



*3 Days Birding Excursion in Shaanxi*





# 3 Days Birding Excursion in Shaanxi

*December 2016 - Philip He*



## *Details*

### **Trip Briefing**

We got an inquiry from Susan for two and a half days' private trip to see and photograph Crested Ibis and other birds. After knowing that Susan is a very experienced birder who has started birding from the age of 14, and both Susan and her husband Philip were graduated from world top universities in the US, I got a little bit nervous, because we care about the satisfaction of our clients and we know the needs of clients are so different. I asked Susan whether they need a professional bird guide or an amateur bird guide like me who also know most of the local birds but may need to check the field guide for some difficult birds such as warblers, to my surprise, Susan told me they are happy to travel with me. Because of business need, Philip travels extensively in China with Susan. This gives them lots of opportunities to see birds in different parts of China.

### **Meet Clients**

I arrived Xi'an by a night train from Chengdu to Xi'an around 8:00 p.m and got to Xi'an Shangri-La Hotel at 9:30 a.m. Upon arrival, I sent an email to Susan telling her that I was already in her hotel and was told she was enjoying a short morning culture tour in Xi'an. Sitting on the hotel couch, I was thinking of the way we could make this trip the most enjoyable. I have guided similar trips in southwest Shaanxi before but this time, my clients are well-known professors, very experienced birders, and photographers. I need to be sure I am fully prepared for any unexpected requests so that they could enjoy their trip best with AlpineBirding. My deep thinking was interrupted by a very gentle and polite voice, this must be Philip. I raised my head seeing a smiling lady wearing binoculars walking towards me with two gentlemen, I immediately responded with confidence: 'you must be Susan'. We shook hands with each other and talked briefly. It happened that the name of Susan's Husband is also Philip. Susan is so smart that she said from now she would call me Philip but call her husband Phil so as to not cause any confusion. Susan told me that they needed to go back to their room, pack and check out. I waited in the hotel lobby with their Chinese friend Mr. Chen who is also a nice person. I had a great time chatting with Mr. Chen who impressed me deeply with his great knowledge and good manner.

### **Trip Start**

After meeting Susan again in several minutes, we loaded their luggage to the van and said goodbye to Mr. Chen. We stopped at a restaurant for lunch before we got on the high way to Yangxian, the hometown of Crested Ibis.

After lunch, we drove to the highway heading to Yangxian. For birders, driving on the highway might be the most boring time, you can't see many birds and even you happen to see a good one, you can't stop to have a close look. We had a couple of stops to stretch our legs and had some brief birding. The boring hours in the afternoon, the limited space of highway service area and the winter season made our birding not fruitful. We only saw some large-billed Crown on the tree and a number of other very common birds. Once we got to Yangxian, we decided to drive to the field immediately so as to make the best use of our time. What I saw there horrified me when we were approaching our birding destination along a paved road, the road I knew well is being reconstructed. It becomes very bumpy and the air is full of dust from those passing trucks with heavy loads. We drove on to a relatively quiet place by the side of stream, we stopped for birding. As soon as we walked to the edge, I found some Crested Ibis feeding in the stream along with some Little Egret.



**Crested Ibis**

We set up the spotting scope and enjoyed a great view of those lovely birds. When we searched along the river, we found some plovers such as Wood Sandpiper, a Solitary Snipe, Common Sandpiper, White Wagtail, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Fork-tailed Swift, Grey Heron, Great Cormorant in flight and some other birds. When I searched further place of the stream, I saw an Intermediate Egret feeding under a bridge.



**Silver-throated Tit**

It's getting dark. We decided to call it a day, just when we got into our van, I saw a flock of Silver-throated Tit in the tree by the side of the road, I immediately asked the driver to stop to see these lovely tits. After that, we drove back to our hotel and check-in. After talking to Susan and Phil about their preferences over dinner option, we decided to try a local popular hotpot restaurant. Once we walked into the hotpot restaurant, Susan and Phil immediately got attention from the diners. One couple even came to us with their baby child to ask for a photo with Susan and Phil.

We had a great time in the restaurant. After dinner, we settled the breakfast time and departure time, I said goodnight to Susan and Phil.

## Birding and Photograph Birds in Yangxian and on the way to Foping

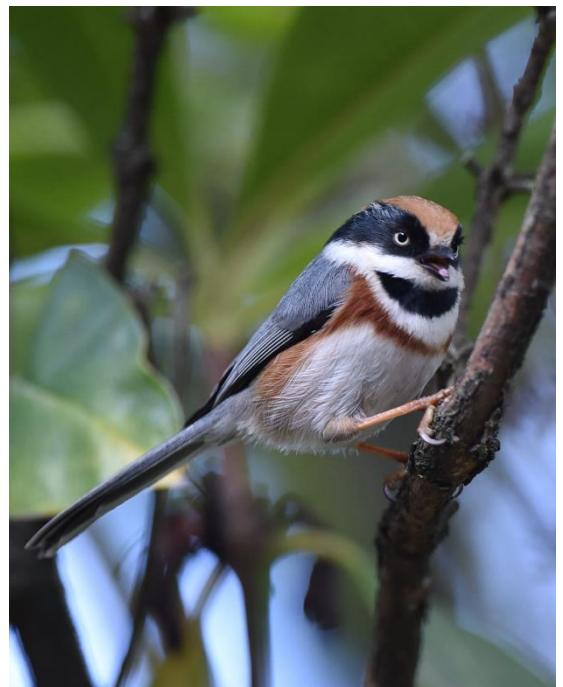
According to our plan, we will spend about half-day birding in the Yangxian. We leave our hotel as we have planned and drive to the field started our search for birds. We also start our birding from roughly the same site as yesterday. Because of road work, it is difficult for us to drive further.



**White-browed Laughingthrush**

So we decide to leave the driver in the parking lot and walk to the forest to search for some new birds. Walking through the farmlands, we come to a small hill, and start our search for birds in the bushes. We see quite a number of birds in the bushes and village such as Eurasian Turtle Dove, White-browed Laughingthrush, Red-billed Liothrix, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Grey-capped Greenfinch, Brambling, Black-throated Tit, Brown-breasted Bulbul, Oriental Skylark, Asian short-toed Lark, Yellow-throated Bunting, Brown Bush Warbler, Japanese Tit, Daurian Redstart, and Himalayan Bluetail. Around afternoon, we walk back to our van and drive to the town, enjoy a delicious lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch, we drive towards Foping, our next destination. Foping is the core part of Qinling Mountain and a great place for birds. Unfortunately, Foping Nature Reserve has been closed to visitors. But still it is a very charming place for birders. To ensure we get more birding time, we decide to take the normal road instead of the high way. I keep search for birds along the road, we find Brown Dipper, Crested Kingfisher, White-capped Water Redstart, Black-throated Tit, and Brown-breasted Bulbul. On one side, I find some ducks swimming in the river in distance, I immediately ask the driver to stop and there we find about 30 plus Mandarin Duck.



**Black-throated Tit**

By the time we get to Foping, it is already 5:20 p.m, we check in at our hotel. Foping is much smaller than Yangxian in terms of town size and there are much less choices for good restaurants. We drive to a restaurant that looks pretty nice and unique. The food served there is not so delicious as the food we have enjoyed in restaurants in Yangxian. After dinner, we decide to have our own breakfast at 7:00 next morning instead of waiting for the

breakfast provided by the hotel at 8:00. Because the hotel does not provide staff room, our driver and I have to go to a nearby hotel and stay there.

### **Morning Birding, Photograph Golden Monkey and Scenic Driving**

In the early morning, we come to the restaurant and get breakfast ready in the lobby of the hotel where Susan and Phil stay. After breakfast, we drive towards Panda Valley to photograph Golden Monkey. While we are driving along the winding road, I keep looking for any birds that appeared along the river. After a while, we decide to stop and walk along the road so as to get a closer look, we find Common Kingfisher standing on the top of road ready to target at any fish appear from the small pond by the side of the rock and a Crested Kingfisher standing on another rock about 5 meters away. While we are searching Susan finds a Forktail which she is not very sure, because the bird keeps moving between the rocks and occasionally showing Susan small part of its body. We try to get a nice view from different angle and eventually I get full view, it is Little Forktail.



**Golden Snub-nosed Monkey**

Susan believes that she has also got a brief view of Forktail with long tail, so we keep searching. Eventually I find the bird walking to my full view and it is White-crowned Forktail. So far she hasn't seen any forktails in China. The encounter of these lovely birds makes Susan quite excited. We move on towards our destination, we get into the valley by their park golf car and walk along a short mud trail into the forest. As soon as we get close to the forest, I hear the sound from the Golden Snub-nosed Monkey moving from tree to tree. Though the monkeys are just a couple of hundred meters away, the heavy mist makes it difficult for us to gain a good view of those cute animals. We could do nothing but wait. Luckily, the mist gradually moves away from us, we get clearer view of the monkeys. Obviously the monkeys have got used to human beings. They show no signs of fear toward us. They even climb down to the ground and look for the corn spread on the ground by the park staff.

We get great photos of the monkeys. While Phil and I are obsessed with photographing monkeys from different angles, Susan quietly walks away and after a while, she comes back to us and tells us she saw Goldcrest and Crimson-breasted Woodpecker. We decide to leave the monkeys and start to search for birds again. When we climb down to the only panda enclosure inside this park,



we see a brown and white panda sleeping on the wooden platform made by the park. Suddenly I hear the call of Elliot's Laughingthrush, and call Susan to my side to see this bird. After this laughingthrush, we find it is already about 12:30 and we decide to move to our van. We have lunch in a local family restaurant. The owner is a middle-aged kind-looking lady who does all the works, cooking, serving and cashier. But restaurant is rather simple but quite warm and the food is quite delicious. After lunch, we drive on towards the airport. We just plan to have some short stops for birds. The boring afternoon hours for birders make us see very few birds. However, driving along the winding road through the valley is very scenic. By the time we get to the airport, it is already 6:30 p.m. The train station where I will take the night train back is about two hours driving distance away and my train is scheduled to leave at 9:02 p.m. After asking Susan and Phil whether it is ok to leave themselves to check-in at the airport so that I could ride the driver's van back to Xi'an and take a taxi to the train station. They happily agree. We drive back to the city and then I take a taxi to the train station. By the time I get to the train station, I only have about 15 minutes. If I stay any longer, I would not be able to catch the train. I am so lucky that I have such nice clients like Susan and Phil. By now this trip ends successfully largely thanks to Susan and Phil for their valuable trust and full supports throughout this trip.

#### **Bird List:**

1. Mandarin Duck
2. Great-spotted Woodpecker
3. Grey-headed Wood Pecker
4. Crimpson-breasted Woodpecker
5. Common Kingfisher
6. Crested Kingfisher
7. Fork-tailed Swift
8. Spotted Dove
9. Eurasian Turtle Dove
10. Wood Sandpiper
11. Common Sandpiper
12. Great Cormorant
13. Intermediate Egret
- 14 Little Egret
15. Grey Heron
16. Grey-backed Shrike
17. Red-billed Blue Magpie
18. Black-billed Magpie
19. Spotted Nutcracker (heard)
20. Large-billed Crow
21. Eurasian Blackbird (Chinese Blackbird)



22. Himalayan Bluetail
23. Solitary Snipe
24. Plumbeous Redstart
25. White-capped Redstart
26. Daurian Redstart
27. Little Forktail
28. White-crowned Forktail
29. Brown Dipper
30. Eurasian Nuthatch
31. Green-backed Tit
32. Japanese Tit
33. Marsh Tit
34. Long-tailed Tit
35. Black-throated Tit
36. Crested Ibis
37. Light-vented Bulbul (Chinese Bulbul)
38. Brown-breasted Bulbul
39. Collared Finchbill
40. Brown Bush Warbler
41. Goldcrest
42. White-throated Laughingthrush
43. White-browed Laughingthrush
44. Elliot's Laughingthrush
45. Steak-breasted Scimitar Babbler (heard)
46. Winter Wren 47. Red-billed Liothrix
48. Vinous-throated Parrotbill
49. Oriental Skylark
50. Asian Short-toed Lark
51. Eurasian Tree Sparrow
52. White Wagtail
53. Grey-capped Greenfinch
54. Brambling
55. Yellow-throated Bunting



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