

Mammals & Birds in NE Tibet, 10-24 May 2015

An at-a-glance list of 25 species of mammals & 200 species of birds.

By Jesper Hornskov ****this draft 4 June 2015**** ALL RIGHTS RESERVED®

Please note that the following list is best considered a work in progress. It should not be quoted without consulting the author.

Based mostly on my own field notes, this brief write-up covers the mammals & birds noted by B Beach, G Broddelez, M Buermans, S Cross, F De Waele, B Eaton, J Pilkington, P & P Williams & myself in NE Tibet, China's Qinghai province, during 15 days in the field over 10-24 May 2015.

Our trip aimed to see as many of the unique mammals of the Tibetan highlands as we could, but searching for mammals typically allows one to pay attention to birds as well, and it is hopefully of interest what we saw at a time of the year when few dedicated naturalists visit this mysterious land. Predictably, the relatively early dates meant that we saw a good number of migrants, and we saw some of the specialities far better and/or in greater numbers than we would have in summer. We recorded 200 spp of birds & no fewer than 25 spp of mammals, incl PALLAS' CAT *Felis manul*, WOLF *Canis lupus*, TIBETAN FOX *Vulpes ferrilata*, a best-ever EURASIAN OTTER *Lutra lutra*, MOUNTAIN WEASEL *Mustela altaica*, KIANG (= Tibetan Wild Ass) *Equus kiang*, WHITE-LIPPED DEER *Przewalskium albirostris*, the ultra-rare PRZEVALSKI'S GAZELLE *Procapra przewalskii*, ARGALI *Ovis ammon*, TIBETAN ANTELOPE *Panthalops hodgsonii*, and large numbers of BLUE SHEEP *Pseudois nayaur*.

Just 11 additional species of birds were noted @ our Beijing hotel pre-departure on 25th, somewhat below average for the time of year but interesting nonetheless.

Our photographers worked diligently, making the most of the often exquisite light – I hope their images will be made available as soon as possible...

The mammals, the birds, the unbeatable scenery (in places already enhanced by a variety of wildflowers), an intriguing amalgam of local cultures, wonderful food, comfortable - from 'definitely OK' to 'surprisingly good' - accommodations & (not least) the companionship all came together to produce a trip the more memorable for the region - though in many ways an indisputable 'MUST' destination for anyone hooked on Palearctic and/or Asian mammals or birds - being so under-visited.

A huge 'THANK YOU!' to Gerald for all his work getting the group together...

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In the species list the concept "bird-days" is used - it is the avian equivalent of man-hours, the day totals added up – it indicates relative abundance but does not consider the “problem” of lingering birds or, far from unimportant in a non-scientific context such as a birding holiday abroad, how satisfying the encounters were. 25 bird-days for e.g. Spoon-billed Sandpiper could be one distant flock of migrating birds, gone in a flash, or one bird lingering for 25 days, offering the observers point-blank views anytime in that period...

The sequence of the bird list follows *The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World – 3rd Edition* (Dickinson 2003), in my opinion by still the most useful one-volume checklist.

Initials in brackets after a few single-observer sightings does not imply that I have doubts as to the correctness of the ID.

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Species list:

Sequence and taxonomy follows "A Guide to the Mammals of China", Smith & Xie (ed.) 2008.

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*

A troupe of 35+ moved across a hillside on 17th – a very nice encounter & an OK photo op for those of us with proper cameras (those of us attempting to digiscope had to concede defeat: either the animals moved on too fast or their faces were obscured by twigs!).

****vide* GB probably these 'Rhesus' Macaques are better regarded as a different species...

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*

57+ animal-days. Fairly common & often confiding, engaging in wrestling contests close to the road or sitting back watching the world go by – encountered on at least eight dates.

Przewalski's Steppe Vole *Eolagurus przewalskii*

12+ animal-days. Noted on two dates.

Vole sp.

2+ on 15th.

***Seems to be the same species photographed [JH] near Wenquan in Oct 2014, provisionally considered Kam Dwarf Hamster *Cricetulus kamensis* but 'more research needed'.

***'someone really needs to do a review of the hamsters of the plateau – they are a mess and we could only guess in 'The Mammals of China' as to the best possible arrangement': A Smith in email to 2009 OBC Fundraiser participant P Los when tentatively confirming the ID of one small animal we're seeing regularly... Could that 'someone' please include ALL the small mammals of the Tibetan Plateau in that review!?

Plateau (= Black-lipped) Pika *Ochotona curzoniae*

Common – not systematically recorded.

Glover's Pika *Ochotona gloveri*

Six animal-days. Noted S of Yushu on three dates – with its rusty-and-grey fur, big ears & sweet eyes arguably the cutest of all pikas!

Moupin Pika *Ochotona thibetana*

One photographed [P&PW] S of Yushu on 17th.

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*

24+ animal-days. Noted on eight dates.

Pallas' Cat *Felis manul*

3-4 animal days. Noted on two dates – seeing this mythic creature quite early on on the 1st day of searching the prime area allowed us to relax AND to return for follow-up looks the next day!
TINGALING!

Wolf *Canis lupus*

Ten animal-days. Noted on four dates – three 'scoped eating a freshly killed Tibetan Gazelle on 14th was a hard act to follow...

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata*

32 animal-days. Noted on six dates - excellent views on a number of occasions.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

12 animal-days. Noted on six dates, with several seen well.

Eurasian Otter *Lutra lutra*

One on 17th – a once-in-a-lifetime encounter: spotted while still a little way above the river examining the base of an overhanging boulder we saw the webbing between its toes (!) before it plunged in, then were able to follow as it worked a 500m stretch of river, swimming against the strong current with powerful thrusts, sleekly examining every nook of river bank, sliding round or over half-submerged rocks and snagged tree trunks, and every now and then looking at us with curiosity across the fast-flowing water!

Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica*

Singles on two dates. One played along with our team photographers...

Kiang *Equus kiang*

501 animal-days. Noted on three dates – main event 439 along the way across the Roof of the World: it was a real pleasure to watch these dignified ‘donkeys’ - in the absence of hunters they (and other large mammals on the Plateau) are fairly confiding, and in a couple of cases we were able to get good-to-decent photos even without the help of long lenses!

Gansu Red Deer *Cervus (elaphus) kansuensis*

16 animal-days. Noted on two dates W of Koko Nor.

***In N Tibet the respective ranges of *Cervus kansuensis* and *Cervus canadensis alashanicus* are unclear, as is their taxonomic status. The type locality for *kansuensis* is Lintan (= Xincheng: 34° 42'N, 103° 21'E), not far NE of where Schafer collected undoubted *macneilli*.

****vide* Groves (2005), *kansuensis* is ‘quite distinct, the winter pelage being especially different: *macneilli* stags are very light, creamy grey, while *kansuensis* stags are deep steely grey. The black on the croup [...] is much more conspicuous in *kansuensis*.’

***Subsequently (Groves & Grubb: *Ungulate Taxonomy* (2011)) it was felt, however, that *kansuensis* is probably NOT a valid taxon. There are specimens from S Koko Nor Range 37°N 100°E & from Tatung Shan 37°15'N 100°E, and there are sight records from Qilian Shan.

Macneil's Deer *Cervus macneilli*

Ten bird-days. Noted on two dates S of Yushu – five just as the weather closed in was considered pretty lucky (it was, of course, but it also wasn't – knowing where to look *does* help!), but those damp individuals were completely upstaged by another five the following day: spotted in dense scrub above a hillside dotted with White Eared Pheasants they kept ducking out of view, but in the end everyone who tried got photos of that quite well-antlered immature stag...

***Groves (2005) concluded that two Shou taxa merit full species treatment - *Cervus wallichii* & *Cervus macneilli*. They ‘retain many features’ that characterized the primitive basal stock of the entire red deer/wapiti/sika/rua group’.

****macneilli* is ‘the pale red-grey deer of the eastern margins of the Tibetan plateau’: Groves (2005).

White-lipped Deer *Przewalskium albirostris*

99 animal-days. This charismatic endemic was seen well on three dates.

***‘The species previously ranged across much of the eastern Tibetan Plateau, [but now] occurs in fragmented populations in northwestern and southwestern Gansu, eastern and central, and southern Qinghai, eastern [Xizang], western Sichuan, and northwest Yunnan’.

‘There is no [official] global population estimate’, [though] ‘Wang (1998) estimated a total population of some 7,000’: see <http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/4256/0>

Tibetan Partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae*

Five bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates – one confiding pair delighted our photographers.

Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*

12 bird-days. Excellent views were had on two dates.

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

41+ bird-days. Noted near Nangqian on three dates – incredibly, the proverbial hard-to-beat views on 17th (more than a dozen individuals scattered across a hillside lit by the evening sun) were soundly beaten the following morning by a pair on the edge of the road!

Blue Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon auritum*

4+ N of Xining on 10th.

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

26 bird-days. Noted near Xining on two dates.

***Cheng (1987) listed a staggering 18 races for mainland China. Of these he listed just three for Qinghai: *vlangalii*, *strauchi* (for 'NE part') & *suehschanensis* as an accidental to Zekog in SE.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

c40 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

c4,365 bird-days. Noted on ten dates – main event a whopping c4,070 scattered across a roadside wetland on 19th...

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Seen only at Koko Nor – one seen incubating on 11th, and a pair w/ three 'ugly ducklings' (oops, I meant – 'beautiful cygnets!') there on 24th.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Three bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

c412 bird-days. Noted on 12 dates – one highlight was seeing a pair w/ ten tiny ducklings in a canal next to the road: alarmed by our unexpected arrival the female did a full wing-drag fake injury hobble away from the bemused ducklings, who quite forgot that they were supposed to make themselves scarce and lie low until collected.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

17 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

29 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Ten bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Chinese Spotbill *Anas zonorhyncha*

Six bird-days. Noted on six dates – nice views of two at Koko Nor on 11th...

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Four bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

41 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*

c25 at Koko Nor on 11th.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

c105 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

c85 bird-days. Noted on three dates – some fine drakes...

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

c35 bird-days. 15-20 on both visits to Koko Nor.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

99 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Singles on two dates.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

22 bird-days. Mostly ones and twos noted on five dates – an immaculate drake on a white water stream gravel bar is a fine sight...

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

c220 bird-days. Noted on three dates – we had several opportunities to watch the elaborate display...

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

c50 at Koko Nor on both visits.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Great views of a 2nd c-y bird circling low overhead on 23rd.

*****Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

One over our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*

Nine bird-days. Noted on four dates.

***An additional seven 'egret sp.' were most likely also this species...

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

15 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

C50 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Seven bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Four bird-days. Noted on three dates – not sure which was best, two displaying together on 22nd, or

one on a wire w/ its prey on 24th?

Saker *Falco cherrug*

17 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

***For most of us a welcome opportunity to watch (and photograph) a species which is declining globally...

Black Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*

11-12 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

25-26 bird-days. We recorded this 'flying dragon' on eight dates – eh, hang on, 'recorded'? We were BLOWN AWAY by the views we got: TINGALING!!

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*

47 bird-days. Noted on 12 dates.

Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

Three bird-days. Noted on two dates – good views!

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Three bird-days. Noted on two dates – all who saw it were duly WOW'd by a top-speed turn executed by one N of Xining on 10th... but the targeted Elliot's Laughingthrush escaped!

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*

One N of Xining on 10th.

***Formerly considered a race of Common Buzzard *B. buteo* but genetically closer to Upland Buzzard *B. hemilasius* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005) from which it is ecologically separated & easily - well, fairly easily! - distinguished...

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

173+ bird-days. Noted on 13 dates - main event 50 along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

Five bird-days. Noted on three dates – interestingly, an immature bird on 19th was given no peace by resident predators: even a Tibetan Fox came over to move it along when it landed to take time out from the severe harassment meted out by a Saker & an Upland Buzzard.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

11 bird-days. Noted on six dates this classy Holarctic species granted us some memorable encounters: WOW!

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

One dark morph bird was seen well at Koko Nor on 11th.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Two on 11th.

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Seen only at Koko Nor: 75+ on 11th & c100 on 24th.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

Six along Koko Nor on 24th [GB, P&PW].

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

46+ bird-days. Noted on seven dates... several delightful encounters & photo ops: WHAT a bird!

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

Singles on three dates.

***As anyone contemplating a quick twitch for this charismatic species had better bear in mind, Ibisbills seen in Tibet feeding on a flowered-over meadow next to a rushing, icy stream – with Red-billed Choughs cawing, Blue Hill Pigeons cooing, Elliot's Laughingthrushes cheerfully whistling & domestic yaks snorting thoughtfully in the background - are more REAL than the sad one or two which still desperately attempt to cling on in competition with sickly-looking domestic ducks along the last stretches of barely acceptable water close to Beijing!

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

41 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

12 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

Two in summer plumage on 11th!

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Four bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

c34 bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event c30 adults (plus at least three recently hatched chicks: tiny dots of marbled down atop very long legs) near Chaka on 23rd.

'Spot-fronted' Sand Plover *Charadrius atrifrons*[^]

17+ bird-days. Noted on five dates.

***[^]formerly consider conspecific with Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*.

***ssp *atrifrons* has 'forehead and band through and below eye to ear coverts black, occasionally with some white mottling in front of eye; rufous-cinnamon of chest extends to flanks and breast, not bordered by black bar against white chin' while *mongolus* has forehead white, often divided by narrow black line in middle, bordered from cinnamon forecrown by narrow black line; black line runs from lores to ear coverts and white line from above eye to above ear-coverts; narrow black bar between white chin and clear-cut cinnamon-rufous chest-band'. *schaeferi* 'often has some white on forehead; intermediate between *atrifrons* and nominate *mongolus*', 'often closest to *mongolus*': BWP vol III, p169.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultia*

Instructive, close-up views of three alongside Spot-fronteds on 23rd.

Pintail / Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago stenura* / *G. megala*

Singletons seen on 21+23rd.

Western Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

11 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

One at Koko Nor on 11th.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

One in full summer plumage wading deep on 23rd – WOW!

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*
195+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*
3+ bird-days. Noted on two dates – ‘how often do you see them in summer plumage!’...

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*
Singles noted on three dates.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*
Seven bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Singles noted on two dates.

Temminck’s Stint *Calidris temminckii*
Seven bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
Prolonged views of four on 23rd – a real treat: three were in nearly full-blown breeding plumage, while in the 4th the purplish red was only beginning to show through.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*
A fine male on 23rd – ruff black-and-orange...

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
29 bird-days. Noted on three dates – main event 23 showing a good variety of plumages on 14th.

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*
c48 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Common Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*
Six at Koko Nor on 11th.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
c94 bird-days. Noted on nine dates – we were able to confirm that the underbody of ssp *tibetana* can look nearly as dark as Whiskered Tern’s...

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*
24 bird-days. Great views on two dates...

Pallas’ Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*
28+ bird-days. Noted on two dates – main event 26+ in a morning, incl a fairly close three ‘scoped on the ground in good light, ‘feeding warily amongst the scattered, wind-burnt clumps of grass’.
***Essentially a bird of the steppes of Central Asia east to Mongolia - its occasional irruptions, during which it may reach and breed in e.g. the British Isles, adds considerably to its charisma, making it a true Dreambird! Despite its nomadic inclinations it is usually reliable at our favoured site...
***Sadly, a change of plans – favoured by everyone - meant we ran out of time before we had found its only congener, Tibetan Sandgrouse *S. thibetana*...

Blue Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*
c116 bird-days. Noted on 12 dates.

Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*
19 bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates.

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
55 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

*****Spotted Dove** *Streptopelia chinensis*
One @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

*****Indian Cuckoo** *Cuculus micropterus*
1-2 @ our Beijing hotel on 25th – heard, and seen display-flying!

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
22 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Common Swift *Apus apus*
12 bird-days. Noted at Koko Nor on two dates.

Salim Ali's Swift *Apus salimali*
19 bird-days. Noted five dates.

***Leader (2011) concluded that the *Apus pacificus* complex should be treated as four species, at least three of which occur in China/Tibet.

***Salim Ali's Swift *Apus salimali* is 'restricted to E Tibetan Plateau and adjacent high-altitude W Sichuan' breeding at 'very high altitudes (above 3,400m)' – 'Fork-tailed Swifts' breeding near Xining, Qinghai, at c2,500m are also this form: JH *et al.* pers obs. 'Its winter distribution is apparently unknown but, at the very least, it must be an altitudinal migrant'.

The species is longer-tailed with a proportionately shallower tail fork, has different throat pattern ('narrow pale strip on the center of the throat and is narrowest at the base of the bill, where it tapers to a neat point', 'less than half the width of the other taxa'), 'the rump patch is consistently narrow', 'the crown and nape are mid-brown, contrasting conspicuously' with the glossy black mantle, and the pale tips to the underparts are much reduced compared to *pacificus* (more comparable to *leuconyx* in this character).

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*
Nine bird-days. Noted on six dates.

'Chinese Pied' Woodpecker *Dendrocopos cabanisi*[^]
Five bird-days. Noted on two dates – 'scoping revealed that this taxon is rather distinctive!
***Split from Great Spotted Woodpecker *D. major* following Perktas & Quintero (2013)
***It is worth noting that ssp *beicki* [of Ningxia, Gansu & E Qinghai: Zheng *et al.* (2005)] is not recognized as a taxon in HBW Illustrated Checklist Vol 1 (S. Lowe, pers com), being lumped into ssp *stresemanni* [of E Xizang, W & S Yunnan, N Guizhou & Sichuan: Zheng *et al.* (2005)]; the range of nominate *cabanisi* is SW Liaoning, Hebei, Shandong, Henan, Shanxi, N Anhui & N Jiangsu: Zheng *et al.* (2005)...

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*
Singles heard on two dates.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*
Five bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates.
***In addition, one was heard near our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*

Heard on 17th... (we were too busy enjoying an otter to pay much attention to this widespread species).

*****Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus*

Six @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus tsaidamensis*

14 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

***Of the similar Turkestan Shrike *L. phoenicuroides* Svensson *et al.* (2009) notes: 'often treated as a race of Isabelline Shrike, but adult males usually differ quite clearly, hybridization limited, and genetic difference sizeable [...]'.
***A low-density species, wide-ranging and often inconspicuous even when present (and thus easily missed), we were fortunate to see it so well!

Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*

30 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius (s.) giganteus*

A pair was seen well on 14th.

***A low-density species, wide-ranging and often inconspicuous even when present (and thus easily missed), we were fortunate to see it so well!

*****Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Two @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus*

14 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

***In addition, present @ the grounds of our Beijing hotel.

***The Iberian taxon, *C. (c.) cooki*, has been shown to be sufficiently differentiated genetically to merit elevation to full species status. In addition to the ones we saw, *kansuensis* in NE Tibet & *interposita* at Beijing, the eastern species includes a further five taxa (Dickinson 2003)...

Common Magpie *Pica pica*

74 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Tibetan Magpie *Pica (pica) bottanensis*

39 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

***The two *Pica* taxa occupy mutually exclusive ranges and display a number of vocal, morphological & habitat differences.

Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*

Six bird-days. Noted on three dates.

***This sought-after species frequently gives birdwatchers the dodge-and-run treatment, but then typically succumbs to curiosity to sit up allowing good views...

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

599+ bird-days. Noted on 12 dates.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

Four bird-days. Noted on just two dates – one N of Xining on 10th was a 1st for that area (JH pers obs).

Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus*

16 bird-days. Noted on five dates – 'scoping two pied adults on the ground across a small stream was a fine way to bag this pretty corvid.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Four bird-days. Noted near Xining on both 11+24th.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

One N of Xining on 10th.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Six bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

55+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*

101 bird-days. This Plateau endemic was noted on 12 dates.

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris*

11 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus affinis*

Six N of o Xining on 10th.

***'Songar Tit *P. songarus*' is now lumped back in with Willow Tit: IOC (2015).

Sichuan Tit *Parus weigoldicus*

Six bird-days. Seen well S of Yushu on both 17+18th.

***Note that of the several 'Songar Tit' spp only *weigoldicus* merits full species status (the rest are now lumped back in with Willow Tit *Parus montanus* by e g IOC (2015).

***Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) noted that "the case for treating *weigoldicus* as a full species appears particularly strong on the basis of its unusually high genetic distances from other taxa, despite weak morphological differentiation". Actually – as we couldn't help noticing (& see Collar & Pilgrim 2007) - *weigoldicus* does differ 'conspicuously' in many respects, incl vocalizations, from even *affinis*.

White-browed Tit *Parus superciliosus*

Just one...

Grey Crested Tit *Parus dichrous*

Six bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

7+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Pale Sand Martin *Riparia diluta*

58+ bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Eight bird-days. Stray migrants were noted on five dates.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

47+ bird-days. Noted on five dates – main event a post-drizzle flock of 30+ on 17th...

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*

24 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

*****Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica*

Several @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Stoliczka's (= White-browed) Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae*
Six bird-days. Noted on three dates – superb photo ops on 14th!

Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica*
Six bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Long-billed Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha maxima*
11 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris*
20 bird-days. Noted on five dates – several were singing strongly, and we couldn't help noticing that those seen well looked much less ragged than we knew they would once the high altitude breeding season, with its fierce light & changeable weather, had taken its toll.

Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis*
40+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*
Fairly widespread – noted on at least seven dates.

Elwes' Horned Lark *Eremophila elwesi*
Widespread – not systematically recorded.

***Drovetski *et al.* (2014) – in an article record-breakingly titled 'Limited Phylogeographic Signal in Sex-Linked and Autosomal Loci Despite Geographically, Ecologically, and Phenotypically Concordant Structure of mtDNA Variation in the Holarctic Avian Genus *Eremophila*'[^]: PloS ONE 9(1) – proposed splitting Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* into six species.

Of relevance in an Oriental context are:

E. elwesi of Tibet etc. (to be renamed if the uninvestigated ssp *longirostris* proves to belong to this clade).

E. penicillata including 'birds inhabiting alpine zone of Palearctic mountains from southeastern Europe to Tian Shan' (ssp *albigula* is found in Xinjiang, China).

E. flava 'breeding in the tundra from Scandinavia to Amguema River in Chukotka' (and occurring S in winter at least to Beijing).

E. brandti 'breeding in aridlands from the northwestern border of Kazakhstan to northeastern Inner Mongolia in China' (and occurring S in winter at least to Beijing).

The dust is yet to settle, but *elwesi* is as genetically distinct as Temminck's Horned Lark *E. bilopha*...
***[^]To which the only reasonable response would be 'supercalifragilisticexpialidocious'!

Tarim Hill Warbler *Rhopophilus albosuperciliaris*

Seven on 21st – those of us who took the time to be patient were rewarded with great views...

***The much-loved Chinese Hill Warbler *Rhopophilus pekinensis* turns out to be two monotypic species (Leader *et al.* 2013: Forktail 29, pp31-36): *Rhopophilus pekinensis* & *R. albosuperciliaris*, with the proposed English names Beijing Babbler & Tarim Babbler, respectively... Seeing that Beijing is only a tiny dot on the map of the former's vast range (from N Korea to NE Tibet), and that the latter is *not* endemic to Xinjiang's Tarim Basin, perhaps the best selling point for these names are that they consign the 'Chinese Bush-dweller' of Handbook of the Birds of the World (Vol XII, p281: Collar & Robson 2007) to history?

The two taxa are easily distinguished – *pekinensis* has a striking whitish iris, broad-ish streaking on the mantle & extensive orangey streaking on the flanks, while *albosuperciliaris* has a dark iris, narrower & less extensive streaking above, and much less orange markings on the flanks. Both species 'have a wide repertoire of vocalizations'; but at least two of the song types we heard were distinctive.

*****Chinese Bulbul** *Pycnonotus sinensis*
2+ @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

*****Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
One @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

'Smoky' Warbler *Phylloscopus 'fuligiventer' weigoldi*

Six in a morning – we were treated to an incredible singing extravaganza: close-up 'scope views, anyone??

***Martens (2008) unconvincingly aligned the reasonably distinctive but oddly localized taxon *weigoldi* with Smoky Warbler *P. fuligiventer* [rather than with *P. fuscatus*]:

http://globiz.sachsen.de/snsd/publikationen/vertebrate-zoology/vz58-2/06_Martens.pdf

***Zheng *et al.* (2011) references the Martens *et al.* (2008) article but appears to disagree that *weigoldi* is better considered a race of Smoky Warbler *P. fuligiventer*, a change IOC (2015) on the other hand accepts without comment.

'Chinese' Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus (affinis) occisinensis*

52 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

***Martens (2008) elevates part of Tickell's Warbler to full species status as *P. occisinensis*

http://globiz.sachsen.de/snsd/publikationen/vertebrate-zoology/vz58-2/06_Martens.pdf

Yellow-streaked Warbler *Phylloscopus armandii*

25 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Buff-barred Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher*

20 bird-days. Noted on two dates – good views of several flitting about low, giving their look-at-me! flash of white tail feathers.

Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

A total of 11 were noted N of Xining on 10th.

***This attractive warbler – a real gem-with-wings - is the key *Phylloscopus* to look for in this part of the world: it was only recently reaccepted as a valid species, and its winter quarters remain undiscovered...

Chinese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus yunnanensis*

One N of Xining on 10th – great views, eventually...

***Zheng *et al.* (2011) gives the range of this species as 'Liaoning, Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Henan, Shanxi, S Shaanxi, S Gansu, E Qinghai, Yunnan, E Sichuan, Chongqing & N Hubei'.

'Eastern' Lemon-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus (chloronotus) forresti*

15 bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates.

***Martens *et al.* 2004 (*vide* Rheindt 2006) elevated *forresti*, considered a synonym of *chloronotus* by Cheng (1987), to full species status, splitting it from *chloronotus* (of Nepal) which, with *simlaensis*, becomes Western Lemon-rumped Warbler. The two differ "dramatically in song and mitochondrial DNA (4.2% cytochrome-b divergence)": Rheindt (2006).

Given that the type locality for *forresti* is Lijiang, in Yunnan (Cheng 1987) it is not obvious that "Sichuan Leaf Warbler" is preferable to 'Eastern Lemon-rumped Warbler'. "Presumably the hitherto unknown border between both species lies somewhere in Yunnan, Burma or north-eastern India.": Rheindt (2006). *Ahem?*

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei mandellii*

41 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

***Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) treats both ssp as full species, noting that "although the call of *mandellii* is markedly different from [n nominate] *humei*, the whistled songs of both taxa are variable and

often inseparable. While *mandellii* is genetically closer to *humei* than to *inornatus*, it is long-separated from either according to mtDNA (Irwin *et al.* 2001); its status as a full species thus remains equivocal.” – NOT (yet) accepted as a full species by IOC: <http://www.worldbirdnames.org/BOW/bushtits/>

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

One migrant photographed as it fed high up in poplars on 23rd – quite hard to get proper looks at but its distinctive song eliminated the similar Greenish Warbler...

***In addition, one was seen @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Four bird-days. Noted on just three dates – no doubt the bulk of them had yet to arrive...

*****Two-barred Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*[^]

Three @ our Beijing hotel on 25th – seen well & heard singing.

***[^]*vide* Inskipp *et al.* (2011) re-split - Dickinson (2003) retained *plumbeitarsus* as a full species - 'because of its sympatric occurrence with *viridanus*'; IOC (2015) lists it as a full species, without comment.

Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis*

Three bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates – great views!

***Collar (2006) elevated *odicus* (of NE and E Burma, N Indochina, S Yunnan and Guizhou (except N), *decarlei* (of 'E Xizang', SW Sichuan, and NW Yunnan), *dedekensi [sic]*' (of '(N)E Xizang', W Sichuan, and NW Yunnan), *gravivox* (of S Gansu, S Shaanxi, S Shanxi, NW Henan, and N Sichuan), and *cowensae* (of C and E Sichuan, N Guizhou, and W Hubei) to species status on morphological grounds, a 'new arrangement, which clearly rests on uncertain foundations and is in need of considerable fortification (which is not supplied by morphometric analysis, as this shows as much variation within the new species as between them, notably a remarkably long tail in *dedekensi [sic]*...'. In the absence of DNA analysis and a thorough study of the notoriously varied vocalizations of these birds, such rearrangement seems fairly meaningless...

Kozlov's Babax *Babax koslowi*

Nine S of Yushu on 18th – very obliging...

***For birdwatchers one of the main 'pretexts' for visiting a sigh-inducingly pretty area on the remote 'Tibet Autonomous Region' border.

Giant Laughingthrush *Garrulax maximus*

31+ bird-days. Noted S of Yushu on two dates - GREAT views!

***This superb-looking but all-too-frequently hard to see species has an impressive range of calls, some subdued, some anything but, yet others direct or derived mimicry – duetting birds are often a striking component in the dawn chorus, and throughout the day at this time of the year pairs travelling through the forest will mark their progress with occasional sessions of loud calling.

Elliot's Laughingthrush *Garrulax elliotii*

46+ bird-days. This attractive endemic was noted on four dates.

Chinese Fulvetta *Alcippe striaticollis*

Two pairs on 17th – one individual was seen collecting beard lichen...

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Two on 10th.

Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Five bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Chinese Nuthatch *Sitta villosa*
12 N of Xining on 10th.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*
Two – a male & a female – on 22nd.

***'One of the most spectacular birds in the world, this [monotypic family] species is aptly named 'rock flower' in Chinese': Harrap & Quinn (1996) – I'm not sure which Chinese dialect Harrap and/or Quinn is familiar with but both Cheng (1987) and Zheng *et al.* (2005) refer to *Tichodroma muraria* as 'Hongchi xuanbi que', 'red-winged cliff-hanging bird'.

*****Crested Myna** *Acridotheres cristellatus*
4+ making a racket @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

White-cheeked Starling *Sturnus cineraceus*
Three bird-days. Noted on 12+13th.
***In addition, 6+ @ our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Long-tailed Thrush *Zoothera dixonii*
One heard singing, briefly, on 16th.

Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus*
One on 10th.

Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri*
37 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*
One seen well in desert poplars on 22nd.

Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis*
Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates – 'scope views of a singing male on 15th: TINGALING!

Himalayan Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus*
One adult male 'scoped on 17th.

Northern Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
11 N of Xining on 10th.

***Apparently (L Svensson pers com) birds breeding in NE Qinghai – with a white brow in adult males – are *albocoeruleus*, a long neglected taxon hitherto considered of doubtful validity (and still not listed by IOC (2015)), but with a song distinct from both *cyanurus*' & *rufilatus*'. It is genetically closer to *cyanurus*, but has legs as long as *rufilatus*'.

Przevalski's Redstart *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*
Nine on 22nd – two pairs plus a group of two males w/ three females feeding busily... 'Arguably the prettiest in the genus'? Oh yes!!

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
111+ bird-days. Noted on 13 dates.

Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*
34 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps*
Nine bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Guldenstadt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

Nine bird-days. Noted on three dates – being able to drive up to >4,800m meant we got this high altitude specialist without undue puffin'!

Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*

25 bird-days. Noted on five dates – 'scoping a singing male was a fitting way to wind down on 24th.

River Chat *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

22 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Grandala *Grandala coelicolor*

6-7 [GB] moving through at >4500m on 18th.

'Common' Stonechat *Saxicola 'torquatus'*

Two fine *przewalskii* males on 24th.

***sspp *maurus*, *przewalskii* & *stejnegeri* occur in China / Tibet. Dickinson (2003): "proposed splits of this complex species seem unsatisfactory if only in how the forms are ascribed to species", and (still) NOT elevated to full species status by e.g. Svensson *et al.* (2009), who treated 'Eastern Stonechat' as a subspecies group under 'Common Stonechat' and dealt with it in a separate account only 'for practical reasons'.

***IOC (2015) treats sspp *hemprichii*, *variegatus*, *maurus*, *indicus* & *przewalskii* as 'Siberian Stonechat', and further elevates ssp *stejnegeri* as 'Stejneger's Stonechat' based on Zink *et al.* 2009 mtDNA analysis, though with the caveat '[this] may be premature; further resolution of this stonechat complex is needed'.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

40 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

One singing male 'scoped up above on 22nd.

Slaty-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula hodgsonii*

32+ bird-days. Noted on two dates – main event 31+ on 17th, when we all enjoyed repeated close looks.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

11 bird-days. Noted on five dates – both brown-throated & 'normal' (i.e. white-throated) morph birds were seen well, and there was even an apparent intergrade!

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

One fly-by male on 21st.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

28 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Henri's Snowfinch *Montifringilla henrici*

32 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

***DNA work has shown this taxon to be more closely related to Tibetan Snowfinch than to Eurasian (with which it was lumped in the past).

Tibetan Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi*

30 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

***Rather unspectacular on the ground but truly striking in flight, this species is blessed with no fewer than four English names...

White-rumped Snowfinch *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*

123+ bird-days. Seen on ten dates this was the most charismatic of the snowfinches encountered – the species ‘dive-bombs’ rivals, engages in strutting stand-offs, and lumbers along, all hunched up and true intentions hidden behind its highwayman’s mask...

Pere David’s Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda davidiana*

One on 24th – ‘it would have been nice to see it better’...

***It is doubly misleading to call this ‘one of the most localized snowfinch species’ (as done by H Jannes in a 2011 Birdquest trip report) as

a) its range is vast, covering SE Russian Altai, Mongolia & SE Transbaikalia S to E Qinghai and W & C Inner Mongolia (Dickinson, 2003)!

b) the only Snowfinch that could be reasonably said to be ‘localized’ is Afghan Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda theresae*, ‘endemic to the N & C ranges of the Hindu Kush, Afghanistan (Shibar, Sabz & Unai Passes, Bamian [Prov]), between approximately 67° and 69°E’, descending from its summer range between 2575-3000m to lower levels, and ‘occasionally moves N into Badghyz and Karabil, SE Turkmenistan’: Clement *et al.* (1993)!

Rufous-necked Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda ruficollis*

247+ bird-days. Noted on 11 dates.

Blanford’s Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*

22 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*

Four on 18th – one ‘scoped briefly.

Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides*

46 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Rufous-browed Accentor *Prunella strophciata*

Nine bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*

52 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

One *thunbergi*-type male seen well at Koko Nor on 11th.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

62 bird-days. Noted on eight dates – main event 38 ssp *citreola* on 11th (it was only later in the trip that we caught up with the eye-watering spp *calcarata*).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Five bird-days. Noted on two dates.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

31 bird-days. Noted on ten dates - sspp involved were *leucopsis* (none identified S of @ Er La pass) & *alboides* (in the Yushu/Nangqian area).

***Dickinson (2003) evidently consider without merit the idea that *lugens* is a valid species. Alstrom & Mild (2003) also concludes that various factors "suggest that the White Wagtail is best treated as a single species under the BSC".

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

Three on 23rd – one song-fighting, another on the ground, close (click!-click!-click!-click!)...

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

Two along the Mekong on 18th.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

11 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseus*

26+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*

Two in desert poplars on 23rd.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

Heard on 22nd.

***In addition, one female-type in front of our Beijing hotel on 25th.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*

325+ bird-days. Noted on 13 dates.

Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*

395+ bird-days. Noted on five dates.

Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti*

c100 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

***In addition, a flock of c60 unidentified mountain finches on 20th were probably also this species.

Przevalski's Rosefinch *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates – great views of a total of four pairs.

***A not-to-be-taken-for-granted bird which has something to offer no matter what subspecies of birder you are: beauty, interesting behavior (notably its parachute type song-flight which we saw repeatedly), odd song, as well as taxonomic interest (it has for some years now been known to represent a monotypic family).

'Chinese' Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus 'davidianus'*[^]

Seven bird-days. Noted on three dates – everyone finally got great views...

***[^]Tietze *et al.* (2013) seem to conclude, *contra* Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), that *davidianus* is NOT sufficiently diverged (just 2.1%) from its sister lineage *pulcherrimus* / *argyrophrys* to merit treatment as a full species: having determined (p299) that *waltoni* & *eos* form one species *C. waltoni*, they state that '*Carpodacus pulcherrimus* (F. Moore, 1856) consequently is left with only the subspecies *argyrophrys* Berlioz, 1929, *davidianus* A. Milne-Edwards, 1866, and nominate *pulcherrimus*'.

***See also www.birdforum.net/showthread.php?t=90229

Pink-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus waltoni*[^]

51 bird-days. Noted on three dates.

***^See taxonomic note under Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch, above.

Three-banded Rosefinch *Carpodacus trifasciatus*

One heard on 17th – SE Qinghai is on the edge of the species' range.

Chinese White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus dubius*

12 bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Eastern Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilloides*

26 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

***Several encounters with full-blown red males, rewarding in their own right, left us well prepared to recognize a male Caucasian Great Rosefinch...

Caucasian Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla severtzovi*

Two on 14th – a superb male next to the road!

***“Treatment of *severtzovi* as a subspecies of (Caucasian) Great Rosefinch *C. rubicilla* (of Caucasus) is unjustified given differences in plumage [Caucasian is much brighter red overall, and lacks whitish spots on the crown: Rasmussen 2005], habitat and (apparently) vocalisations (Dement'ev *et al.* 1970)...”: Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Tietze *et al.* (2013), however, established that *severtzovi* genetically is insufficiently differentiated from *rubicilla* to merit treatment as a separate species. What a bummer!

Red-fronted Rosefinch *Pyrrhospiza punicea*

Seven on 18th – close-range 'scope views of an adult male feeding next to four females: WOW!

Roborovski's Rosefinch *Kozlowia roborowskii*

Six bird-days. Noted on two dates – PW managed to get to within 3-4m of a fine male, obtaining outstanding photos...

Grey-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythaca*

13 bird-days. Noted on two dates – 'scope views of a male quietly feeding on budding leaves.

White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carniceps*

c80 bird-days. This somewhat nomadic species was noted on three dates – a flock of c70 N of Xining on 10th was great, but getting 'scope views of several on 22nd was even better.

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*

12 bird-days. Noted on two dates W of Koko Nor – nice views of several males.

Eastern Rock Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii*

60 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

Kozlov's Bunting *Emberiza koslowi*

Two on 10th: a cooperative male at c4,500m, plus a heard-only.

***Only when this highly localized and hard-to-get-to Restricted Range endemic species is 'in the bag' will birdwatchers allow themselves a sigh of relief and a pleasant 1st taste of 'we've done it!'. And did we do it!? Superb views, views that could hardly have been improved upon, and ditto photo opportunities – would have been worth far more of a trek: arguably the Most Special Bird of the Trip.
