan Snowcock near Lhasa (Hannu Jännes).



One of the several Ibisbills we saw on this tour (Hannu Jännes).

- Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*** Two sub-adults (first-summer?) near Lake Qinghai.
- Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*** A total of eight were noted.
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*** Two in the Xining-Huzhu Bei Shan area.
- Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*** One at Beizha Forest.
- Black Kite *Milvus migrans*** Scattered records of ones and twos. See note.
- Upland Buzzard** ♦ ***Buteo hemilasius*** Abundant on the plateau.
- Himalayan Buzzard** ♦ ***Buteo burmanicus*** Noted in the forests of Huzhu Bei Shan and Beizha.
- Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*** About ten in Xinjiang.
- Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***
- Eurasian Coot (Common C) *Fulica atra***
- Black-necked Crane** ♦ ***Grus nigricollis*** A total of 42 were noted.
- Ibisbill** ♦ ***Ibidorhyncha struthersii*** A total of ten including an adult with two cute chicks between Yushu and Nangqian.
- Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus***
- Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avocetta*** 30 near Chaka including several chicks.
- Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*** 100 near Chaka and 10 in Xinjiang.
- Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*** 30 near Chaka and ten or so near Budongquang.
- Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*** Common and widespread.
- Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*** Two were noted.
- Brown-headed Gull** ♦ ***Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus***
- Black-headed Gull (Common B-h G) *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*** Common near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.
- Pallas's Gull (Great Black-headed G) *Ichthyaetus ichthyaeus*** A total of 70 were noted.
- Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*** Five near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.
- Common Tern *Sterna hirundo***
- Tibetan Sandgrouse** ♦ ***Syrrhaptes tibetanus*** A total of eight with excellent views.
- Pallas's Sandgrouse** ♦ ***Syrrhaptes paradoxus*** 100 with good views in Xinjiang.
- Rock Dove (R Pigeon) (feral) *Columba livia***
- Hill Pigeon** ♦ ***Columba rupestris***
- Snow Pigeon** ♦ ***Columba leuconota*** 16 birds were noted in southern Qinghai.
- Oriental Turtle Dove (Rufous T D) *Streptopelia orientalis*** Common in Xizang.
- Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***
- Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*** Fairly common in Qinghai and Xizang.
- Little Owl *Athena noctua*** A family party of five in southern Qinghai.
- Common Swift *Apus apus***



Hill Pigeon and Oriental Turtle Dove (Hannu Jännes).



Three-toed Woodpecker of the dark-bellied subspecies *funebris* (Douglas Futuyma) and Biddulph's Ground Jay (Lois Mansfield).

Salim Ali's Swift ◇ *Apus salimalii*

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Widespread in small numbers.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* One at Gonghe.

White-winged Woodpecker *Dendrocopus leucopterus* Two near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major*

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus* One excellent male at Beizha Forest.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* Couple of birds at Beizha.

Grey-headed Woodpecker (Grey-faced W) *Picus canus* Five birds were noted.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* A total of 17 noted. Subspecies *milvipes*.

Lord Derby's Parakeet ◇ *Psittacula derbyana* Two in Lhasa, with good views.

Isabelline Shrike ◇ (Xinjiang S, Chinese S) *Lanius isabellinus* See Note.

Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*

Chinese Grey Shrike ◇ *Lanius sphenocercus* One distant bird near Chaka. See note.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* One at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Azure-winged Magpie ◇ (Asian A-w M) *Cyanopica cyanus*

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Henderson's Ground Jay ◇ (Mongolian G J) *Podoces hendersoni* Four encounters with this stunning bird.

Biddulph's Ground Jay ◇ (Xinjiang G J) *Podoces biddulphi* An adult with juvenile near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.



Horned Lark and Japanese Tit (Hannu Jännes).

- Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*
Alpine Chough (Yellow-billed C) *Pyrrhonorax graculus* Two at Kanda Shan.
Daurian Jackdaw ◊ *Coloeus dauuricus* Fairly common in the Nangqian area. Also two near Xining.
Rook ◊ *Corvus frugilegus* Three were seen briefly in flight near Xining. See Note.
Carrion Crow (Oriental C) *Corvus corone* See note.
Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax*
Rufous-vented Tit *Periparus rubidiventris* Two at Huzhu Bei Shan and eight at Beizha forest.
Grey Crested Tit *Lophophanes dichrous* Great views at Beizha forest.
White-browed Tit ◊ *Poecile superciliosus* A total of five birds were noted.
Willow Tit ◊ *Poecile montanus* Small numbers at Huzhu Bei Shan. See Note.
Sichuan Tit ◊ *Poecile weigoldicus* Small numbers at Beizha.
Ground Tit (Hume's G, Groundpecker) *Pseudopodoces humilis* Common and widespread.
Japanese Tit ◊ *Parus minor*
Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Horned Lark (Shore L) *Eremophila alpestris* One of the most common and widespread birds on the plateau.
Hume's Short-toed Lark ◊ *Calandrella acutirostris*
Mongolian Lark ◊ *Melanocorypha mongolica* A total of six early on.
Tibetan Lark ◊ (Long-billed Calandra L) *Melanocorypha maxima* Five birds were noted.
Asian Short-toed Lark ◊ *Alaudala cheleensis*
Pale Martin ◊ *Riparia diluta*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropsis daurica* A total of ten between Yushu and Nangqian.
Silver-throated Bushtit ◊ *Aegithalos glaucogularis* See note.
White-browed Tit-warbler ◊ (Severtzov's T-w) *Leptopoecile sophiae* A total of ten were noted.
Crested Tit-warbler ◊ *Leptopoecile elegans* Stunning views at Beizha forest, also two at Huzhu Bei Shan.
Smoky Warbler *Phylloscopus fulgiventis* Great views of one near Rubber mountains.
Alpine Leaf Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus occisinensis*
Yellow-streaked Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus armandii*
Buff-barred Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher* Common at Huzhu Bei Shan. Also heard at Beizha Forest.
Gansu Leaf Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus kansuensis* Seen well at Huzhu Bei Shan.
Chinese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus yunnanensis* Several birds, with great views, at Huzhu Bei Shan.
Sichuan Leaf Warbler (Pale-rumped W) *Phylloscopus forresti* Fairly common at Beizha forest near Nangqian.



White-browed Tit-warbler and White-browed Tit (Hannu Jännes).

Hume's Leaf Warbler (Buff-browed W) *Phylloscopus humei*

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* A total of 11 at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Spotted Bush Warbler ◊ *Locustella thoracica* Several encounters and excellent views at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler ◊ *Pomatorhinus gravivox* Great views of two near Nangqian.

Giant Babax ◊ *Babax waddelli* Rather common at Shuksep, near Lhasa.

Tibetan Babax ◊ (Kozlov's B) *Babax koslowi* Good views in the Nangqian area.

Giant Laughingthrush ◊ *Garrulax maximus* A few, including some stunning views, at Beizha forest.

Plain Laughingthrush ◊ (Père David's L) *Garrulax davidi* Fairly common at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Elliot's Laughingthrush ◊ *Trochalopteron elliotii* Common in suitable habitat.

Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush ◊ (Prince Henri's L) *Trochalopteron henrici* Common in Xizang.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* Four in the outskirts of Ruoqiang.

Desert Whitethroat (Small W) *Sylvia minula* One near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.

Desert Whitethroat ◊ (Margelanica L W) *Sylvia [minula] margelanica* Two at Gonghe and two in Xinjiang. See note.

Chinese Fulvetta ◊ *Alcippe striaticollis* Six with great views in the Nangqian area.

Tarim Babbler ◊ (Chinese Hill Warbler) *Rhopophilus albosuperciliaris* See note.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* Noted at Huzhu Bei Shan and Beizha Forest.

Eurasian Wren (Winter W, Northern W) *Troglodytes troglodytes* Noted at Beizha Forest.

Chinese Nuthatch ◊ (Snowy-browed N) *Sitta villosa* Two, with good views, at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Przevalski's Nuthatch ◊ *Sitta przewalskii* Noted at Huzhu Bei Shan and Beizha Forest.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* A total of three birds were noted.

Eurasian Treecreeper (Common T) *Certhia familiaris* Four at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Hodgson's Treecreeper (Himalayan T) *Certhia hodgsoni* A few at Beizha Forest.

Crested Myna *Acridotheres cristatellus* Couple of birds in Lhasa. Released cagebirds?

White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus* Two near Chaka.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Fairly common in Ruoqiang.

Tibetan Blackbird ◊ *Turdus maximus* Fairly common in Lhasa.

Chestnut Thrush ◊ *Turdus rubrocanus* Quite common in Huzhu Bei Shan.

Kessler's Thrush ◊ (White-backed T) *Turdus kessleri* Widespread.

White-bellied Redstart ◊ *Luscinia phoenicuroides* Seen at Huzhu Bei Shan, and heard at Shuksep.

White-tailed Rubythroat ◊ (Himalayan R) *Calliope pectoralis* Excellent views near Yushu.

Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* Excellent views at Huzhu Bei Shan.



Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush and Tibetan Babax (Hannu Jännes).

- Red-flanked Bluetail (Northern B, Siberian B) *Tarsiger cyanurus*** Good views at Huzhu Bei Shan.
Himalayan Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus* (H) Heard in Beizha Forest.
Slaty-backed Flycatcher ◊ *Ficedula hodgsonii* Seen at Huzhu Bei Shan and in Beizha Forest.
Przevalski's Redstart ◊ (Ala Shan R) *Phoenicurus alaschanicus* A pair near Chaka.
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Hodgson's Redstart ◊ *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*
White-throated Redstart ◊ *Phoenicurus schisticeps*
Güldenstädt's Redstart ◊ (White-winged R) *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus* A total of seven were noted.
Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*
Plumbeous Water Redstart (Plumbeous R) *Phoenicurus fuliginosus* Noted only in Huzhu Bei Shan.
White-capped Redstart (W-c Water R, River Chat) *Phoenicurus leucocephalus* Fairly widespread.
Common Rock Thrush (Rufous-tailed R T) *Monticola saxatilis* Three near Chaka.
Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* Two near Chaka.
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* Four in Xinjiang.
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* One in the hills near Xining.
White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* Widespread in small numbers.
Saxaul Sparrow ◊ *Passer ammodendri* Fairly common in the Ruoqiang area in Xinjiang.
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Two females in Gonghe were a surprise.
Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans* Noted in Tibet.
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*
Henri's Snowfinch ◊ (Prince Henri's S) *Montifringilla henrici* Noted in small numbers on four days.
Tibetan Snowfinch ◊ (Adams's S, Black-winged S) *Montifringilla adamsi* Noted on four days.
White-rumped Snowfinch ◊ *Onychostruthus taczanowskii* Fairly common and widespread.
Père David's Snowfinch ◊ (Small S) *Pyrgilauda davidiana* Three at Lake Qinghai and one near Budongquan.
Rufous-necked Snowfinch ◊ *Pyrgilauda ruficollis* Common and widespread.
Blanford's Snowfinch ◊ (Plain-backed S) *Pyrgilauda blanfordi* Six at Chaka.
Robin Accentor ◊ *Prunella rubeculoides* Handfull of birds were noted.
Rufous-breasted Accentor ◊ *Prunella strophiatea* Two birds at Huzhu Bei Shan.
Brown Accentor ◊ *Prunella fulvescens* Small numbers were noted on six days.
Maroon-backed Accentor ◊ *Prunella immaculata* (H) One was heard on two days at Beizha Forest.
Eastern Yellow Wagtail (Manchurian W) *Motacilla [tschutschensis] macronyx* One near Gonghe.
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola citreola* Several birds near Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.
Tibetan Wagtail ◊ *Motacilla [citreola] calcarata* A few individuals of this distinctive form were noted. See note.
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*



Brown Accentor and Godlewski's Bunting (Hannu Jännes).



Crimson-browed Finch and Henri's Snowfinch (Hannu Jännes).

- White Wagtail (Masked W)** *Motacilla [alba] personata* (LO) One on route to Ruoqiang.
- White Wagtail (Himalayan W)** *Motacilla [alba] alboides* Rather common north of the central plateau.
- White Wagtail (Amur W)** *Motacilla [alba] leucopsis* Fairly common south of the central plateau.
- Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni*
- Rosy Pipit** *Anthus roseatus* Ten or so were noted.
- Przevalski's Finch** ◊ (Pink-tailed F) *Urocynchramus pylzowi* A male in the Rubber Mountains near Chaka.
- White-winged Grosbeak** ◊ *Mycerobas carnipes* A handful of birds with several stunning views.
- Grey-headed Bullfinch** ◊ *Pyrrhula erythaca* Seen at Huzhu Bei Shan and in Beizha Forest.
- Mongolian Finch** ◊ (M Trumpeter F) *Bucanetes mongolicus* Two near Gonghe.
- Brandt's Mountain Finch** ◊ (Black-headed M F) *Leucosticte brandti*
- Common Rosefinch (Scarlet R)** *Carpodacus erythrinus* Seen at Huzhu Bei Shan and in the Nangqian area.
- Streaked Rosefinch** ◊ (Eastern Great R) *Carpodacus rubicilloides*
- Great Rosefinch** ◊ *Carpodacus rubicilla* Five near Yushu, and one at Altun Shan in Xinjiang. See note.
- Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch** ◊ *Carpodacus pulcherrimus* Only a few were noted. See Note.
- Pink-rumped Rosefinch** ◊ (Stresemann's R) *Carpodacus waltoni* Common in S Qinghai and Tibet.
- Tibetan Rosefinch** ◊ (Roborovski's R) *Carpodacus roborowskii* Great encounter at Bayankala Shan.
- Three-banded Rosefinch** ◊ *Carpodacus trifasciatus* A few, including an immature male, at Beizha Forest.
- Chinese White-browed Rosefinch** ◊ *Carpodacus dubius* Rather common in suitable forests.
- Red-fronted Rosefinch** ◊ (Red-breasted R) *Carpodacus puniceus* Noted at three different sites.



Rufous-necked Snowfinch at Bayankala Shan (Hannu Jännes).

- Crimson-browed Finch** ♦ *Carpodacus subhimachala* A first-summer male near Lhasa was a nice surprise.
- Grey-capped Greenfinch (Oriental G)** *Chloris sinica*
- Desert Finch** *Rodospiza obsoleta* Good views on the outskirts of Ruoqiang in Xinjiang.
- Twite** *Linaria flavirostris* Widespread.
- Red Crossbill (Common C)** *Loxia curvirostra* 60 at Beizha forest near Nangqian.
- Tibetan Serin** ♦ (T Siskin) *Spinus thibetana* Couple of brief views at Beizha Forest.
- Pine Bunting** ♦ *Emberiza leucocephalos* Rather common in the Chaka area.
- Godlewski's Bunting** ♦ *Emberiza godlewskii* Widespread in small numbers.
- Tibetan Bunting** ♦ (Kozlov's B) *Emberiza koslowi* Great encounter with four different birds at Kanda Shan.
- Black-faced Bunting** *Emberiza spodocephala* Four males near Gonghe.



A view over Lhasa (Hannu Jännes).



Tibetan Gazelle (Douglas Futuyma).

MAMMALS

Black-lipped Pika (Plateau P) *Ochotona curzoniae* Very common in some areas.

Glover's Pika *Ochotona gloveri* Four in southern Qinghai.

Tsing-Ling Pika *Ochotona huangensis* One apparently belonging to this species at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai* One near Xining.

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus* Common and widespread.

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana* Common and widespread.

Pallas's Cat *Felix manul* Great encounter with a male on route to Zhi Duo.

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata* A total of 14 with some excellent views.

Grey Wolf (Wolf) *Canis lupus* Two at a wetland south of Maduo chasing a Tibetan Fox.

Tibetan Macaque *Macaca thibetana* A troop of 10 at Beizha Forest.

Eastern Roe Deer *Capreolus pygargus* One at Huzhu Bei Shan.

Tibetan Antelope *Pantholops hodgsonii* 54 in the Kexekili-Budongquan area and 24 from the Lhasa train.

Tibetan Gazelle *Procapra picticaudata* Common in the Kexekili-Budongquan area and from the Lhasa train.

Goitered Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa* Three were noted in Xinjiang.

Bharal (Blue Sheep) *Pseudois nayaur* Noted on three days.

Kiang (Tibetan Wild Ass) *Equus kiang* Common in some areas.

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

The form *lineatus* encountered on this tour is sometimes treated as a separate species Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus*.

Isabelline Shrike (Xinjiang S, Chinese S) *Lanius isabellinus*

Two at Chaka and common from Golmud to Ruoqiang. The form encountered on this tour (*arenarius*) is currently treated as a subspecies of Isabelline Shrike by IOC.

Chinese Grey Shrike *Lanius sphenocercus*

The form *giganteus* (Tibetan Grey Shrike) encountered on this tour is currently treated as a subspecies of Chinese Grey Shrike.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

The form *pastinator* (Oriental Rook) encountered on this tour is treated as a subspecies of Rook by IOC.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

The form *orientalis* (Oriental Crow) encountered on this tour is treated as a subspecies of Carrion Crow by IOC.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

Songar Tit *Poecile songarus* is now lumped with Willow Tit by IOC.

Silver-throated Bushtit *Aegithalos glaucogularis*

Two between Huzhu Bei Shan and Xining. A write-in. A recent split from Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*.

Desert Whitethroat (Margelanian Lesser Whitethroat) *Sylvia [minula] margelanica*

This form is treated as a subspecies of Desert Whitethroat *Sylvia minula* by IOC.

Tarim Babbler (Tarim Bush-dweller, Chinese Hill Warbler) *Rhopophilus albosuperciliaris*

Five birds with some brilliant views in the outskirts of Ruoqiang. The former Chinese Hill Warbler *R. pekinensis* has recently been split into two species: the eastern Beijing Babbler *R. pekinensis* and the western *R. albosuperciliaris*, Tarim Babbler.

Tibetan Wagtail *Motacilla [citreola] calcarata*

The black-backed form *calcarata* encountered in the Qinghai and Tibet sections of this tour is treated as subspecies of Citrine Wagtail by IOC.

Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla*

After being a full species for a few years the form *severtzovi* (Spotted Great Rosefinch) encountered on this tour is now re-lumped with the Caucasian Great Rosefinch *C. rubicilla*, and the name Great Rosefinch is used for the enlarged species. A taxonomic “yo-yo” movement!

Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus pulcherrimus*

The recent splitting off of Chinese Rosefinch *Carpodacus dubius* only refers to the easternmost subspecies *davidianus*, which occurs in NE China. All other subspecies including the form *argyrophrys* encountered on this tour belong to Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch.