



2023_ 7 Days West Sichuan Birding Tour



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Jan 29 - Feb 04, 2023

Trip report compiled by Bella Zhang



Lady Amherst's Pheasant



Summary

In early December 2022, China finally relaxed its pandemic policies and lifted its travel restrictions. Travel is back to people's daily lives. This Jan, we had two clients join us on this trip; an avid birder from the US and a professional bird photographer from Germany. Winter, at some point, is not the best season for species richness and abundance. However, the large mix-species flocks are something we don't want to miss in this season, especially after a long time of no birding. We enjoyed nice flocks of forest species as expected. Parrotbills, pheasants, woodpeckers, and laughingthrushes highlighted our list, in addition to three non-avian species, namely Red Panda, Tufted Deer, and Tibetan Macaque.



Details of the Trip

Day 1 (Jan 29th): Chengdu to Longcanggou.

We met our clients at Chengdu Tianfu Airport at around 11 am. The airport would expect more international flights in the future, but not yet busy this morning. We drove roughly 3 hours before reaching our first destination, Longcanggou. We went directly to the first birding spot, Dashiba, where the elevation is around 1400 m.a.s.l. Collared Finchbill, Brown-breasted Bulbul, and Spotted Forktail caught our eyes immediately along the drive but these common species only attracted our attention for a short time. Not too long after we arrived at the end of the road (there was a muddy flatland), we found a large mix-species flock in the forest patch to the left. It was a typical flock led by David's Fulvetta, which were then joined by at least 20 Gold-fronted Fulvetta, and big flocks of Rufous-capped Babblers and Rufous-faced Warblers. The flock moved slowly and came back to forage in the same area later this afternoon. Exploring around that area further brought us Red-billed Leiothrix, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Black-faced Laughingthrush, Brown Dipper, Little Forktail, Spotted Forktail, Eurasian Wren, White-capped Water Redstart, Plumbeous Water Redstart, Mountain Hawk Eagle, etc. As darkness fell, we drove to our guesthouse in the mountain and spent two nights there.



Golden-breasted Fulvetta

Day 2 (Jan 30th): Longcanggou.

Following a warm noodles breakfast at the guesthouse, we headed back to the same forest patch trying to get some nice shots in the morning light. Along the way, we got a close look at a White-backed Woodpecker, a flock of Streak-breasted Scimitar Babblers, and a flock of Golden-breasted Fulvetta. In addition, a Great Barbet was heard from the distance. We reached the same forest patch at dawn. Two Chestnut Thrushes were already foraging on a fruit tree. Several Bay Woodpeckers were calling nearby. We got ourselves warmed up with a cup of morning coffee, then we hiked to the forest. Birds were not very active at the beginning, we only had a small flock of Stripe-throated Yuhinas. Soon after, we found a cute Tufted Deer resting in the forest. We then hiked back to the forest edge where we again had a mix-species flock consisting of exactly the same members, namely David's Fulvetta, Gold-fronted Fulvetta, etc., not sure if they were the same flock from Yesterday. We followed the flock for quite a while trying for good photos. A snap

of a Gold-fronted Fulvetta perching on a little branch over a puddle was no doubt my favorite during that day. Another David's Fulvetta flock was found later on, but this time, it was joined by Streak-breasted Scimitar Babblers, Yellow-browed Tits, Rufous-capped Babblers, and Rufous-faced Warblers.



Gold-fronted Fulvetta

We had a lovely picnic lunch in the field. Then we slowly drove back to the farmland around our guesthouse. A big flock of Vinous-throated Parrotbills highlighted our farmland exploration. Other species found here include Collared Finchbill, Red-billed Leiothrix, Grey-capped Greenfinch, Brown-breasted Bulbul, Chinese Bamboo Partridge, etc. We came back to this area again at night for owling and had a glimpse at a Himalayan Owl.

Day 3 (Jan 31st): Longcanggou to Kangding.

Our original plan was to visit the forest park today. However, the coming and going big buses we saw on the last day changed our plan. There are two scenic areas in this park. The first one has opened to the public a long time ago, but it is not good for birding. The second one was not open but accessible with a special application, leaving it a great birding spot at that time. However, it

has opened to the public recently. Large crowds of tourists and the shuttle-bus-only rule made it very frustrating for birders. Therefore, after a group discussion, we decided to leave Logcanggou earlier and add Kangding to our itinerary. What we saw here also made us worried about the tourists in Wawu Shan. The snowy weather brought a lot of tourists to the mountain to enjoy the snow scenery. So we also decided to stay one less day in Wawu Shan. At the same time, we extended the trip to 7 days and added Yibin to our itinerary.

Following our new itinerary, we left the guesthouse this morning with all our luggage. We spent a couple more hours at Dashiba before getting on the freeway. This time, we chose to walk on the main road which later proved to be a nice choice. We got more of the fulvetta flocks with Gold-fronted Fulvetta in, a nice flock of Blyth's Strike Babblers, a big flock of over 20 Golden-breasted Fulvettas, and other birds including Darjeeling Woodpecker, Crimson-breasted Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Stripe-throated Yuhina, Mountain Hawk Eagle, Spotted Forktail, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, etc. We also spent quite some pleasant time enjoying a pair of Great Barbets at a reasonably close distance during which time a troop of Tibetan Macaques was exposed by their noisy jabbering.



Blyth's Strike Babbler

Driving to Kangding is roughly 4.5 hours. To make the best use of our time, we managed to drive off the freeway and spend 1.5 hours at Erlang Shan. It was about 4:30 when we got to the foot of the mountain. As the newly built tunnel took all the traffic from the old national road, we had no companies driving on the road except Lady Amherst's Pheasant frequently showed up on the road. We also got some small birds like Rufous-vented Tit, Grey-crested Tit, Goldcrest, Eurasian Nutcracker, White-collared Yuhina, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Chinese White-browed Rosefinch, Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, etc.

After that, we drove on to Guza, a small town near Kangding, to spend the night. The elevation was much lower here and we enjoyed a warm pleasant stay.

Day 4 (Feb 1st): Kangding to Wawu Shan.

This morning we went to a bird hide to photograph Lady Amherst's Pheasant. Birding in hides is undoubtedly more promising if you enjoy birding this way. We had several male, subadult, and one female Lady Amherst's Pheasants. The owners put out suet for small birds, they also made two small bath puddles on the ground. The most frequently visiting species include White-browed Fulvetta, Rufous-vented Tit, Black-browed Tit, Giant Laughingthrush, Bared Laughingthrush, Elliot's Laughingthrush, Chinese Babax, etc. Besides, we also had Red-billed Blue Magpie, Streaked Rosefinch, Eurasian Nutcracker, and Great Spotted Woodpecker visited the hide.



Streaked Rosefinch

We spent the whole morning in the hide and then drove on to Wawu Shan after a field lunch. We enjoyed a one-hour birding on the way, but it didn't give us new species except for two Ruddy Shelducks.

Day 5 (Feb 2nd): Wawu Shan to Yibin.

Both Longcanggou and Wawu Shan are famous for parrotbills and middle to high-elevation forest species. Wawu Shan Park opens at 8 am. When we showed up at the entrance at 7:45, there was already a line (speak of the devil). Most of them are parents and kids with skiing sleds. We struggled our way up to the mountain. Outside the halfway cable car station, we got a flock of Brown Parrotbills, a flock of Grey-hooded Fulvettas, and two White-collared Yuhinas.

Up to the mountain top, there was a nice flat broad walk of about 3.5 to 5 km (depending on the route). The foggy weather and icy road made our first 2 hours there unproductive. That, plus the noise from the skiing sleds grinding the road, makes the situation not optimistic. Changes were brought by several close flocks of Rufous-vented Tits and Grey-crested Tits, followed by one of our clients spotting a Red Panda running across the frozen lake. We then visited a Taoist monastery where we enjoyed some quiet birding and cultural moments. We explored a trail to the left of the monastery. It led to the ski resort which was closed today, so not too many visitors. One client got a big flock of Three-toed Parrotbill by himself, then we got a big flock of Fulvous Parrotbill together. The flock was huge, at least 50 of them. It was quite a moment watching them flying

towards us, then past us.



Fulvous Parrotbill

After that, we got back to the main road to search for parrotbills and other species. We soon found a big mix-species flock of Grey-crested Tit, Rufous-vented Tit, and Hodgson's Treecreeper. In the nearby area, we had another small flock of Fulvous Parrotbill. As it was about 3 pm, we decided to speed up a little and head down to our car so that we wouldn't arrive too late to our next destination. However, some parrotbills seemed to disagree with us. Before we reached the cable car station, we met a big flock consisting of Great Parrotbills, Brown Parrotbills, and Three-toed Parrotbills. Besides, an Elliot's Laughingthrush and a Crimson-breasted Woodpecker were found nearby. A sleeping Red Panda also held us off for a while. But still, we managed to arrive at our next destination before 10 pm.

Day 6 (Feb 3rd): Yibin Tanshi Village.

Tanshi Village has earned its reputation through Sichuan Partridge hides in recent years. However, we didn't set high expectations as we had been informed that the partridge doesn't visit the hides regularly in this season. Still, there are some other interesting species in the hide and field. Before we departed this morning, we had Japanese Tit, Green-backed Tit, Little Bunting, Red-flanked Bluetail, Red-billed Leiothrix, etc. around the guesthouse. We then headed to the mountain and

spent most of the day in the partridge hide (#4 bird spot). There, we had several time visits from Spotted Laughingthrush, Buffy Laughingthrush, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Silver Pheasant, and Lady Amherst's Pheasant. We also had a small flock of Chinese Bamboo Partridges visiting the hide, but they didn't stay for too long. We also spent some time outside the hide and found White-browed Robin, Maroon-backed Accentor, White-browed Laughingthrush, Spot-breasted Parrotbill, Ashy-throated Parrotbill, Red-billed Blue Magpie, etc.



Silver Pheasant

Day 7 (Feb 4th): Yibin to Chengdu.

As both of our clients had late afternoon flights, we were able to spend the morning here. We drove up to another hide (#2 bird spot) to try our luck. Unfortunately, we got heavy fog making it struggling to stay in the hide. We drove down a little bit to get more light and took a well-paved road. Surprisingly, we got a glimpse of a male Sichuan Partridge there. With the fog clearing up, we decided to drive back to the hide. We had Silver Pheasant and Lady Amherst's Pheasant there. Sichuan Partridge were heard calling around but didn't show up in the hide. With no new species visiting the hide, we decided to explore the nearby areas a bit to get more small birds. A big flock of Black-chinned Yuhinas and other species including Maroon-backed Accentor, White-browed Robin, and White-collared Yuhina were found during the search. Right before we were about to leave that place, a big flock of Golden-breasted Fulvettas appeared in the bamboo forest, then quickly flew across the road and disappeared at the other side. Back to our car, three Mountain Bulbul were perching on the trees nearby. We then called it an end and had our journey back to Tianfu Airport.

For more photos taken on this trip, click the link to our client Kai Pflug's trip album.
<https://birdphotos.smugmug.com/Birds-of-China/Birds-of-Sichuan/>



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