

5th June to 28th June 2014

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Either for rarity value, excellent views or simply a group favourite.

- Szechenyi's Monal-Partridge
- Tibetan Partridge
- Tibetan Snowcock
- Himalayan Snowcock
- Przevalski's Partridge
- Daurian Partridge
- Blue Eared Pheasant
- Black-necked Crane
- Ibisbill
- Tibetan Sandgrouse
- Pallas's Sandgrouse
- Salim Ali's Swift
- White-winged Woodpecker
- Three-toed Woodpecker
- Bearded Reedling
- Mongolian Lark
- Tibetan Lark
- Robin Accentor
- Black-throated Accentor
- White-tailed Rubythroat
- Siberian Rubythroat
- Siberian Bluetail
- A La Shan Redstart
- Guldensadt's Redstart
- Eversmann's Redstart
- Grandala
- Crested Tit-warbler
- Kozlov's Babax
- Azure Tit
- Wallcreeper
- Przewalski's Nuthatch
- Henderson's Ground-Jay
- Biddulph's Ground-Jay
- Kozlov's Bunting
- Pink-tailed Finch
- Pale Rosefinch
- Spotted Great Rosefinch
- Roborovski's Rosefinch
- Saxaul Sparrow
- Pere David's Snowfinch
- Grey Wolf
- Pallas's Cat

SUMMARY:

Our exciting adventure to some of the remotest regions of China resulted in a large number of endemic and extremely localised species. However, on this journey it is not about the number of birds you see, but more importantly it is the overall experience of birding in one of the most beautiful environments imaginable. We visited all of the best birding sites in Qinghai, including Koko Nor Lake, Rubber Mountain, Er La Pass, Kande Shan, Chaka and many places in between. Of course there are some wonderful birds such as Himalayan Snowcock, Tibetan Sandgrouse, A La Shan Redstart, Tibetan Rosefinch and plenty of other mouth-watering, high-altitude species. We were also fortunate to see a Pallas's Cat at close quarters, a hunting Wolf, and several stunning Tibetan Fox. We also visited the far north-west and a quest to the remote Taklamakan Desert where we found the range-restricted Biddulph's Ground-Jay amidst a stark desert landscape that provided a total contrast to the snow-capped mountains and beautiful valleys of the Tibetan Plateau. We enjoyed White-winged Woodpecker and Saxaul Sparrow here as well, before ending in the Tien Shan Mountains. Overall, a simply great experience and a privilege to be able to visit such a vast and remote region.

Days 1 – 2 5th June – 6th June

Funny how months and months of anticipation leading up to a particular tour and all the excitement that it brings can come crashing down around your ankles for a while. You see our flight in to Beijing had to be re-routed to Tinjiang due to bad weather and we had to sit on the runway for three and a half hours waiting for clearance at another stab at landing where we should be. Anyway, we got to Beijing with just under an hour to go before our flight to Xining was due to depart and basically after a long immigration queue and getting hassle at the x-ray machines we made it to the gate with about a minute to spare. What a stressful day this was turning out to be. Upon arrival in Xining our luggage was not as lucky as we were and remained behind in Beijing. We finally reached the hotel around 11pm and crashed out straight away.

Day 3 Saturday 7th June

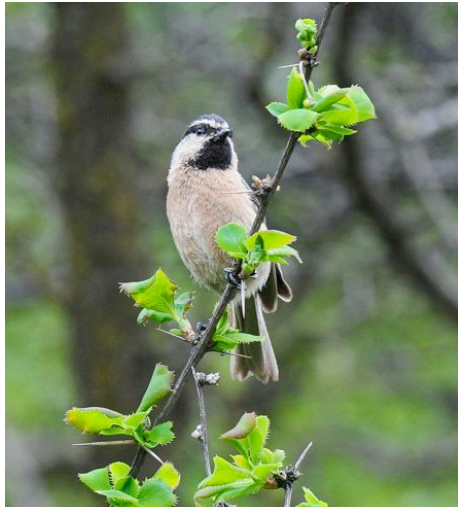
Left at 6am after a poor night's sleep and drove for maybe an hour and a half to Dong Xia – a pine clad series of hills for our first taste of Qinghai birding. The only birds of note on the drive being **Little Owl**, numerous **Common Pheasants** and a **Grey-backed Shrike**. Upon arrival we drove up to an open area and parked the coach, and whilst our crew were preparing breakfast we walked down to the edge of the forest. One of our first birds was a **Chinese Nuthatch** that appeared right beside us and showed well, and was quickly followed by a **Chinese White-browed Rosefinch**. **Goldcrest**, **Sichuan Tit** and a **Siberian Bluetail**. This latter species is basically **Northern Red-flanked Bluetail** but is vocally distinctive and also looks a little different and is a potential future split. With the lure of coffee back at the coach we returned and enjoyed a nice breakfast, but birds kept appearing to distract us. One of my favourite birds, **Spotted Bush-warbler**, began calling uphill and with a little prompting flew right down and into the bushes next to us. It showed superbly well and was very, very bold, giving views down to 2 metres! After a few more mouthfuls a pair of **White-throated Redstarts** appeared nearby, then an **Elliot's Laughingthrush** hopped out onto the road, a pair of **White-winged Grosbeaks** appeared and another **Siberian Bluetail** was seen.



Spotted Bush-Warbler

Once breakfast was over we began walking along a nice little trail that passed through the pine forest and scrub-covered hills. Almost immediately we picked up our first **Gansu Leaf-warbler** and then found them to be extremely common in this area. Other warblers here were **Hume's Leaf-warbler** (*mandellii*) and **Yellow-streaked Warbler**, both of which proved to be very confiding. Everyone particularly appreciated several views of male **Siberian Rubythroats** singing from their exposed song perches, and we probably saw 4 different males in total. We had just finished watching one fine male rubythroat when a lovely male **White-browed Tit-warbler** flew across the path in front of us and we were able to watch a pair taking food into a bush on the hillside above us. And then having just said how skulky **White-bellied Redstarts** are, would you believe one just hops on top of a bush and sings back at us for several minutes. Amazing! Finally, after quite a search we were able to find a superb **Przewalski's Nuthatch** singing from the top of a pine tree, and manage to call it in for much closer views. There was also a couple of **Plain Laughingthrushes** feeding beside the path as well.

Other species seen this morning included **Himalayan Buzzard**, **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Himalayan Wagtail**, **Chestnut Thrush**, **Rufous-vented** and **Japanese Tit**.



White-browed Tit

So we left here and drove back towards Xining, stopping at a small restaurant for our first of many excellent meals. Afterwards, we drove back to the airport as our luggage had finally arrived and then we set off to Huzhu Beishan, a drive of a couple of hours. The road wound its way through beautiful valleys with tall mountains either side and eventually we reached a certain point from where we could scan the tree and bush-covered hillsides all around us. Virtually the first bird Mr Todd put his bins on was a **Blue Eared-Pheasant**, and then there was a second bird. Unbelievable! We were able to watch them at leisure through the scope for ages until a crowd gathered around us wanting their photos taken with us big noses! Kevin found a second pair (of pheasants) a short while later, and further scanning revealed both **Chestnut & Kessler's Thrushes** as well.

All that remained was to drive a further 30kms to a really good hotel, where we would be staying for the next 2 nights. Just as well as the weather had closed in and a dark sky led to heavy rain by the time we reached there at 6pm.

Day 4 Sunday 8th June

Left our hotel at 5.30am and drove back up through the main valley until we reached the start of a trail that led into a scenic side valley. Had breakfast at the roadside, during which we saw **Elliot's Laughingthrush**, a flock of **Salim Ali's Swifts & Asian House Martins**, **Common Rosefinch** and a pair of **Godlewski's Buntings**. Then we headed up into the valley in search of **Chinese (Severtzov's) Grouse** and walked for a couple of hours through a type of birch forest before reaching the pine forest.

Although the grouse were non-existent we did see some good birds and found **Chinese Leaf-warbler** to be very common here, along with yet more **Gansu Leaf-warblers**. There was also **Northern Goshawk**, **Grey-crested Tit**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, **Grey-headed Bullfinch**, **Slaty-backed Flycatcher**, **Large-billed Leaf-warbler**, and more **Siberian Bluetails**.

By 9.30am we were done here and decided to drive higher up and check out the scrub and bush covered hillsides, but a fine male **Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch** was found before we boarded the coach.

A nice path led us across the hillside through good habitat, and we got the ball rolling here with a pair of **White-browed Tits** and the first of many **Alpine Leaf-warblers**. Yet more **Siberian Rubythroats** were present and we were probably in double figures for sightings of them during this walk. I was surprised to see many **Hume's Leaf-warblers** in this habitat, whilst **Chinese White-browed Rosefinches** were more expected. A male and two female **Streaked Rosefinches** and **Blue-fronted Redstart** were seen, and towards the end of the walk a pair



Siberian Rubythroat

of **Severtzov's (White-browed) Tit-warblers**, **Greenish Warbler** and **White-browed Tit** were seen well.

We drove back down the valley and had lunch in a nice little restaurant and whilst waiting for our food we saw **Red-billed Chough**, **Plumbeous Water-redstart** and a **Brown Accentor**. The rest of the afternoon was spent exploring another superb side valley but this walk was all uphill and rather quiet. That was until we heard **Verreaux's Monal Partridge** calling and eventually had a couple of very close fly pasts from them. The walk back down produced our first **Claudia's Leaf-warbler** and **Eurasian Crag-martin**, whilst a **Black Woodpecker** was seen from the bus on the drive back to the hotel.

Day 5 Monday 9th June

Had another crack at the grouse again but they just weren't around so we set out on the drive up onto the Tibetan Plateau and Koko Nor Lake, seeing our only **Eastern Rook** along the way. We stopped at the pass called Sun And Moon Mountain (very nice!) to stretch our legs and found our first **Ground-tit**, as well as **White-rumped** and **Rufous-necked Snowfinches**, plus the first of many **Plateau Pikas**. It was midday by now and within the hour we had reached a small town where we had a really great meal in a restaurant. The lake wasn't far away and before we reached it, a pair of **Black-necked Cranes** were spotted which prompted a quick exit of the coach to fully admire them in the scope, and we also found **Horned Lark** here as well. Further on and a **Mongolian Lark** was seen flying past the coach and away into the distance.



Severtzov's or White-browed Tit-Warbler

At the lake we saw both **Common** and **Whiskered Terns**, flocks of **Bar-headed Geese** grazing along the shoreline, **Ruddy Shelduck** and **Greylag Geese**, **Common Redshank**, and a flotilla of distant ducks included **Tufted Duck**. Moving on we walked out to a marshy area, finding **Hume's Short-toed Lark** and **Isabelline Wheatear** nearby. Out on the marsh were lots of **Black-necked Grebes** and we scoped a loose nesting colony of them a little later. Ducks were much in evidence with **Red-crested** and **Common Pochards**, **Ferruginous Duck**, and a single **Mallard**. Other species here included **Black-winged Stilt**, **Twite** and a large flock of **Pale Martins**.

So we left here and drove to Heimahe, stopping along the way for a quick walk out in the grassland but apart from many **Pallas's Gulls** it was quiet. But what views of the gulls and I can't remember seeing so many, with maybe 50+ littering the shoreline, as well as several closer individuals. On arrival at Heimahe we walked out into the fields and quickly found several huge **Tibetan Larks** amongst the smaller and more numerous **Oriental Skylarks**. There was also a distant **Upland Buzzard** flying past. A short drive took us to a comfortable hotel for the night, but there was just enough time to scan the open fields from a viewpoint at the back of the hotel where Kevin found a family of **Red Foxes** playing.

Day 6 Tuesday 10th June

Waking up to dull, overcast skies and heavy drizzle wasn't the best start to what turned out to be a superb day. Must admit I was in two minds as to whether I should change our plans and not hike up into the Rubber Mountain, but Tang Jun said we should give it some time and have our packed breakfast near the start of the track. So we did and it continued to rain whilst we ate, and we got out



Pink-tailed Finch habitat – just the start of the awe-inspiring scenery on this tour.

of the coach several times and yes, it was easing and getting brighter. A **Rufous-necked Snowfinch** raised optimism somewhat, so by the time we drove the last kilometre to the start of the trail and phuffed around it was hardly raining so off we went. The walk up to the base of the hills is probably a couple of kilometres but it took a while as we came across our first **Rock Sparrows**, **Black-winged**



Pink-tailed Finch - for the world lister this is a key species, being a monotypic family.

(**Adam's**) **Snowfinch**, **Robin Accentors** and a superb **Saker**. Then we had to start the trek up into the scrub-covered little side valley, and up & up we went. The weather was still a bit miserable and it was chilly – not the best conditions to search for **Pink-tailed Finch**. This is one of the star birds of any Qinghai tour, as it is now in a family all of its own. So the pressure was on! Anyway, we got to a vantage point where we could scan quite a way and I fired up the ipod – but nothing. And nothing. And nothing. David walked further up and thankfully spotted one coming down the valley in response

to the call and a few of us managed to get on it. But somehow it disappeared, so we went up higher and fortunately it reappeared for another brief appearance. What a relief! I think it's true to say everyone wanted more so we walked right up to the head of the (by now really steep) steep valley and walked over the brow of the hill, admiring the scenery as it would have been rude not to. The valley over the top held more bushes and Neil spotted one way down below us – another finch that is. We scrambled down and had amazing views of two adults and an immature bird feeding, bunting-like on the ground between the dwarf bushes. The views were awesome and it was a real privilege to be this close to such a mega! However, walking back up the ridiculously steep hillside wasn't so much fun I can tell you.



Robin Accentor



Black-winged Snowfinch

Anyway, we hung around at the top for a while and had a female **Streaked Rosefinch** fly in, and some great looks at the *weigoldi* **Smoky Warblers**, along with **Rufous-breasted Accentors** as well. Then we walked down the ridge and followed another valley for a while but didn't get anything new, although seeing **Ground-tits**, **Blue-fronted Redstarts**, **Kessler's Thrushes**, **White-browed Tit** and other commoner birds in such spectacular surroundings was fine!



Rufous-necked Snowfinch



Henri's Snowfinches

By the time we had walked back down to the bus, finding our first **Rosy Pipit** along the way, we were ready for lunch and our crew did a fine job in producing such good fayre. As we were sitting along a stream we noticed that there were many birds coming down to drink and bathe as the weather was clearing up and it was nice and warm now. There were many **Black-winged Snowfinches**, **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**, **Brown & Robin Accentors**, and several **Twite** all giving point-blank views. It was such a treat to get close to these birds, as after bathing they flew up onto the grassy bank to sunbathe and didn't pay much attention to the few of us watching them.

We then drove up to the pass and scored with our first **Henri's Snowfinches**, and several pairs were present and showing well. We also had a **Tibetan Lark** here.....! Then we drove down to Chaka Basin and set out on a walk across the strange desert landscape, and unbelievably we found **Henderson's**

Ground-Jay quite quickly and were able to watch a group of 3 at

leisure. So with that done we walked further and had four sightings of **Pallas's Sandgrouse** flying overhead. What a day!



Henderson's Ground-Jay

Day 7 Wednesday 11th June

Left the hotel at 5.30am and drove 30kms to the start of our Snowcock walk, however as we ate our packed breakfast the rain that had been threatening came in and we decided it was pointless to make a long hike up a mountain. So instead we drove back past Chaka and on for another 70kms to the start of another trail. This one is usually driveable for 4 kms to the base of the mountains, but as there had been a lot of rain the track had become a thick, glutinous, sticky, slidy, undriveable skislope. So we had to make the painfully, strength-sapping walk up to the valley where **A La Shan Redstart** resides. And boy it was a tough walk up as the track was so muddy and slippery, but we made it despite the constant steady drizzle and cool conditions. Once we entered the redstarts favourite, Juniper dotted valley we found ourselves in low cloud and visibility was poor. Am I painting a good picture here..? You know I didn't believe there was any point being here, but was also aware that you never know what will happen. And sure enough as we sheltered from the rain underneath a large tree, Steven our additional local guide called from the gloom that he had found it! Holy cow! We skidded our way down to his position and unbelievably there was a pair of stunning redstarts feeding some 20 metres above us on a grassy slope – still in the low cloud but we didn't care. Oh boy, you can imagine the elation we all felt and well done Steven. Apart from a nice **Pine Bunting** we didn't see another bird up here so headed straight down to the coach.

We drove back towards Chaka, seeing **White-throated Dipper & Goosander**, and stopped for coffee before walking out into the desert where we found many **Asian Short-toed Larks**, **Isabelline Shrike**, **Desert Wheatear** and another **Henderson's Ground-Jay**.

Our last stop in the early evening was just south of Chaka where another walk out into the grassland produced a flyby **Mongolian Lark**, **Tibetan Lark**, **Tibetan Wagtail** & more **Twite**. Plus another **Woolly Hare**. We celebrated in a different restaurant tonight with some of the local beer!

Day 8 Thursday 12th June

Returned to the head of the valley we tried yesterday morning and this time the rain stopped (almost) during our field breakfast and we could head up into the mountains on our most scenic and adventurous walk to date. We had just began walking when a **Tibetan Grey Shrike** was spotted on



We saw **Himalayan Snowcocks** here.

nearby telegraph wires – what a great start. In fact we found another one further along the path, sharing the fence posts with a couple of **Common Cuckoos**. Once we reached the valley, we quickly found our first **Przevalski's Partridges** scurrying up the hillside above us and we would see several more during the course of the morning. The first of a couple sightings of **Wallcreeper** this morning was particularly special for Chris. From the valley floor we hiked high up across a ridge in a circular route from 3200 – 3700m and it was

particularly hard going but everyone 'enjoyed' it. We got off to a flyer with a pair of **Tibetan Partridges** seen well and higher up a group of 5 **Himalayan Snowcocks** flew right over us as they went from one ridge right away across the valley to the other side. We managed to track them down and had very nice scope views as they fed on a steep grassy slope. The scenery was magnificent and well worth the effort. We also found **Alpine Leaf-warbler**, **Beautiful Rosefinch**, and a **Kessler's Thrush** mobbing a perched **Northern Goshawk**.

Once we had returned to the valley floor we spread out and managed flight views of 2 pairs of **Daurian Partridges** to make it a 4 'chicken' morning. After a late lunch in Chaka we drove to the desert east of the town and had our best view yet of a **Mongolian Lark**, but the rain that had been threatening came in and we had a well deserved early finish and a nice rest after our earlier exertions.

Day 9 Friday 13th June

We left Chaka early doors and drove along the expressway some 120 kms to the town of Gonghe – most of the way it rained! We had a great breakfast of porridge and dumplings (not together!) in a little restaurant before checking out an area just outside of town. Well, we couldn't find any whitethroats, but were entertained by a **Grey-headed Woodpecker** and several **Eurasian Hoopoes**. Then we walked out into the semi-desert area and found a nice wadi where we eventually scored with **Mongolian Finch**, a bird that we had been looking for ages for over the past 3 afternoons. We

also had a pair of **Meadow Buntings** here, as well as a **Ground-tit**, whilst nearby a **Crested Lark** sang from some telegraph wires. Then we checked out the poplars again for any sign of whitethroats without any luck, and had to content ourselves with a **Eurasian Wryneck**.



We were very lucky to see this rare Pallas's Cat.

Then we set out on the drive to Er La Pass (4500m), reaching here by mid-afternoon, only to find ourselves in the middle of a blizzard. The whole area was covered in a layer of snow, but we still had a nice walk amidst such spectacular scenery you just have to experience to believe. We did find a pair of **Guldenstadt's Redstarts**, **Brandt's Mountain-finch** for some, and **Rufous-necked**, **White-rumped** and **Henri's Snowfinches**.

The undoubted highlight was a **Pallas's Cat** watched for a good half an hour as it hunted across the barren hillside above the road. At one stage it crouched right down and stalked

a pika, which it duly caught and devoured – all the while being watched by a very appreciative audience. I must admit to getting the old 'shaky hand' syndrome as we watched this mega-rare mammal. Whilst watching this amazing creature a pair of **Golden Eagles** locked talons and tumbled earthwards, only to pull up at the last moment and a **Lammergeier** flew over.

Tonight we stayed in a rundown, old 'hotel' that has apparently been renovated – lucky us!

Day 10 Saturday 14th June

This was the day of the big hike up the mountain for **Tibetan Sandgrouse** and we set off early from the hotel, but still had time for a spot of breakfast in a nearby restaurant first. Up at the pass we were soon off and heading upwards amidst a winter wonderland landscape of snow covered hills and mountains all around – in fact it had snowed heavily overnight and was even more scenic than when



A wintry scene from Er La Shan

we drove over the pass yesterday. Our acclimatisation had worked well over the past week and everyone did very well on this tough climb, but a nice male **Roborovski's (Tibetan) Rosefinch** certainly helped as it perched on a small rock looking down on us – a key species here. There were a few birds around, including our first **Plain Mountain-finch**, but otherwise much the same as yesterday so up we hiked. It only took a little over 90 minutes to reach the top but it was hard going at

times and the layer of snow didn't really help. But boy the scenery all



Worth the hike in freezing conditions - just for the view!

around was amazing!

Once at the top we walked along a plateau until it dropped away onto a lower plateau and began to scan, and fortunately 3 **Tibetan Snowcocks** scuttled across in front of us and showed very well. We probably spent a couple of hours scanning and searching the favoured area of the sandgrouse, but the whole place was covered in snow so how could they feed here? Eventually we walked further along the ridge and found an area where there was a very sparse layer of snow, mingled with 'bare' areas of soil and

short grass. But there was still nothing doing here, until all of a sudden a strange call emanated from the plateau behind us and amazingly a **Tibetan Sandgrouse** flew right past us and continued on over a shallow hill. Oh yes baby!! The bird I personally wanted more than any other on this tour was finally nailed! We walked in the direction it had flown and relocated it, watching it feed amongst an area of small rocks and worked our way to within a couple hundred yards of it. It seemed quite nervous so we didn't push it and the views through the scope were stunning. But a little too far for photos. When it flew off back in the direction it had come we headed down and then discovered another pair feeding below us. I managed some nice, albeit distant photos despite the old 'shaky' hand again.

Walking down towards the road we had a flock of **Brandt's Mountain-finches**, **Robin Accentors** and other species and it was a relief to finally climb aboard the coach after such a strenuous walk.

We stopped in town for a late noodle lunch before driving the next 200kms of tedious, road work infested craziness..... Not far from our destination of Maduo we watched in amazement as a **Wolf** attacked a flock of sheep, killing one and maiming another before running across the road in front of us and joining the other three members of his pack. Wow!



Tibetan Sandgrouse

It seemed a good area for mammals as we'd already had **Kiang (Tibetan Wild Ass)** and **Tibetan Gazelle** as well amidst a more typical Tibetan Plateau scene of wide open horizons and rolling hills. **Upland Buzzards** were everywhere and a **Saker** was nice too!

Day 11 Sunday 15th June

We left our comfy hotel in Maduo at 6am and then spent the day predominantly driving along a terrible road that was mainly under construction the whole 300+ Kms, eventually reaching a brand new hotel in Yushu around 8pm.

Anyway, after an hours drive we stopped for breakfast along the road, at a point overlooking a large lake and surrounded by snow covered rolling hills all around. Our crew provided a fitting plate of mixed delights and hot coffee whilst we watched a **Black-necked Crane** quietly feeding at the water's edge. There were also plenty of other previously seen species here before we set of again and had good numbers of **Tibetan Wild Ass** and **Tibetan Gazelles** from the road.



Tibetan Fox

We made a few stops before our picnic lunch for roadside **Saker, Ravens, Upland Buzzard**, an out-of-place **White-cheeked Starling** and just to admire the scenery. Our lunch was taken overlooking a river where **Rufous-necked Snowfinches, Ground-tits** and a pair of **Lesser Sandplovers** were seen, and where this **Tibetan Fox** gave point-blank views as he chased pikas across the grassland. By the time we had reached a high pass at 4350m it was 4.30pm and we walked out to a scrub covered hillside where we saw several **White-tailed (Himalayan) Rubythroats** singing, as well as **Robin** and **Rufous-breasted Accentors, Common Rosefinch** and **Alpine Leaf-**

warbler. As we headed lower down through a very scenic gorge with tall cliffs all around the road followed the Yangtze River and then we drove up into a side valley where we saw 3 **Ibisbills** feeding in a grassy pasture. We spent around an hour watching them feed, preen and then get disturbed by a herd of domestic Yak and it was a real privilege I can tell you. This was a nice scenic valley with a Buddhist temple and prayer flags adorning the hillside, with **Tibetan Wagtails, Marmots** and a herd of 45 **White-lipped Deer** grazed and **Himalayan Griffons, Red-rumped Swallows** and **Salim Ali's Swifts** flew over. Driving lower we saw **Eurasian Hoopoes, Eurasian Crag Martins** and many, many **Kessler's Thrushes** were present.



Ibisbill gave stunning views.

Got to the hotel in the new town of Yushu late but enjoyed another fine meal and cool beer!

Day 12 Monday 16th June

We were on-site at daybreak and scanning some craggy cliffs beside the road during breakfast. Things were a little slow to start but there were plenty of birds here with both **Bar-headed Goose** and **Ruddy Shelduck** seemingly nesting on the cliffs here, **Himalayan Griffons** perched and waiting for the sun, a **Black-eared Kite** flew by, **Godlewski's Bunting, Common Rosefinch, Rock Sparrows, Black-winged**

Snowfinches and others. It took a while but when the sun suddenly broke over the hills there was an instant buzz of activity and suddenly Frank picked up a bird in flight and got my attention and sure enough there was a pair of **Spotted Great Rosefinches** feeding beside the road! Wow! As soon as everyone had got a view they flew off but within half an hour we had relocated them and we had stunning views as they fed beside a nearby river. What a bird! There was also a fine male **Pink-rumped Rosefinch** feeding not too far away, but it was dwarfed by its larger and more special cousin. We also saw another **Ibisbill** land on the opposite bank as well. Non avian highlight was a cute **Glover's Pika** feeding amongst the rocks.



Spotted Great Rosefinch



Streaked Rosefinch

Moving on, the scenery became even more spectacular if that is at all possible and by the end of the day we had scenery-overload! We travelled across a wide open plain with more **Tibetan Gazelles** and **Saker Falcon** seen, to a high snow-covered pass and down into a spectacular gorge with huge snow-capped peaks and craggy cliffs. Wasn't sure what to expect here but it was a very pleasant place to scan the surroundings and we picked up a few **Golden Eagles**, **Upland Buzzard**, two different **Lammergeiers**, **White-winged Redstart** and some **Blue Sheep**. Moving lower we hit pay-dirt, as first of all there was **Greenish Warbler** and **White-throated Dipper**. Then in a small meadow above the road we found several **Snow Pigeons** feeding quietly. Then a male **Streaked Rosefinch** was found, followed by more **Pink-rumped Rosefinches**, both of which were very confiding. More **Ground-Tits** were here as well, plus **Tibetan Wagtail**, a brief **Yellow Wagtail** seemed out of place, and some huge looking **Marmots**. We spent quite a while watching the rosefinches, which was fortunate as a pair of **Red-fronted Rosefinches** flew in and fed below our group.

Dragging ourselves away from this delightful valley we stopped for lunch in a small restaurant before heading to a very scenic gorge and seeing **Daurian Jackdaw** and **Salim Ali's Swifts**, passing yet more stunning scenery. We did see a pair of **White Eared-Pheasants** here, but nothing else new. Although **Tibetan Partridges** were very confiding, and there was **White-throated** and **Hodgson's Redstarts**, **White-capped River-chat**, many **Elliot's Laughingthrushes**, and **Chinese White-browed Rosefinch**.

So by the end of the day we had seen a very cool 6 species of Rosefinch – mania indeed!

Day 13 Tuesday 17th June

A 5am departure saw us driving up to a high pass where our arrival was met by the sun just beginning to peek over the horizon. But boy was it cold! Birding was slow to begin with, save for a few singing



Kozlov's Bunting Site

Olive-backed Pipits. Once the hillside above us began to glow in the sun's rays a couple of birds flew in and landed on the grassy slope – **Kozlov's (Tibetan) Bunting**! And there it was, our major target bird in the bag before breakfast was finished. In fact, the birds flew right down towards us and landed really close and we had crippling views.

Following this, we split into two groups with Tang Jun taking some people up into the higher slopes where **Grandala**, **Alpine Accentor** and close **Red-fronted Rosefinch** were seen. The rest of us walked down the road and bumped into a

feeding party of **Chinese Beautiful Rosefinches**. This prompted a walk across the slope to take in a magnificent view, and along with that came a couple of female **Red-fronted Rosefinches**, **Alpine Accentor**, **Plain Mountain-finch** & distant scope views of a calling **Tibetan Snowcock**, as well as a necessary photo opportunity! Then a male **Red-fronted Rosefinch** was spotted and flew down into a muddy area with 4 females and they were very obliging to say the least.



Red-fronted Rosefinch



Kozlov's Bunting

After an hour or so we all met up and walked further down the road and saw a **Wallcreeper** before boarding the coach and driving lower. We checked out an area of Junipers and had more **Streaked Rosefinches**, before heading lower. We stopped to check more trees and a random bit of ipod play resulted in **Szechenyi's (Buff-throated) Monal-partridge** calling back at us from the valley below. After a bit of a search with the scope we picked up a calling bird and everyone managed tickable views before we walked lower. Much better and closer views ensued and we watched several birds feeding and walking in some open clearings amongst the Junipers. During our vigil here we also had over 7 **White Eared-Pheasants** as well in the same area!

As it was such a good spot with great birds and magnificent scenery, we decided to have lunch here and enjoyed some hot noodles and melon for desert. And there were some other birds as well, with **Hodgson's, Blue-fronted & White-throated Redstarts, Greenish Warbler** and **White-winged Grosbeak** present.

Driving way down the valley most of us were snoozing as an Ibisbill flew past – well done Neil! Then we followed a trail into a narrow valley and found a **Tibetan (Kozlov's) Babax** that proved really tricky to get a good view of. We did see **Lammergeier, Sichuan Tit** and several **Pink-rumped Rosefinches** though. In the end we gave up after just getting flight views and tried another side valley. This time we found numerous **Tibetan Babax** feeding their young out in the open and generally mooching around right in front of us, totally unafraid. A great way to end the day and we were all rather jubilant as we headed to our hotel and an early shower!

Day 14 Wednesday 18th June

Was really looking forward to visiting Beizha Forest today and it did not disappoint as we saw a number of great birds. We started in a side valley where a **Blood Pheasant** responded to the ipod but remained at the top of a ridge above us and not everybody managed to see it well enough. We needn't have worried as after breakfast we drove down into the valley and a group of 7 were feeding beside the rushing stream and we were able to watch them for a long time. We then continued driving, eventually stopping beside a nice looking piece of forest, which we walked up into and then spent the rest of the morning birding in one small area. We began with a close **Chinese Fulvetta**, and then found **Sichuan Leaf-warblers** to be reasonably numerous, but a **Buff-barred Warbler** was somewhat of a



Crested Tit-Warbler

surprise here. A pair of **Himalayan Bluetails** put in an appearance, whilst a high pitched call led us to a pair of **Maroon-backed Accentors** – another surprising find. Then a **Grey-crested Tit** flew in and as we watched this, a male **Crested Tit-warbler** appeared right next to us. In fact there were at least two males and a female in the trees around us and we were fortunate to be able to watch them for a good half an hour, with one male in particular giving absolutely stunning views. There was also **Greenish**

and **Hume's Warblers** here, as well as **Rufous-breasted Accentor**, **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Slaty-backed Flycatcher**, and numerous **Daurian Jackdaws**. It was a pity that a pair of **Three-banded Rosefinches** didn't hang around long enough for everyone to see them.

The scenery was once again stunning, with a Buddhist monastery perched high up on some rocky crags and the setting was made even better with a family of **Lammergeiers** constantly on view. From our picnic spot we could scope numerous **Blue Sheep** on the slopes above as well as enjoy more **Lammergeier** views, with one immature perched on a ledge on the cliffs above. So with lunch over we began walking down the road through nice forest but it was so hot there was absolutely zero bird activity. A good decision then was made to drive up to the monastery where we were fortunate to be there when one of the 'living Buddhas' had just returned from exile a few days before our visit. So the place was buzzing with excitement and we were allowed entry and given an audience with the monks who invited us into their communal area for food and drink. A tour then followed into their main prayer and chanting room which was fascinating and decorated in typical Tibetan Buddhist architecture and design. It was a truly memorable experience and one which will live long in the memory.

Tearing ourselves from here we drove down into the forest but it was still hot and not much bird activity, although we saw a few bits and pieces but nothing new. So we left and returned to the hotel for a delicious hotpot dinner.

Day 15 Thursday 19th June

We decided to change our itinerary as our previous day in the forest was pretty successful and we still had a couple of snowfinches missing from our lists, so basically this was a travelling day as we drove 560kms from Nangqian to Maduo with just a few stops made. We did see a few birds along the way such as **White-winged Redstart**, **Robin Accentor**, **White-rumped**, **Rufous-necked** and **Henri's Snowfinches**, plus the by now standard 'amazing scenery'. And any day when you see an **Ibisbill** can't be bad right?



Some typical Tibetan scenery

Day 16 Friday 20th June

Left Maduo after a rather interesting breakfast of some black rice porridge – yes it was as disgusting as it sounds! We then drove north basically and went in search of the two remaining snowfinches that had so far eluded us. I found this particularly frustrating as I wasn't totally sure where to find them having been in the alleged best sites for them already. Well we made a few stops to look at **Black-necked Crane, Upland Buzzard, Lesser Sandplover, Tibetan Gazelle, Tibetan Fox** etc. At one particularly interesting spot we walked across a Pika-laden field and into some scrub and found a **Pink-tailed Bunting** – totally unexpected actually. But we were escorted 'off the premises' by the alleged landowner who wanted a large sum of money from us. So we left! The rest of the day was spent stopping, scanning and walking a little bit, especially at Er la Pass where we saw **White-winged Redstart, Tibetan Lark** and all the usual suspects.

By early evening we were driving across the sandy plateau approaching Gonghe when I decided to stop and have one final scan. Fortunately, and boy we earned it, there was a **Pere David's (Small) Snowfinch** in the distance feeding alongside some sheep. Wow! Can't explain the elation I felt at this point as I'd really given up finding anything new today. So we walked closer and managed really nice scope views, but a strong fence lay between us and it so couldn't get closer for better views. Anyway, everyone was really happy and we also had a few **Mongolian Larks** – in fact our best views to-date to really add a little icing on the cake, plus several **Isabelline Wheatears** as well. And that was our day...!

Day 17 Saturday 21st June

Checked out a couple of sites near Gonghe where a pair of **Oriental Greenfinches** were new for the trip, and we also saw **Godlewski's Bunting** and **Przevalski's Partridge** before returning to the hotel for one of the few 'sit-down' breakfasts of the tour. Shouldn't have bothered really as it was rubbish and craving pizza right now! Afterwards we checked out some other areas but all we found new was a pair of **Asian Azure-winged Magpies**, but a pair of **Daurian Partridge** were much appreciated by Frank before heading north after a lunch top back in town.

On a grassy hillside we found **Pere David's Snowfinch** to be common, along with **White-rumped Snowfinch** and **Ground-tit** as well. Another 100km drive back to Xining followed and some time to rest before our busy day tomorrow.

Day 18 Sunday 22nd June

Another early morning departure saw up on the dry hillsides above Xining in search of **Pale Rosefinch**. It took a while but eventually everybody managed to get on one of two males seen. A **Pied Wheatear** was also a nice find, and other commoner birds included **Red-billed Chough, Godlewski's Bunting, Oriental Greenfinch** and others. We then drove some three hours to Lanzhou and flew to the north-west province of Xinjiang and the modern city of Urumqi for the final and, for me, the most exciting leg of the tour.

Day 19 Monday 23rd June

Yet another early start as we left Urumqi on the 650+kms drive south to Luntai in the Tarim Basin, passing through stark grey and arid mountains where a male **Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush** posed nicely. As the road dropped down into the desert-like plains, **Long-legged Buzzards** and **Pied Wheatears** became more prominent. After lunch we reached some marshes at the edge of the huge Bosten Nur Lake and followed a path through lush reedbeds teeming with **Great Reed Warblers**. It was fantastic

habitat, with numerous **Bearded Reedlings** all around, at least 10 **Little Bitterns** flying across the area (an Asian mega-tick!), **Western Great Egret**, **Citrine Wagtails**, **Common Reed Buntings**, a couple of **Paddyfield Warblers**, and both **Black** and **Whiskered Terns** hunting the channels. However, best of all were at least 7 singing **Savi's Warblers**, and we took some time to get crippling views of this rare Chinese bird. We also had several **Isabelline Shrikes**, that along with most of the other birds seen here was extraordinarily pale – possibly as a result of the extremely high temperatures? Leaving here we stopped the coach to look at our first **Turkestan Shrike** and noted plenty of **Eurasian Starlings**.

As we approached Luntai a **Black Stork** circled over the road before dropping down into a surprisingly green area and it was with some relief that we arrived at our hotel just before 9pm!

Day 20 Tuesday 24th June

Headed to the Tarim River this morning which actually took longer than expected but the overcast and cool weather really helped us. As we pulled in to a certain location it took a little over 20 minutes to nail **Chinese Bush-Dweller**, **White-winged Woodpecker**, **Saxaul Sparrow**, **Small Whitethroat** and **Azure Tit**. Not bad going huh? And then we could enjoy our breakfast! Afterwards we spent some time improving on our views and really appreciating these great birds.

Then we drove out further into the Taklamakan Desert where we began our vigil for **Biddulph's Ground Jay**, a bird endemic to this desert. The strange landscape of dead trees and tamarisk bushes could only really be viewed from on top of the sand dunes and we spent ages scanning the



The fabled Biddulph's Ground-Jay

surrounding area for any signs of life. Apart from more **Saxaul Sparrows**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Black Stork**, **Long-legged Buzzard** and **Black-eared Kite** it was rather quiet. We worked both sides of the road and eventually it was Frank who became our hero and found the bird. A quick (sort of) sprint across the sand and everyone locked binoculars on one of the birds of the trip. In fact it was a family group of two adults and two almost fully grown juveniles and we watched them for a while as they moved across a small wadi in front of us. They certainly could shift and ran at an incredible speed, pausing now and again to fly up into one of the dead trees to survey the area. It was such a privilege to become one of the few westerners to see this bird.

Driving further into the dune landscape we found another couple of ground-jays before walking out into the sea of sand to admire the view. Then it was lunch at a local restaurant before we headed to a town closer to Bosten Nur Lake and a slight change of plan as this would give us an opportunity to visit the wetlands a lot earlier in the morning than would have otherwise been possible had we stayed in Luntai.

Day 21 Wednesday 25th June

Breakfast at a local restaurant was enlivened by a pair of **Desert Finches** coming down to a puddle beside the main road! Couldn't quite believe it as we were in a built up area and I assumed they were escaped cage birds but there was a male and female and their plumage was in pristine condition with no frayed edges indicating captivity.... A singing **Eurasian Blackbird** was also watched as well and interesting to note the subtly different song as well. We did indeed visit a different lake area this morning and our efforts were rewarded with quite a few **Caspian Gulls** being seen, plus there were also **Black-headed Gulls**, **Little, Common, White-winged** and **Whiskered Terns**, **Paddyfield**, **Eurasian** and **Great Reed Warblers**, **Citrine Wagtail**, many **Masked Wagtails**, **Isabelline Shrike** and a **Chinese Pond-heron**.

Then we set out on the long drive back to Urumqi, arriving 9.30pm. But along the way our driver decided to try a shortcut which led us into an arable area of lush, green fields and hedgerows where several pairs of **Barred Warblers**, **Richard's Pipits** and **Bluethroats** were a nice surprise.

Day 22 Thursday 26th June

What a day this turned out to be, as we drove up into the Tien Shan Mountains. Although after a little



The flower-filled foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains.

later start than normal we then hit bad traffic and it took well over two hours to get out of the city and into the arable land at the base of the mountains. But some fruitful roadside stops produced a number of goodies and we soon forgot about the journey here, as we quickly found several **Tawny Pipits**, lots of **Red-headed Buntings**, flocks of **Rosy Starlings**, **Linnet**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Pied** and **Northern Wheatears**, whilst the fields were alive with **Eurasian Skylarks** song-fighting, plus many **Turkestan Shrikes** were seen as well.

Driving higher we checked out some valleys without any joy, apart from finding our first of many **Fire-fronted Serins** and **Eurasian Jackdaws**, before heading off to another good area where **Pine Buntings** were common and we also had **Spotted Nutcracker** as well. We had a lunch of lamb pasties before walking up a side valley and after a bit of a search came up with three of our main targets: **Black-throated Accentor**, **Blue-capped Redstart** and a fine **Three-toed Woodpecker**. Other species seen

included **Coal Tit**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, **Goldcrest** and others. In fact our search had taken longer than we realised as walking back to the road we noticed it was already 6.30pm so left on the drive for the hotel. However, Neil spotted a redstart beside the road and we reversed the coach only to find our main target of a fine male **Eversmann's Redstart**. Out we jumped and enjoyed fine scope views of it perched on some bushes before flying closer to check us out.

Day 23 Friday 27th June

Returned to the Tien Shan Mountains and birded a different valley for the morning. We found more **Eversmann's Redstarts**, **Godlewski's** and **Pine Buntings**, and many **Common Rosefinches**. A delightful **Azure Tit** performed exceedingly well but would just not settle on any close trees, instead it took delight in confounding us by landing on overhead telegraph wires.....The only new birds were a dark-phase **Booted Eagle** and a **Great Tit** – the latter species caused Clements' list followers some palpitations in case it was a **Turkestan Tit**, but alas not!

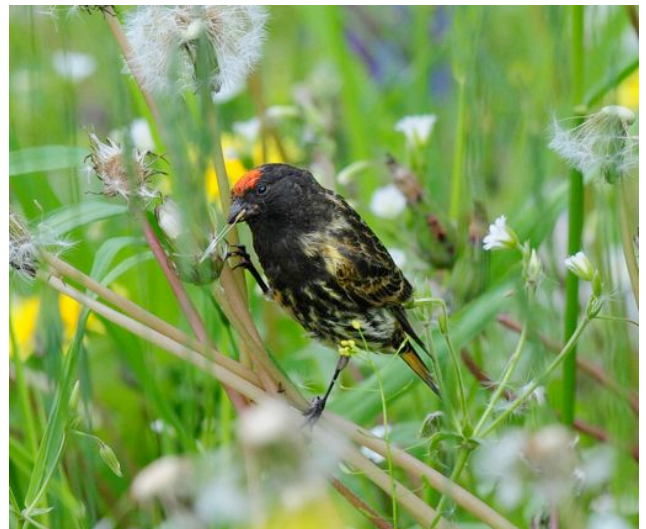
As this was our 23rd consecutive day of high energy birding/travelling we decided to finish after lunch and return to the hotel early. Despite the mother of all traffic jams slowing us down, fortunately the traffic queue was going in the opposite direction, we arrived back shortly after 4pm for a much deserved rest before visiting the Irish bar for pizza.....!!!!

Day 24 Saturday 28th June

Our last morning's birding was at a lake near Urumqi where we arrived quite early and straight away got our bins on a male **White-headed Duck**! This is a rare bird in China and many country listers have visited this spot over the past 4 – 5 years to tick this bird here. There were also **Red-crested Pochard**, **Ferruginous Duck** and other commoner wildfowl, along with **Northern Lapwing**, **Common Sandpiper**, many **Pale Martins**, **Pied Wheatear** and **Isabelline Shrikes**. We drove around to the other side of the lake and walked down towards the water's edge where we had much better views of a male, female and immature male **White-headed Duck**. It was a nice setting with hills all around, beautiful blue skies and plenty of birds but eventually the time had come to turn around and head back to the hotel and pack. But we weren't done yet as we saw a family of **Chukar** on a hillside to bring our tour list to 245 species seen. After lunch we drove to the airport and flew back to the UK via Beijing, arriving the following day.



White-headed Duck



Fire-fronted Serin

SYSTEMATIC LIST FOR QINGHAI and XINJIANG TOUR – JUNE 2014

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

Greylag Goose

Bar-headed Goose

Whooper Swan

Ruddy Shelduck

Mallard

Eastern Spot-billed Duck

Red-crested Pochard

Common Pochard

Ferruginous Duck

Tufted Duck

White-headed Duck

Common Merganser

Anser anser

Anser indicus

Cygnus cygnus

Tadorna ferruginea

Anas platyrhynchos

Anas zonorhynchos

Netta rufina

Aythya ferina

Aythya nyroca

Aythya fuligula

Oxyura leucocephala

Mergus merganser

GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae

Chinese (Severtzov's) Grouse (Single observer)

Verreaux's Monal-Partridge

Szechenyi's Monal-Partridge

Himalayan Snowcock

Tibetan Snowcock

Przevalski's Partridge

Daurian Partridge

Tibetan Partridge

Chukar

Daurian Partridge

Blood Pheasant

White Eared Pheasant

Blue Eared Pheasant

Common Pheasant

Tetrastes sewerzowi

Tetraophasis obscurus

Tetraophasis szechenyi

Tetraogallus himalayensis

Tetraogallus tibetanus

Alectoris magna

Perdix dauurica

Perdix hodgsoniae

Alectoris chukar dzungarica

Perdix dauurica

Ithaginis cruentus

Crossoptilon crossoptilon

Crossoptilon auritum

Phasianus colchicus suehschanensis

PODICIPEDIFORMES: Podicipedidae

Great Crested Grebe

Black-necked Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

Podiceps nigricollis

CICONIIFORMES: Ciconiidae

Black Stork

Ciconia nigra

PELECANIFORMES: Ardeidae

Chinese Pond Heron

Grey Heron

Great Egret

Little Egret

Eastern Cattle Egret

Little Bittern

Ardeola bacchus

Ardea cinerea

Ardea alba

Egretta garzetta

Bubulcus coromandus

SULIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant

Phalacrocorax carbo

ACCIPITRIFORMES: Accipitridae

Bearded Vulture

Himalayan Vulture

Booted Eagle

Golden Eagle

Eurasian Sparrowhawk

Northern Goshawk

Black-eared Kite

Himalayan Buzzard

Upland Buzzard

Long-legged Buzzard

Gypaetus barbatus

Gyps himalayensis

Hieraaetus pennatus

Aquila chrysaetos

Accipiter nisus

Accipiter gentilis

Milvus migrans lineatus

Buteo burmanicus

Buteo hemilasius

Buteo rufinus

GRUIFORMES: Rallidae

Eurasian Coot

Common Moorhen

Fulica atra

Gallinula chloropus

GRUIFORMES: Gruidae

Black-necked Crane

Grus nigricollis

CHARADRIIFORMES: Ibisorhynchidae

Ibisbill

Ibisorhyncha struthersii

CHARADRIIFORMES: Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt

Himantopus himantopus

CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing

Little Ringed Plover

Lesser Sand Plover

Vanellus vanellus

Charadrius dubius

Charadrius mongolus atrifrons

CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae

Common Redshank

Common Sandpiper

Tringa totanus

Actitis hypoleucos

CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae

Brown-headed Gull

Black-headed Gull

Pallas's Gull

Caspian Gull

Mongolian Gull

Little Tern

Common Tern

Common Tern

Whiskered Tern

White-winged Tern

Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus

Chroicocephalus ridibundus

Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus

Larus cachinnans

Larus cachinnans mongolicus

Sternula albifrons

Sterna hirundo tibetana

Sterna hirundo hirundo

Chlidonias hybrida

Chlidonias leucopterus

Black Tern

Chlidonias niger

PTEROCLIFORMES: Pteroclididae

Tibetan Sandgrouse

Pallas's Sandgrouse

Syrrhaptes tibetanus

Syrrhaptes paradoxus

COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae

Rock Dove

Hill Pigeon

Snow Pigeon

Oriental Turtle Dove

Oriental Turtle Dove

Eurasian Collared Dove

Laughing Dove

Columba livia

Columba rupestris

Columba leuconota

Streptopelia orientalis orientalis

Streptopelia orientalis meena

Streptopelia decaocto

Streptopelia senegalensis

CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae

Common Cuckoo

Cuculus canorus

STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae

Little Owl

Athene noctua inapasta

APODIFORMES: Apodidae

Common Swift

Salim Ali's Swift

Apus apus pekinensis

Apus salimali

BUCEROTIFORMES: Upupidae

Eurasian Hoopoe

Upupa epops

PICIFORMES: Picidae

Eurasian Wryneck

Great Spotted Woodpecker

White-winged Woodpecker

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker

Black Woodpecker

Grey-headed Woodpecker

Jynx torquilla

Dendrocopos major stresemanni

Dendrocopos leucopterus

Picoides tridactylus tianschanicus

Dryocopus martius

Picus canus

FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae

Common Kestrel

Eurasian Hobby

Saker Falcon

Falco tinnunculus

Falco subbuteo

Falco cherrug

PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae

Isabelline Shrike

Isabelline (Xinjiang) Shrike

Red-tailed (Turkistan) Shrike

Grey-backed Shrike

Chinese (Tibetan) Grey Shrike

Lanius isabellinus tsaidamensis

Lanius isabellinus arenarius

Lanius phoenicuroides

Lanius tephronotus

Lanius sphenocercus giganteus

PASSERIFORMES: Dicruridae

Black Drongo

*Dicrurus macrocercus***PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae**

Eurasian Jay

Azure-winged Magpie

Eurasian Magpie

Spotted Nutcracker

Henderson's Ground Jay

Biddulph's Ground Jay

Red-billed Chough

Alpine Chough

Daurian Jackdaw

Eurasian Jackdaw

Eastern (Oriental) Rook

Oriental (Carrion) Crow

Large-billed Crow

Northern Raven

*Garrulus glandarius kansuensis**Cyanopica cyanus kansuensis**Pica pica bottanensis**Nucifraga caryocatactes macella**Podoces hendersoni**Podoces biddulphi**Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax himalayanus**Pyrrhocorax graculus digitatus**Coloeus dauuricus insolens**Coloeus monedula**Corvus frugilegus pastinator**Corvus corone orientalis**Corvus macrorhynchos tibetosinensis**Corvus corax tibetanus***PASSERIFORMES: Paridae**

Rufous-vented Tit

Coal Tit

Grey Crested Tit

White-browed Tit

Sichuan Tit

Azure Tit

Ground Tit

Japanese Tit

Japanese Tit

Great Tit

*Periparus rubidiventris**Periparus ater rufipectus**Lophophanes dichrous**Poecile superciliosus**Poecile weigoldicus**Cyanistes cyanus tianshanicus**Pseudopodoces humilis**Parus minor minor**Parus minor tibetanus**Parus major kapustini***PASSERIFORMES: Panuridae**

Bearded Reedling

*Panurus biarmicus***PASSERIFORMES: Alaudidae**

Oriental Skylark

Eurasian Skylark

Crested Lark

Horned Lark

Hume's Short-toed Lark

Mongolian Lark

Tibetan Lark

Tibetan Lark

Asian Short-toed Lark

*Alauda gulgula**Alauda arvensis**Galerida cristata**Eremophila alpestris khamensis**Calandrella acutirostris tibetana**Melanocorypha mongolica**Melanocorypha maxima maxima**Melanocorypha maxima holdereri**Alauda cheleensis***PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae**

Pale Martin

Barn Swallow

*Riparia diluta tibetana**Hirundo rustica*

Eurasian Crag Martin
Asian House Martin
Common House Martin
Red-rumped Swallow

Ptyonoprogne rupestris
Delichon dasypus
Delichon urbicum
Cecropis daurica

PASSERIFORMES: Aegithalidae

White-browed Tit-warbler
Crested Tit-warbler

Leptopoecile sophiae obscura
Leptopoecile elegans

PASSERIFORMES: Phylloscopidae

Smoky Warbler
Alpine Leaf Warbler
Yellow-streaked Warbler
Buff-barred Warbler
Gansu Leaf Warbler
Chinese Leaf Warbler
Greenish Warbler
Hume's Leaf Warbler
Hume's Leaf Warbler
Large-billed Leaf Warbler
Claudia's Leaf Warbler
Sichuan Leaf Warbler

Phylloscopus fuligiventer weigoldi
Phylloscopus occisinensis
Phylloscopus armandii armandii
Phylloscopus pulcher pulcher
Phylloscopus kansuensis
Phylloscopus yunnanensis
Phylloscopus trochiloides
Phylloscopus humei mandelli
Phylloscopus humei humei
Phylloscopus magnirostris
Phylloscopus claudiae
Phylloscopus forresti

PASSERIFORMES: Acrocephalidae

Great Reed Warbler
Eurasian Reed Warbler
Paddyfield Warbler

Acrocephalus arundinaceus
Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus
Acrocephalus agricola

PASSERIFORMES: Locustellidae

Spotted Bush Warbler
Savi's Warbler

Locustella thoracica
Locustella luscinioides

PASSERIFORMES: Leiothrichidae

Tibetan (Kozlov's) Babax
Giant Laughingthrush
Plain (Pere David's) Laughingthrush
Elliot's Laughingthrush

Babax koslowi
Garrulax maximus
Garrulax davidi
Trochalopteron elliotii

PASSERIFORMES: Sylviidae

Common Whitethroat
Desert (Small) Whitethroat
Barred Warbler
Chinese Fulvetta
Chinese Bush-Dweller

Sylvia communis
Sylvia minula
Sylvia nisoria
Fulvetta striaticollis
Rhopophilus pekinensis albosuperciliarus

PASSERIFORMES: Regulidae

Goldcrest

Regulus regulus yunnanensis

PASSERIFORMES: Troglodytidae

Eurasian Wren

*Troglodytes troglodytes szetschuanus***PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae**

Chinese Nuthatch

Przevalski's Nuthatch

Eurasian Nuthatch

*Sitta villosa bangsi**Sitta przewalskii**Sitta europaea seorsa***PASSERIFORMES: Tichodromidae**

Wallcreeper

*Tichodroma muraria***PASSERIFORMES: Certhiidae**

Eurasian Treecreeper

Eurasian Treecreeper

*Certhia familiaris tianschanica**Certhia familiaris bianchii***PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae**

White-cheeked Starling

Common Starling

*Spodiopsar cineraceus**Sturnus vulgaris***PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae**

Grandala

Common Blackbird

Chestnut Thrush

Kessler's Thrush

Mistle Thrush

*Grandala coelicolor**Turdus merula intermedius**Turdus rubrocanus gouldi**Turdus kessleri**Turdus viscivorus***PASSERIFORMES: Muscicapidae**

Bluethroat

White-bellied Redstart

White-tailed Rubythroat

Siberian Rubythroat

Himalayan Bluetail

Siberian Bluetail

Slaty-backed Flycatcher

Przevalski's (A La Shan) Redstart

Blue-capped Redstart

Eversmann's Redstart

Black Redstart

Hodgson's Redstart

White-throated Redstart

Güldenstädt's Redstart

Blue-fronted Redstart

Plumbeous Water Redstart

White-capped Redstart

Common Rock Thrush

Northern Wheatear

Isabelline Wheatear

Desert Wheatear

*Luscinia svecica**Luscinia phoenicuroides**Calliope pectoralis tschebaiewi**Calliope calliope**Tarsiger rufilatus rufilatus**Tarsiger cyanurus albocoeruleus**Ficedula hodgsonii**Phoenicurus alaschanicus**Phoenicurus coeruleocephala**Phoenicurus erythronotus**Phoenicurus ochruros rufiventris**Phoenicurus hodgsoni**Phoenicurus schisticeps**Phoenicurus erythrogastrus**Phoenicurus frontalis**Phoenicurus fuliginosus**Phoenicurus leucocephalus**Monticola saxatilis**Oenanthe oenanthe**Oenanthe isabellina**Oenanthe deserti*

Pied Wheatear

Oenanthe pleschanka

PASSERIFORMES: Cinclidae

White-throated Dipper

Cinclus cinclus przewalskii

PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae

Saxaul Sparrow

House Sparrow

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Rock Sparrow

Henri's Snowfinch

Tibetan (Black-winged) Snowfinch

White-rumped Snowfinch

Pere David's Snowfinch

Rufous-necked Snowfinch

Passer ammodendri stoliczkae

Passer domesticus

Passer montanus

Petronia petronia brevirostris

Montifringilla henrici

Montifringilla adamsi

Onychostruthus taczanowskii

Pyrgilauda davidiana

Pyrgilauda ruficollis

PASSERIFORMES: Prunellidae

Alpine Accentor

Robin Accentor

Rufous-breasted Accentor

Brown Accentor

Maroon-backed Accentor

Black-throated Accentor

Prunella collaris

Prunella rubeculoides

Prunella strophiata

Prunella fulvescens

Prunella immaculata

Prunella atrogularis

PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae

Eastern Yellow Wagtail

Citrine Wagtail

Tibetan (Citrine) Wagtail

Grey Wagtail

Himalayan Wagtail

Amur Wagtail

Masked Wagtail

Richard's Pipit

Tawny Pipit

Olive-backed Pipit

Rosy Pipit

Tree Pipit

Motacilla tschutschensis macronyx

Motacilla citreola citreola

Motacilla citreola calcarata

Motacilla cinerea

Motacilla alba alboides

Motacilla alba leucopsis

Motacilla alba personata

Anthus richardi

Anthus campestris

Anthus hodgsoni hodgsoni

Anthus roseatus

Anthus trivialis

PASSERIFORMES: Urocynchramidae

Przevalski's (Pink-tailed) Finch

Urocynchramus pylzowi

PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae

White-winged Grosbeak

Grey-headed Bullfinch

Mongolian Finch

Plain Mountain Finch

Brandt's Mountain Finch

Common Rosefinch

Mycerobas carnipes

Pyrrhula erythaca

Bucanetes mongolicus

Leucosticte nemoricola

Leucosticte brandti

Carpodacus erythrinus roseatus

Streaked Rosefinch
Spotted Great Rosefinch
Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch
Pink-rumped Rosefinch
Pale Rosefinch
Tibetan (Roborovski's) Rosefinch
Three-banded Rosefinch
Chinese White-browed Rosefinch
Red-fronted Rosefinch
Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch
Desert Finch
Common Linnet
Twite
Red-fronted Serin

Carpodacus rubicilloides
Carpodacus rubicilla
Carpodacus davidianus
Carpodacus waltoni
Carpodacus stoliczkae beicki
Carpodacus roborowskii
Carpodacus trifasciatus
Carpodacus dubius
Carpodacus puniceus
Chloris sinica
Rhodospiza obsoleta
Carduelis cannabina
Linaria flavirostris miniakensis
Serinus pusillus

PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae

Pine Bunting
Pine Bunting
Godlewski's Bunting
Meadow Bunting
Red-headed Bunting
Tibetan (Kozlov's) Bunting
Black-faced Bunting
Common Reed Bunting

Emberiza l. leucocephalos
Emberiza leucocephalos fronto
Emberiza godlewskii
Emberiza cioides
Emberiza bruniceps
Emberiza koslowi
Emberiza spodocephala
Emberiza schoeniclus centralasiae



Tibetan Partridge

Zoothera Qinghai and Xinjiang 2014

Mammals and Others

MAMMALS

Taxonomy

(For references and bibliography see Appendix 1)

Classification and nomenclature is based on Duff and Lawson (2004); itself, based on earlier versions of the major reference work by Wilson and Reader (2005).

This taxonomy is different from that used in both Smith and Xie (2008) and each of Wilson and Mittermeier 2009 and 2011.

However, in the present context, the important differences are few and this is indicated where appropriate. As the Handbook of The Mammals of the World progresses, and later versions of Wilson and Reader are issued, they will become the default taxonomies; for a while!

The scholarly Smith and Xie (2008); is the outstanding guide to the mammals of the region. This particular version of Smith and Xie is the 'full' (ie hardback) version which contains some additional information to the more convenient paperback version.

Most of the tour group saw most of the species detailed below; exceptions are indicated.

Order: LAGOMORPHA (Rabbits, Hares and allies)

Family: Ochotonidae (Pikas)

Superficially, Pikas look more like Guinea Pigs (which are Rodents) than Lagomorphs.

The tour covered areas where at least eleven species of Pika could, potentially, have been seen. Many species are difficult to identify without expertise and experience, as testified by the key in Smith and Xie (2008) [where features that are not observable in the field must be compared in many cases]. The pelage of most species is highly variable and differences are compounded by seasonal changes and moults; they would have looked different in July and August.

Pika taxonomy has also been the subject of review and different authorities have different opinions on species status.

Black-lipped (Plateau) Pika *Ochotona curzoniae*

Seen on ten days of the tour in a variety of moist plateau grassland areas. Numbers were very high at some sites.

A key species, whose activities and huge bio-mass contributes enormously to the whole plateau ecosystem. They provide resources such as food for predators and refuge/breeding holes for many other species.

Glover's Pika *Ochotona gloveri*

Several seen on Mon 16 June. Observed around walls, dwellings and rocks at the base and lower levels of the cliffs at the 'Rosefinch' site.

An attractive Pika that did show some of the colour patterns as per the illustration in Smith and Xie (2008). The distribution map within Smith and Xie (2008) indicates that we were very much at the edge of the illustrated range for this species.

This was the site where a number of particularly large and alert dogs, guarding a small temple, prevented us from climbing higher. However, we saw the birds anyway!

Large-eared Pika *Ochotona macrotis*

Seen on Fri 13 and Sat 14 June and again on Thu 19 and Fri 20 June.

Found at higher elevations than the Plateau Pika; it is also less abundant – proportionally – in the areas where it does occur.

Moupin Pika *Ochotona thibetana*

A Pika, seen by one member of the group (CH) on Wed 18 June (within the coniferous forest area opposite the monastery), was assigned to this species. This was a medium elevation mountain site (at least for China) and the animal was in rocky cover under trees (ie not in a meadow or a clearing). We were at the edge of the given distribution range for this species.

Tsing-Ling Pika *Ochotona huangensis*

A Pika seen by all members of the group (and photographed by many) was seen at the Huzhu Beishan site on Sun 8 June.

The animal was deep within mixed coniferous and (mostly) deciduous woodland; there was neither a clearing nor (particularly) a meadow nearby. The animal foraged from a burrow at the base of a shrub within the woodland (and was photographed so doing).

The narrative within Smith and Xie (2008) mostly aptly describes this species.

However, this is a difficult call. The species is little known, endemic and we were very much at the edge of its' described range.

This species is not recognised in Duff and Lawson (2004).

General Comments on Pikas *Ochotona* spp.

It is quite likely that we saw other species of Pika considering the difficulties of in-field identification and the range of sites and geography that the tour covered.

The tour can be reasonably sure of Plateau Pika, Large-eared Pika and (despite the distribution range) Glovers' Pika. Of the other species; there is a much lower degree of certainty.

The Tsing-Ling Pika (*O. huangensis*) has been regarded as a sub-species of the Moupin Pika, (*O. thibetana*) by some authorities and, in turn, the Moupin has been lumped with the Gansu Pika (*O. cansus*) under *O. thibetana* – all of which emphasises the superficial similarity of many of the species. Some of the Plateau Pikas (*O. curzoniae*) – at lower (and potentially damper) elevations – may have been Daurian Pikas (*O. daurica*), with a broadly similar ecology to the Plateau Pika (with which it was previously lumped). Other realistic options also exist but should not be claimed. All of which serves to emphasise the difficulties of identification.

Family: Leporidae (Rabbits and Hares)

Whilst the European Rabbit *Orytolagus cuniculus* has been successfully (sic) introduced to many parts of the world; only the hares, *Lepus*, occur in China.

Three species were encountered on the tour.

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*

China's largest species of hare by a significant margin.

Seen on no less than 14 days of the tour; overwhelmingly during the 1st (ie Qinghai) leg of the trip. Although largely nocturnal and retiring; we managed to see a large number of animals during the day. Most of the sightings were of singletons. However, on Wed 18 June – on our way to the forest area opposite the monastery – hares were both particularly abundant and interacting ('pre-boxing' stand-offs and other mating season activities).

The pelage is quite variable and animals undertake a moult for summer; all leading to the wide variety of hues and coat thicknesses that we saw. Well adapted to very cold winters and encountered at high altitudes.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*

An attractive medium sized hare that we encountered on Thu 26 and Sat 28 June (when we disturbed several). The wide black stripe that runs through the centre of the off-white tail being distinctive. We were not within the current range map (*) – according Smith and Xie (2008) – for this largely nocturnal species. [* Whilst useful at the broad macro level, the maps offer insufficient granularity at anything like the local level (understandably for such a huge country and a book that covers all species)].

Yarkand (Tarim Basin) Hare *Lepus yarkandensis*

One of China's smallest hares and another attractive species. Seen on Mon 23 June in the Tarim and, by both distribution and appearance, the only species it could have been. Several seen amongst the sands and Tamarisk.

General Comments on Hares *Lepus* spp.

The Desert Hare *L. tibetanus* offers a more compelling distribution range than the Tolai Hare *L. tolai*. They also have many observable similarities – eg dark ear tips and tail stripe – as well as more difficult similarities and differences; although photographs show the Desert having larger ears. They were previously lumped. So, as with the Pikas, identification is challenging.

Order: RODENTIA (Rodents)

Family: Sciuridae (Squirrels)

Grey Marmot *Marmota baibacina*

Marmots are 'giant' (in the literal sense) ground squirrels (within which sub-family they belong). The vernacular name, ie 'grey' is not very helpful in identification. Whilst some young animals were quite grey; most individuals (particularly the adults) were not. Seen on both Thu 26 June and Fri 27 June,

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*

The largest of China's four species of marmot (to 9kg) and the country's third largest rodent. This species was seen on 12 separate days and in a variety of habitats - from rocky scree in the alpine zone (lower numbers) to plateau meadows and drier grasslands (higher numbers in both cases).

Family: Muridae (Mice, Rats, Voles and Gerbils)

A number of Murids were observed; classification was another matter. With a number of potential options; most will remain unknown and unclassified.

Mongolian Five-toed Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica*

A desiccated (ie *dead*) animal found in Chaka Basin at the Henderson's Ground-Jay site. This record is included as it may be of use to anyone charting species distribution.

Tibetan Dwarf Hamster *Cricetulus tibetanus*

Seen by several of the group on Mon 14 June. Photographic evidence definitely suggests the genus *Cricetulus* with *C. tibetanus* being the most likely.

Smokey Vole *Lasiopodomys fuscus*

A vole, seen by one member of the group (CH) on Fri 13 June was assigned to this species.

This was previously included in *Pitymys leucurus* and is listed in Duff and Lawson (2004) as such *Microtus (Phaiomys) leucurus* – Blyth's Vole – emphasising the complex taxonomy and identification of Murids.

Order: CARNIVORA (Carnivores)**Family: Felidae (Cats)****Pallas' Cat** *Felis manul*

Unmistakable and a great find!

A single animal seen on Fri 13 June. Initially sighted at 15:10 and watched, on and off (the animal entered a small gully for a while) for 30 minutes. It was still clearly visible at 15:40 when we had to continue our journey. Observed at an altitude of 4,340m near the Er La Pass.

The encounter included some extraordinary behaviour from the cat.

The cat started to stalk and eventually assumed a crouching position; nothing unusual there. It then began to make curious facial gestures and apparent vocalisations, it also kept 'shuddering'. We have no way of knowing whether it was making any noises (it was not sufficiently close). It was almost as if it were 'pishing' to entice prey. It subsequently pounced, captured a vole or small pika and ate it.

Family: Canidae (Dogs and Foxes)**Tibetan Fox** *Vulpes ferrilata*

A wonderful fox with a curious head/muzzle structure and 'facial expression'

Seen on seven occasions over 14 to 20 June (excepting 17 June) in open high plateau areas.

Many animals were seen ranging from singletons (mostly) to adults with cubs (on several occasions). Searching and hunting behaviour was observed, including the catching and eating of Pikas – the universal staple! Slightly lighter (weight wise) than the Red Fox but chunkier looking and with shorter legs.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

A family of four (adults and two cubs) seen on Mon 9 June at the Huzhu Beishan site early in the morning returning to their earth. Whilst clearly a Red Fox (white tail tip and black lower legs etc); these foxes were considerably paler than those found in the UK; they were not substantially darker than some of the Tibetan Foxes.

Grey Wolf *Canis lupus*

The largest wild Canid and always a pleasure to see. The Tibetan Wolves (Smith and Xie (2008) give two sub-species for Qinghai; *C. l. chanco* and *C. l. filchneri*) are not grey; they are a wonderful brown/grey/rufus colour. They are, however, large and robust and must cope with a demanding winter.

A family pack of four animals (adults and two cubs) were seen on Sat 14 June. The sighting started at 18:20 and, initially, only the male was seen.

The encounter was a 'tragic-comedy'. It involved a cast that included a large male wolf, a huge flock of particularly big sheep, a shepherd on horseback and four members of the Chinese army on foot wielding clubs. The opening scene ended with the death of at least three sheep and a ram losing its tail.

The male wolf eventually crossed the road (in front of us) – empty mouthed – and, to our surprise, met up with a female wolf and two fairly well developed cubs [all of which had been hiding within a gully]. To cap it all, one of the cubs was lame in one leg and moved less freely than its sibling. The story is best recounted over a drink at the Birdfair!

We stopped watching at 18:45, with the wolves still in view, in order to continue our journey.

Although on the edge of a vast plateau, the site was not far from a small town and there were construction workings very near to where the female and cub had secreted themselves. What future for this pack which is a known livestock killer?

Order: ARTIODACTYLA (Even-toed Ungulates)

FAMILY: Cervidae (Deer)

Wapiti (Elk, Red Deer) *Cervus canadensis*

A very good find and one that precipitated much discussion and analysis in the field and thereafter.

The single animal, seen on Thu 26 June, was a good-sized male in velvet. The distribution map confirmed that we were in range and, furthermore, confirmed that no other 'suitable' deer was in range.

Smith and Xie (2008) describe the Red Deer as, "Very rare and restricted in China."; although it is also described as widely distributed.

The Red Deer, which is widely distributed across North America, Eurasia and NW Africa, has undergone significant taxonomic revision in recent years. According to Wilson and Mittermeier (2011) the species that we observed in Xinjiang was the Wapiti *C. Canadensis*. However, they also state that, "Several genetic studies have recently tried to clarify the taxonomy of this species, but their results are not always concordant."

Thorolds Deer (White-Lipped Deer) *Cervus albirostris*

A group of 45 animals (actual count) was seen well on Sun 15 June. A more modest number (approximately 5) were seen on Tue 10 June. The use of digital photography, with the ability to zoom and enhance, clearly revealed the trade-mark facial markings of this species.

Thorolds (which Smith and Xie (2008) classify as *Przewalskium albirostris*) is mainly a forest deer but will venture into open glades and meadows. An endemic deer that has been introduced to other countries for farming and for hunting.

FAMILY: Bovidae (Cattle, Antelope, Sheep and Goats)

Tibetan Gazelle *Gazella picticaudata*

Seen over five days, 14, 15 and 16 June and again on 19 and 20 June; a pattern that very much followed that of the Kiang.

Our only antelope and always a pleasant encounter. Numbers varied – almost exactly mirroring the quality of grassland – from 'groups' of 1 or 2 to 20 to 30.

Bharal (Blue Sheep / Greater Blue Sheep) *Pseudois nayaur*

Seen on four occasions; 12, 16, 17 and 18 June in a range of predominantly high, steep and rocky settings. Sightings varied from 'groups' of 1 or 2 to as many as 27 (actual count). An attractive ungulate. Our sightings included a number of particularly resplendent males.

Yak *Bos mutus*

We did NOT see wild Yak. The purpose of including this summary is to explain the situation re what we did see (as some people have asked). We saw:-

- Domesticated yak (mostly black but also other colours, including mixtures, and whites). These were managed – to varying degrees – and mostly corralled or 'watched' at night in some way.
- Free-range domesticated yak – as the name implies, these were more free-roaming with less management. However, they were not wild and not even feral (ie domestics 'returned' to the wild). They are watched-over and accounted for.
- Yak / Cattle crosses – referred to variously as dzho, zho, zo and, simply, yakow. These are all typically managed.

Wild yak occur in areas that we did not cover; remote and generally far from people. They are black and *considerably* larger than virtually anything we saw.

Order: PERISSODACTYLA (Odd-toed Ungulates)**FAMILY: Equidae (Horses)****Kiang (Asiatic Wild Ass) *Equus kiang***

An attractive horse seen in varying numbers on 14 and 15 June and again on 19 and 20 June.

Numbers seen on the Sat 14 June were particularly high – both in terms of numbers of 'groups' and the size of individual herds (with several reaching almost 50 individuals). On our tour the animals were always encountered on large plateaus; whether they were grassy (higher numbers) or higher and more stony (lower numbers).

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REPTILES and AMPHIBIANS

The number of herps seen was small; both in an absolute sense and in terms of likely species.

Two Agama type lizards – both cryptic – were seen on 10 and 24 June.

At least four species of frog/toad were seen; two of which showed quite distinctive body patterns.

Their taxonomy is still being considered. One species, below, was identified.

Class: AMPHIBIA (Amphibians)

Order: ANURA (Frogs and Toads) [means without a tail]

Family: BUFONIDAE

Asiatic Toad (Chusan Island Toad / Chinese Toad) (*Bufo gargarizans*)

A medium/large adult seen on Fri 25 June. A species closely related to the 'Common' Toad *Bufo bufo* which occurs in the UK. The Asiatic Toad is endemic to Eastern Asia and is common throughout most of China. Unfortunately, it has turned-up in Madagascar and there is a fear that the impact may be as that of the Marine (Cane) Toad *Bufo marinus* / *Rhinella marina* in Australia.

Many thanks to Kevin Bryan for the mammal and other animal list.



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