



2018_14 Days Qinghai & Tibet Birding Tour



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Jun 30 - July 13, 2013



Summary

In Sichuan, the rainy July brings lots of uncertainties in its mountainous areas. My memory of being trapped in the middle of a journey because of heavy rain is still fresh and scary. In the same season of this year, I went to Qinghai-Tibet Plateau instead to look for birds with two friends. It turned out to be another journey accompanied by rains. We only had two days birding without rains during our two-week birding trip. Luckily, the flat topography on Qinghai and Tibet Plateau saved us from the embarrassment of being trapped on road by landslides caused by heavy rain. We could at least look for birds from our vehicle during raining time and go to the field to search for birds when rain stops.



Potala Palace

We traveled through areas with an elevation range from 2500 to 4700 meters. Most of times, we searched for birds in areas with an elevation of about 3000 meters. We searched for birds in a variety of habitats including coniferous and broad-leaved mixed forests, coniferous forests, deserts, lakes, alpine scrubs, alpine meadows and alpine screes. Though we traveled through a great variety of complex habitats and did not see many species of birds as we normally birding in lower elevation areas, we saw some great birds endemic to Qinghai-Tibet Plateau such as some

raptors, snowfinches, redstarts and larks.



Tibetan Eared Pheasant

During this trip, we saw totally 148 species of birds including 8 species of larks, 8 species of redstarts, 5 species of snowfinches, 10 species of Corvus, 4 species of falcons, 3 species of pheasants and one species of crane plus some rosefinches, laughingthrushes, water birds, woodpeckers, and warblers, etc. Based on A Checklist on the Classification and Distribution of the Birds of China (Third Edition) by Zheng Guangmei, we saw 13 species of endemic bird species during this trip. They are Rusty-necklaced Partridge, Tibetan Eared Pheasant, White-browed Tit, Ground Tit, Gansu Leaf Warbler, Crested Tit-warbler, Plain Laughingthrush,

Elliot's Laughingthrush, Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush, Chinese Thrush, Pink-tailed Pinktail, Tibetan Snowfinch and Tibetan Rosefinch.

Details of the Trip:

1. Xining

We went to a local geo-park around Xining in search of birds. Before we arrived at the park, we encountered our first bird named Eurasian Tree Sparrow in a street in Xining. This bird is a pretty common bird with great vitality and found almost everywhere in China. We drove into the geo-park. In less than 10 minutes, we heard chirping of a bird. So, we got out of our car and started our search for the chirping birds. It was Godlewski's Bunting. Its color matches the background so well that it took us some time to locate the bird. After that, we saw Red-billed Chough, Plain Laughingthrush, Black-billed Magpie, Black Redstart, Grey-capped Greenfinch and Hill Pigeon.



Godlewski's Bunting

After this search, we drove on to our next place to continue our birding. When we drove past a patch of small trees, we saw a black bird flying from one tree to another. We stopped immediately to search for the bird. It's a Great Spotted Woodpecker known as forest doctor. The bird climbed from the lower part to the higher part of the tree trunk, checking one tree after another. Here we saw Common Pheasant, Chestnut Thrush and White Wagtail. Suddenly, it started raining. We



Common Coot

returned to our car and planned to continue our birding when rain stopped. However instead of coming to a stop, the rain became heavier and heavier. So, we decided to call it a day after waiting for some time and drove back to our hotel. It was still raining the next day. However, real birders could be never hold at hotel by rain. We spent lots of time in the field and all of us were well-equipped with rain gear. After early breakfast, we put on our raincoat and went to a wetland park near our hotel to search for birds,

where we saw Great Crested Grebe, Grey Heron, Mallard, Gadwall, Chinese Spot-billed Duck, Common Pochard, Common Coot, Common Moorhen, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Eurasian Collared Dove. Then we walked back to our car with wet shoes and trousers for our birding in the next site.

2. Huzhubeishan

As one of few parks near Xining City with abundant vegetation, Huzhubeishan Forest Park is a great site for birding. However, we were not so lucky with the weather, it rained most of the time during our visit so we had to stay in our car and look for birds from our car and got little chance to walk in the forest to search for birds. Even in that way, we saw quite number of beautiful birds such as Common Rosefinch, Chinese White-browed Rosefinch, Pink-rumped Rosefinch, Grey-headed Bullfinch, White-winged Grosbeak, Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Himalayan Bluetail, White-throated Redstart, White Capped Redstart, Elliot's Laughingthrush, Gansu Leaf Warbler, Brown-breasted Accentor, Great Cuckoo, White-throated Dipper, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Eurasian Wren, the great climber Great Spotted Woodpecker and Hodgson's Treecreeper and lovely mammal Himalayan Marmot. We missed some of our target birds because of the poor weather. We had to pray for good luck on our next visit.



Common Rosefinch



Elliot's Laughingthrush

3. Datong Forest Park

Our first morning in Datong was a cloudy day with some morning light. Being affected by the abundant rains in the previous days, we packed very early and started our search for birds early. It became pretty dark when we arrived at our birding site, a clear sign of rain. Luckily, we encountered a bird flock before the coming of the rain. We saw Red Crossbill, a very unique bird, colorful White-browed Tit Warbler and Crested Tit Warbler, Chinese Nuthatch and White-cheeked Nuthatch, which feed on tree from top toward bottom, noisy Rufous-vented Tit, Chinese Thrush with their beautiful songs, and a great number of Grey-capped Greenfinch. Barely had we fully enjoyed their beauty, it started to rain and the drizzling rain soon turned into a heavy shower. We had to walk back to our car and continued our birding from the car window. We saw an Oriental Turtle Dove and a Large-billed Crow, and a Siberian Rubythroat singing on a twig of a roadside tree. Later on, in a nearby village, we found a Common Kestrel and a small flock of Durian Jackdaw.



White-browed Tit-warbler



Crested Tit-warbler



White-rumped Snowfinch

4. Qinghai Lake

As the largest inland lake of China, Qinghai Lake is one of the important breeding grounds for Black-necked Crane, which is the only crane breeding on Tibetan Plateau. We arrived at Qinghai Lake in the morning, where we saw countless breeding Great Crested Grebe and Common Coot, beautiful Black-necked Grebe, Red-crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Ruddy Shelduck and Bar-headed Goose which can fly over Mt. Qomolangma, we also saw some water birds such as Black-winged Stilt featuring with two long legs. On the grassland nearby, we also spotted some birds related to this kind of habitats such as White-rumped Snowfinch, Horned Lark, Hume's Short-toed Lark, Isabelline Wheatear, and

Ground Tit. We spent the rest of the morning scanning the wetlands nearby with our spotting scope but failed to find our most important target bird the Black-necked Crane. Instead, we saw the heads of two Whooper Swan in distance.



Bar-headed Goose

After lunch, we drove to another wetland to continue our search for Black-necked Crane. To get there, we had to drive past a small grassland, where we spotted a cute Père David's Snowfinch, a Tibetan Lark in much bigger size and relatively bright-colored Mongolian Lark, one soaring Upland Buzzard and two flying Eurasian Hobby. After this, eventually, we saw two Black-necked Cranes with chicks. Now and then the chicks reached their head out of reed grass, giving us very cute looks. Here we also saw Eurasian Curlew with long curved beak, Brown-headed Gull flying over us and hundreds of Great Cormorants which made the place in front of us filled with black spots.



Black-necked Crane



Przevalski's Pinktail



Streaked Rosefinch

5. Rubber Mountain

Rubber Mountain has been a hot birding spot for quite a while because here is the best place to look for a unique endemic bird in China called Pink-tailed Pinktail, a bird of its own family. We headed to a gully going up to the Rubber Mountain. On the way to the gully, we saw White-rumped Snowfinch, Rufous-necked Snowfinch, Ground Tit and Black Redstart on the grassland as we walked across. While we got close to the entrance of the gully, we saw several big birds fighting with each other. After looking closely, we found that it was two Saker Falcon trying to chase away a Himalayan Vulture who got into their territory. After some close observation, we walked on toward the gully. Once we were in the gully, shrubs appeared on both sides of the trail. This is the typical habitat for Pink-tailed Bunting, so we became fully attentive to any sound and movement from the shrubs. We saw twites flying between the shrub tops. After walking about 200 meters, we saw a pink bird dropped into the shrubs about 20 meters away from us. We stopped and looked at the shrubs very closely. Just as we

had expected, the bird flew out and perched on the top of shrub for quite a while, giving us a great time to appreciate its beauty. Then we headed on and spotted Streaked Rosefinch, Robin Accentor and a nursing Brown Accentor. Later on, when we climbed over the pass, we saw Tibetan Snowfinch which is another endemic bird in China.

6. Chaka

The habitats around Chaka are deserts that are dry with little rainfall. Here we hoped to find some desert birds. Birders come here mostly to search for Mongolian Ground Jay and Palla's Sandgrouse. However, we did not have good luck this time as we did not see these two birds, though we tried several sites where these birds had been recorded. We saw some desert birds such as Blanford's Snowfinch, Common Swift, Isabelline Wheatear, Northern Wheatear, Mongolian Finch and Isabelline Shrike. In the evening, we found a Eurasian Golden Oriole in a wood near the town. We drove



Blanford's Snowfinch

to another site to continue our search the next morning but this normally dry place started to rain. We made several rounds of search on the desert but in vain. However, we spotted a Rusty-necklaced Partridge in a valley not so far away from our searching sites. It was a nice surprising compensation to us.



Rusty-necklaced Partridge

7. Ela Mountain

Ela Mountain Pass at an elevation of 4,499 meters is the highest place on this trip. When we arrived at Ela Mountain Pass, we felt the attitude as soon as started to walk after we got off our car. It was really tough to climb up to the mountain to search for birds. After climbing about 100 meters, one of our birding friends decided to give up and walked back. Another birding friend and I continued to climb up. It did not take us long before we found out target bird here, the Tibetan Rosefinch. After fully appreciating the beauty of the bird, we turned back. On the way back



Tibetan Rosefinch

we saw some more birds such as Tibetan Snowfinch, White-rumped Snowfinch, Rufous-necked Snowfinch, Tibetan Lark, White-winged Redstart, Lammergeier and Himalayan Vulture.

8. Lhasa

As a holy place for Tibetan Buddhism, Lhasa not only serves as the cultural and tourism center in whole Tibetan area but also a great site for birding because the harmonious relations between people and wildlife as well as the strong sense of conservation among local Tibetan people has made it a paradise for birds. In Lhasa, we went to our regular site which is a mountain to look for our target bird Tibetan Eared Pheasant. The thick fog in the morning made our search not so successful. Despite the thick fog, we saw White-browed Tit, Giant Babax, Brown-cheeked Laughingthrush, White-browed Tit Warbler and Hoopoe. Just before we gave up and planned to go back to Lhasa, we heard the calls of Tibetan Eared Pheasant. Following the call, we

successfully found a big flock of Tibetan Eared Pheasants with about 20 adult birds and over 10 young chicks. After the Tibetan Eared Pheasant, we drove back to Lhasa to continue our search in a local park. Our target bird is Derbyan Parakeet. The population of these birds is on the decrease in recent years. Now it has become very hard to see them in nature because of natural reasons and human capture. We did not hold a big expectation to see this bird here. We walked around the park and some regular birds we had seen. Just at the time when we walked to the main gate to leave, I saw five big birds with long tails flew to a treetop about 50 meters from us and perched there. I immediately called my friends and set the spotting scope to see the details. Yes, they were Derbyan Parakeet. We enjoyed the beauty of these birds through our spotting scope. These five parakeets made a perfect conclusion to our birding trip.



Derbyan Parakeet



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