

Report on a Mammal Trip to Sichuan Province, China (28 Sep – 5 Oct 2015)

Paul Carter

Summary:

Guide: Sid Francis - chengduuk@hotmail.com
Participants: Paul Carter (PC), Dominique Brugiére (DB), Holly Faithfull (HF).
Dates: 8 days: 28 Sep to 5 Oct 2015.
Route: Chengdu – Tangjiahe – Baxi and Ruergai – Wolong and Balangshan Pass – Chengdu.
An extension to our Qinghai trip (reported on by Jon Hall).
Mammals: 29 species including Chinese Zokor, Red Panda, Chinese Mountain Cat, Pallas's Cat.
All photos in this report by Paul Carter.

Mammal List:

1. **Complex-toothed Flying Squirrel** (*Trogopterus xanthipes*) @ Balangshan Pass.
2. **Northern Chinese Flying Squirrel** (*Aeretes melanopterus*) @ Balangshan Pass (tentative ID - seen only by HF and DB).
3. **Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel** (*Dremomys pernyi*) @ southwest of Tangjiahe.
4. **Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel** (*Tamiops swinhoei*) @ Balangshan Pass.
5. **Himalayan Marmot** (*Marmota himalayana*) @ Baxi area.
6. **Pere David's Rock Squirrel** (*Sciurotamias davidianus*) @ Tangjiahe.
7. **Chinese Zokor** (*Myospalax fontanierii*) – seen by PC and DM @ Baxi.
8. **Black-lipped Pika** (*Ochotona curzoniae*) @ Ruergai, Baxi.
9. **Moupin Pika** (*Ochotona thibetana*) – probable - by PC @ Balangshan Pass.
10. **Woolly Hare** (*Lepus oiostolus*) @ Baxi
11. **Chinese Mountain Cat** (*Felis bieti*) @ Ruergai.
12. **Pallas's Cat** (*Felis manul*) @ Ruergai.
13. **Leopard Cat** (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) @ Tangjiahe.
14. **Masked Palm Civet** (*Paguma larvata*) @ Tangjiahe.
15. **Gray Wolf** (*Canis lupus*) @ Baxi.
16. **Tibetan Fox** (*Vulpes ferrilata*) @ Ruergai.
17. **Red Fox** (*Vulpes vulpes*) @ Baxi.
18. **Asian Black Bear** (*Ursus thibetanus*) @ Tangjiahe.
19. **Hog Badger** (*Arctonyx collaris*) @ Tangjiahe.
20. **Red Panda** (*Ailurus fulgens*) @ Balangshan Pass (seen only by PC).
21. **Siberian / Eastern Roe Deer** (*Capreolus pygargus*) @ Baxi (seen only by DM and HF).
22. **Sika Deer** (*Cervus nippon*) @ Baxi.
23. **Tufted Deer** (*Elaphodus cephalophus*) @ Baxi.
24. **Reeves' Muntjac** (*Muntiacus reevesi*) @ Balangshan Pass.
25. **Sambar Deer** (*Rusa unicolor*) @ Balangshan Pass.
26. **Tibetan Gazelle** (*Gazella picticaudata*) @ Baxi (seen only by PC).
27. **Takin** (*Budorcas taxicolor*) @ Tangjiahe.
28. **Chinese Serow** (*Capricornis milneedwardsii*) @ Baxi.
29. **Chinese Goral** (*Naemorhedus griseus*) @ Tangjiahe and Balangshan Pass.

Itinerary:

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1. TANGJIAHE (28-30 SEP)

28 Sep: We landed at Chengdu airport (from Xining) at noon and were met by Sid. We drove north; stopped for lunch in Mianyang; drove through Zhuyuanba Gorge; and reached the entrance of Tangjiahe at around 7.30 pm; then spotlighted along the main road for the 11 km from Red Army Bridge up to the Tangjiahe Hotel seeing **Chinese Goral**, **Takin** and **Reeve's Muntjac**. All were easy to see on night drives; and also around the grounds of the hotel.

29 Sep: After breakfast in the rooms we drove out of the hotel at dawn seeing a few **Pere David's Rock Squirrel** along the road. Driving up the 10 km long Yinping Ancient Road, we stopped and scanned the slopes for Serow but none seen. From the parking area we walked the trail to Motliang Mountain, carefully skirting past a **Takin** on the path. Good birds included a Temmink's Tragopan. At noon we drove back to the lodge then spent the afternoon around the hotel, mostly on the Fragrant Princess Woods (FPW) trail looking for Tibetan Macaque, without success; the previously habituated group is no longer around. Between 4.30 and 6 pm DB and I again walked the FPW Trail and had good views of Reeves' Muntjac but nothing new. On the evening night drive (7.30–11.30 pm) we added **Masked Palm Civet**, **Leopard Cat**, **Hog Badger** and **Black Bear** (distant scope views of one in a tree). I then walked the FPW trail after midnight, with close views of a **Hog Badger** foraging. Apart from Muntjac there were no other mammals and it was quite foggy.

Leopard Cat



Hog Badger



Takin



30 Sep: After morning drives and walks we left at 9.30 am for Ruorgai, a couple hours later a **Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel** crossed the road ahead of us, before Pingwu town. In the afternoon we drove through Huang Long Nature Reserve but did not linger and crossed a busy pass at 3950 m. At about 5 pm we were up on the eastern side of the Tibetan Plateau.

2. BAXI, RUOERGAI AREA (30 SEP TO 2 OCT)

30 Sep: Before getting to Ruorgai we took a side road to the Baxi area for some evening scoping from Sid's regular scoping spot. DM was much relieved when we saw **Chinese Serow** on a ridge across the valley (a nice male with white mane) with a **Red Fox** nearby.

1 Oct: At 5.30 am we left the hotel in Ruorgai to get back to the Baxi area for dawn. At Sid's main spot we had 3 Serow and added **Gray Wolf** (x3 on a distant ridge). We then drove some nearby country roads after Sid's target road was blocked for maintenance, around 3020 m elevation. On the way back we found a shrubby meadow with **Chinese Zokor** mounds so DM and I disturbed a fresh mound and waited; after 20 minutes the occupant came by for hole maintenance; I managed a few nose pics before it closed the hole.



2 Oct: at 6.15 am we packed up and left Ruorgai for a last check at Baxi where three Serow were present and we added **Eastern Roe Deer** (seen by DM + HF); **Sika** (1 stag); and at the last minute DM located a **Tufted Deer** for us scope view.

3. RUOERGAI WETLANDS AREA (1 OCT)

1 Oct: After the morning in Baxi and lunch in Ruorgai we regrouped at 4.30 pm and drove out to the hills around the wetlands area for an evening walk and spotlighting. From the road we watched a **Tibetan Fox** hunting **Black-lipped Pika** not happy with just the one which it already had.

At the first area of low hills that we walked into I wandered off the path to a rocky hill and came across a freshly dead Chinese Mountain Cat. Whilst up that hill I saw two **Tibetan Gazelle** on the next ridge and Sid then waved that that he had a **Chinese Mountain Cat** over 500 m away on a distant ridge. It was dusk and after scope views we power-walked over but it was not seen again. Spotlighting on the way back DM picked up the eye-shine of another one close to where I had found the dead one.



We then drove back towards another rocky area where after an hour spotlighting I caught the weak eye-shine of a **Pallas's Cat** dozing on a rock ledge (a poor quality scope phone pic below).



4. WOLONG AND BALANGSHAN PASS (2-5 OCT)

2 Oct: At 9 am we left the Baxi area for a 14 hr trip to Wolong. Our last new mammal on the plateau was **Himalayan Marmot**. At 11.30 we stopped for lunch at Emma's Kitchen in the centre of Songpan; the manager mentioned a landslide on the road to Chengdu (330 km to the south). At 3 pm we reached Maoxian

town and had to sit it out for 3 hours because the landslide had covered a tunnel on the road to the south. At 6 pm the police opened the road to south-directed traffic; on reaching the landslide the traffic was diverted to the other side of the river along a one-way dirt track which explained the slow-going earlier on. After about 30 minutes we crossed back onto the main road and onto Wenchuan. Around 9 pm we were on 30 km of potholed mountain road alongside a roaring river, getting to Wolong after 11 pm.

The landslide south of Maoxian:



3 Oct: after breakfast we set drove up the Balangshan Pass road and stopped at a bend where Sid has had Moupin Pika before; an area with rhododendron forest and a stone wall along the bend. No pika seen but good birding included Blood Pheasant. We scanned another area at around 3300 m before we headed back to the hotel for a late lunch. At 5.30 pm we headed back up to the pika spot (no pika seen) and waited until dark before spotlighting the road back to the hotel; getting in after 10 pm. We saw **Chinese Goral**, **Sambar** and one **Complex-toothed Flying Squirrel**. Spotlighting was a bit uncomfortable due to the holiday traffic and drizzle.

4 Oct: At 5.30 am we set off pre-dawn for the 50 km drive to the top of Balangshan Pass to try for Chinese Monal. It was foggy and we dipped on the Monal. Birds just over the 4450 m pass included Grandala. There were also very fresh vole holes but no voles appeared, even after extensive squeaking. From here we turned back towards Wolong; stopping at one trailhead where we picked up Snow Partridge. At 12.30 pm we tried the Pika spot again; no pika but Holly spotted **Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel** sunning itself on a branch, giving us very good views from about 4 m. Birds included Giant Laughing Thrush.

At 1.30 pm we then stopped at the road-stalls at the 82 km mark; the stall owners reported a couple red panda sightings from a month ago. The others headed down to the hotel for the afternoon to save their energy for spotlighting but I was not keen to do that after the traffic last night and decided to focus on looking for the Moupin Pika and Red Panda for the rest of the day. So I started walking down the pass, scanning the trees for panda; and the others drove down to the hotel. At 3 pm I turned onto the Dengsheng Trail and immediately had quick views of a probable **Moupin Pika** (small, dark brown pika) near the start of the stone wall a few metres down the trail; it darted into a hole (at the wall) before I could get good views or a photo, and did not reappear. I then spent an hour at Dengsheng; a beautiful forest alongside the fast-flowing stream. Back on the main road just down from the ranger station I came across a dog feasting on a goral (roadkill?). Sid picked me up at around 5.45 pm. That evening when spotlighting the others had a different flying squirrel; tentatively a **Northern Chinese Flying Squirrel** (based on Holly's digiscoping pics).

5 Oct: We left the hotel at 5.40 am. DB and HF were particularly keen to try for the Monal Pheasant again and returned to the top of the pass; whereas I was keen to get back into Dengsheng Valley so they dropped me off on the way up. After staking out the pika spot for 30 minutes (without success) I continued along the main trail. I had views of a couple of **Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel** and Black-faced Laughingthrush. Just after 10.30 am and at about 500 m from the trailhead I came across a **Red Panda** only 4-5 m from the path and foraging head-down in the bark of a tree branch about 2 m off the ground. It was unaware of me until I starting taking pics; at which point it stared at me briefly then moved down to the ground and ran off. Back at the entrance at around 11.30 I met up with others; they had not seen the pheasant. We then walked back to the panda spot but no further sign of it.



At 3 pm we left Wolong for the 4 hr drive back to Chengdu (without Holly who stayed behind for a one week extension with Roland, Sid's colleague). DB and I scanned the slopes in the Wolong-Genda area for Tibetan Macaque but without success; and hung out at a traffic jam for a while:



Sid dropped us at the Chengdu Airport Hotel at around 7 pm and we flew out the next day. Thanks to Sid for a great trip; we ticked off nearly all of the target species.