

Birds, culture, great food and happy schoolchildren in –

Yunnan Province, China

(and a couple of sites in Hong Kong)

13th March to 11th April 2009

Barry Virtue and Steve Anyon-Smith



kids - the highlight of the trip

The Plan (and a couple of acknowledgements)

The focus of our holiday was to look for birds in some of Yunnan Province's mountainous areas, running along a long arc from Ruili in the south-west, north-easterly to Zhongdian (or Shangri-La) on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau (*see map below*). Once more we used the services of the Chengdu-based travel agency Sichuan China Youth Travel Service, who planned a tour of 27 days for us. While birding provided the focus, Yunnan features much ethnic diversity, scenery, good food and a relaxed and safe atmosphere. Barry-Sean Virtue joined me for our eighth holiday together. We are still friends.

Whilst most of the key birding sites can be visited in much less time than we allowed, I always like to spend more time so that non-birding activities can be explored, particularly opportunities to interact and learn more about local people and customs (this means drinking alcohol in the street).

It has been said that mammals are hard to see in the parts of Yunnan we were to visit. Those that said this were proven correct.

Fortunately birding legend Dion Hobcroft had travelled much the same route as we did and he started only ten or so days before us. He called us on the mobile a couple of times with important site tips; and later our guide would call Dion's ex-guide to ask questions. This added much value to our trip and more importantly, enabled us to see more birds than Dion did. Well, we had an extra week or so, but the handicapper said that this was fair.

One of the trip reports we were carrying was written by Jemi and John Holmes. Fate determined that I would meet in Tengchong where the Holmes' reinforced the value of staying at the Higherland Inn above Old Dali in the Cang Shen Mountains National Geopark. This site was a trip highlight for us.



Itinerary (as executed) – changes were made from the original itinerary as we went along

General comments on sites visited are included in the Diary section (below).

Day 0: Friday March 13

- Left Sydney at 0835 on Cathay Pacific CX110
- Arrive Hong Kong at 1450

Day 1: Saturday March 14

- At Mai Po Marshes, Hong Kong

Day 2: Sunday March 15

- At Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve, Hong Kong

Day 3: Monday March 16

- Fly to Kunming at 1155 on Dragonair KA0760
- Arrival at Kunming at 1425
- Birding at Dianchi Lake and Xishan (West Hill)
- Overnight at New Golden Flower Hotel, Kunming

Day 4: Tuesday March 17

- Birding at Xishan in the morning,
- Fly to Mangshi (Luxi) with Lucky Air in the afternoon
- Drive to Ruili
- Overnight at Ruili Hotel

Day 5: Wednesday March 18

- Birding at Moli Waterfall Reserve, Wanding and Jiele Reservoir
- Overnight at Ruili Hotel

Day 6: Thursday March 19

- Birding around the Nanjingli area
- Overnight at Ruili Hotel

Day 7: Friday March 20

- Birding at Hu Sa Dong Shan (between Ruili and Yingjiang)
- Overnight at Dong Nan Hotel, Yingjiang

Day 8: Saturday March 21

- Birding in Tongbiguan Nature Reserve (between Yingjiang and Nabang)
- Overnight at Bianchui Hotel, Nabang

Day 9: Sunday March 22

- Birding at Xiamaudao (on the Burmese border in Nabang)
- Overnight at Bianchui Hotel, Nabang

Day 10: Monday March 23

- Birding in Rongshuwang area (the giant banyan tree site 20 minutes south of Nabang)
- Overnight at Bianchui Hotel, Nabang

Day 11: Tuesday March 24

- Drive to Tengchong
- Birding at Lai Feng Shan (in Tengchong)
- Overnight at Hump Hotel, Tengchong

Day 12: Wednesday March 25

- Birding at Lai Feng Shan in the morning
- Afternoon go to Yun Feng Shan Temple
- Overnight at Yun Feng Shan Temple

Day 13: Thursday March 26

- Birding around Yun Feng Shan Temple
- Overnight at Yun Feng Shan Temple

Day 14: Friday March 27

- Birding around Yun Feng Shan Temple in the morning
- Return to Tengchong
- Birding at Lai Feng Shan
- Overnight at Hump Hotel, Tengchong

Day 15: Saturday March 28

- Birding at Bao Feng Temple (near Tengchong)
- Drive to Long Wang Chau, birding along the way
- Overnight at Long Wang Hostel, Long Wang Chau

Day 16: Sunday March 29

- Birding along the road over the main Gaoligong Range
- Overnight at Baihauling (Gaoligong Reserve Station)

Day 17: Monday March 30

- Birding at Baihauling
- Overnight at Gaoligong Reserve Station

Day 18: Tuesday March 31

- Birding at Baihauling
- Overnight at Gaoligong Reserve Station

Day 19: Wednesday April 1

- Birding at Baihauling
- Overnight at Gaoligong Reserve Station

Day 20: Thursday April 2

- Birding in Baoshan area (water reservoir + forested recreation park)
- Overnight at Rui Bao Hotel, Baoshan

Day 21: Friday April 3

- Drive to Dali
- Visit Dali Old Town and lake
- Overnight at Tian Chi Hotel, Dali City

Day 22: Friday April 4

- Birding along the Cloudy Tourist Road
- Overnight at Higherland Inn in Cang Shan National Geopark

Day 23: Sunday April 5

- Morning birding in Cang Shan
- Drive to Lijiang
- Birding in Lijiang area at Heilongtan Park (aka Black Dragon Pool Park)
- Overnight at Cai Lu Hotel, Lijiang

Day 24: Monday April 6

- Birding near Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and Lashi Hai Lake
- Overnight at Cai Lu Hotel, Lijiang

Day 25: Tuesday April 7

- Birding on trail leading up from Lashi Hai Lake
- Visit Tiger Leaping Gorge
- Overnight at Huanyingguanglin Hotel, Qiaotou

Day 26: Wednesday April 8

- Drive to Zhongdian birding along the way
- Birding at Napa Lake
- Visit Zhongdian Old Town
- Overnight at Salong Hotel, Zhongdian

Day 27: Thursday April 9

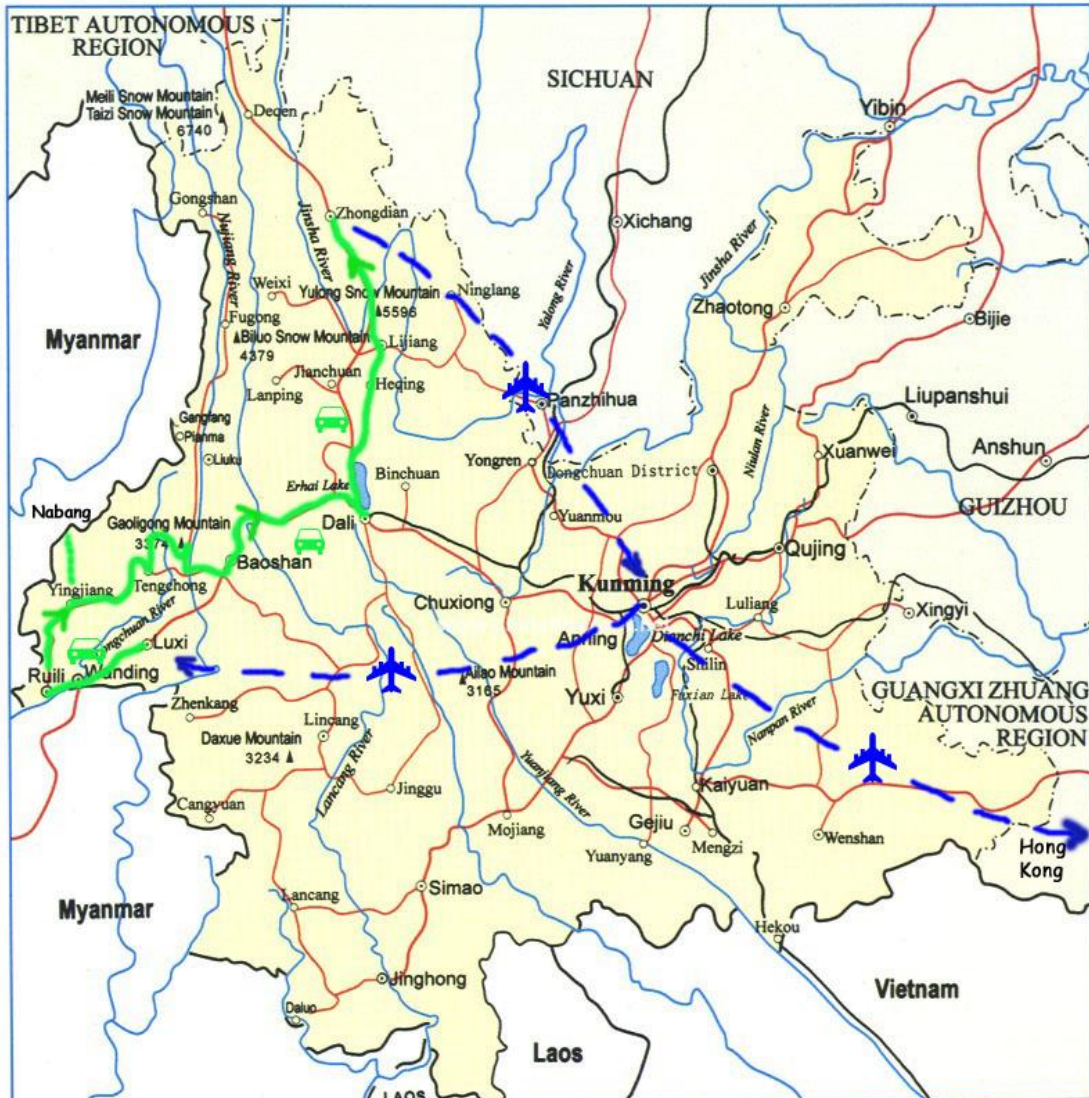
- Birding at sites along the road to and beyond Postada NP
- Visit Ganden Sumtseling Gumpa Tibetan Buddhist Monastery and associated wetland
- Overnight at Salong Hotel, Zhongdian

Day 28: Friday April 10

- Fly to Kunming
- Slothing in Kunming
- Overnight at New Golden Flower Hotel, Kunming

Day 29: Saturday April 11

- Birding at Xiashan
- 1520 fly to Hong Kong and connect to Sydney



Sichuan China Youth Travel Service

Sichuan China Youth Travel Service (SCYTS) arranged our itinerary and for all our transport, accommodation and guiding needs. On our previous tour of Sichuan we found the company to be honest, reliable and very competent, and this has not changed. Our contact was the very professional Ms Yia Min (or Kate). Once more we were quoted a very reasonable rate. SCYTS went to a considerable effort to arrange the itinerary and was always keen to help us with answering questions before our departure and allowing changes to the itinerary during the trip. This flexibility was invaluable as some sites were better than expected and vice versa.

It should be noted that SCYTS arranges the ground content for many of the international birding companies that travel to Sichuan and Yunnan.

SCYTS can be contacted at chinabird@tom.com.

Our Guide

Ming Wei, our licensed guide, spoke very good English and was suggested by our guide from a previous holiday in Sichuan, Zu Hang. Zu was unavailable at the time of our tour. Ming had been warned about birdwatchers and knew what to expect – early starts, peculiar personalities (with strong tendencies toward alcoholism), list-making and the irrational joy that follows seeing “lifers”.



Long tours can sometimes wear friendships but Ming was as cheerful, unflappable and professional on the last day as he was on the first. Ming was generous (e.g., he knew about us wanting to drink coffee at breakfast so he had bought some for us) and regarded any possible question as a personal challenge if he didn't know the answer. So in the evenings he would research the internet or his network of guiding friends and report back to us the next morning.

Ming never complained about anything and was always punctual. Whilst he made no claims to know anything about birds I am sure his experience on this tour will enhance his knowledge and assist him when next he confronts a birding group. At least he now knows what a bulbul looks like. Ming also acts as a guide for Wendy Wu Tours. He is highly recommended for personal tours – and can be emailed at franktigerwei@yahoo.com

Our Driver

Mr Bo (apparently drivers in China only have one name) hails from Tengchong in the bird-rich area of south-west Yunnan. His knowledge of birding sites and the road network anywhere between Ruili and Baoshan is encyclopaedic. Mr Bo has driven for foreign and local birders many times so he, too, knows what to expect. Once we reached Dali and beyond, Mr Bo was less certain. It was clear that neither he nor our guide could read a map. We met a lot of Chinese by virtue of roadside interviews.

Mr Bo was punctual, cheerful, extremely obliging and if he had any complaints other than those associated with his delicate stomach, we failed to understand them. On the subject of Mr Bo's stomach I was tempted to write a paragraph or two, but suffice to say that he enjoyed a certain type of noodles.

Mr Bo drove conservatively in comparison to those around us and despite being the instigator of a few curly overtaking manoeuvres, I would recommend him to others.

We had two different vehicles – a Mitsubishi Pajero (or “Palfro” – *the wags at the factory must have rearranged the letters on one side of the car hoping nobody would notice and they were right – up to a point*), and a VW Santana. The Pajero was used on the cobbled roads as far as Baoshan and the VW thereafter. Neither vehicle is subject to any kind of depreciation when Mr Bo fills out his tax returns, and despite some ominous sounds coming from the vehicles' engines, braking, steering, bearings, transmission, and on occasion, radio and driver, neither conveyance failed us.

Wildlife (see also lists and notes at the end of the report)

Along with trip reports from Jemi and John Holmes and a number of other birders, and notes and tips from Dion Hobcroft, we used MacKinnon and Phillipp's *Birds of China*. For mammals we relied on the knowledge that we were unlikely to see any.

We identified 352 different birds and a variety of squirrels in Yunnan and Hong Kong. 316 of these birds were seen in Yunnan Province. We were very happy with this, as the number of rare or regionally endemic birds was quite high.

Unusually for my rather irrelevant trip reports, this one has a bit of detail on birds seen and site notes in the diary section. There are a few reasons for this. Firstly there are not a lot of useful trip reports for Yunnan. Secondly our driver, Mr Bo, has driven a lot of Chinese birders to sites not featured on any of the trip reports that I had seen. And finally we discovered quite a few birds that had not featured in the trip reports of others, or were shown as out of range on the site maps in MacKinnon. These birds were all seen at times of the day before we started drinking. And I guess a contributing factor was that mammals were so elusive (or eaten) that we needed something else to do.

Apparently “out of range” birds are not all that surprising in Yunnan. It has not been studied as much as many regions in of Asia, and the whole patch is subject to seasonal visitors and passage migrants, particularly at the time of our visit. Additionally most birds

cannot read field guides, have wings and do rather better than many people when they are truly lost.

We failed to see a number of key species. Some, like collared myna, were not searched for, whilst others were just missed. Interestingly we found some target birds at known birding sites but unrecorded at these sites in the trip reports of others.

Ruili was very birdy and we should have spent an extra day or two there. Other really good sites were Lai Feng Shan Park in Tengchong and the area around Zhongdian. We stayed for four nights at the much-celebrated Baihauling. Our visit there intersected with wet and very cold weather so we came away less than excited although we still managed a few good birds.

As an aside I would think that birding by public transport in Yunnan would be quite difficult and would result in much time wasted.

Our bird list does not feature many warblers. You can draw your own conclusions about this. Personally I found it liberating to ignore all warblers that had wing bars. Chairman Mao had the wrong list of targets when he thought he could prevail over wildlife. An attempt at getting rid of *Phylloscopus* warblers might have been a greater legacy.



grey-headed flying squirrel

Mammals were tough. Aside from a treeshrew all the other mammals seen were squirrels, with the best being a sleepy grey-headed flying-squirrel seen sunning itself in the middle of the afternoon in a park in Baoshan. Mammal spoor corresponded with various small cats (probably leopard cat and jungle cat) and a deer or two. We heard a crashing and bounding sound in the forest near Nabang that would be consistent with a

fleeing swamp wallaby, but I would suggest that these would be rarely seen in Yunnan. We didn't go spotlighting as we rarely stayed anywhere near a forest.



Reptiles – a few scurrying skinks were seen but not cared about.

Insects (annoying) – kamikaze flies that want to live in your eyes were an irritation around Ruili and Nabang.

Insects (not annoying) – almost none.



Food

We ate in a variety of outlets ranging from restaurants where untalented singers yelled and rather more talented cloned female dancers colourfully moved about, to the grubbiest imaginable family run shoeboxes and street stalls. If you have now formed an image of grubby - and you have not been to China - then you have not formed the correct image so get rid of it.

The food was always fresh and tasty, sufficient for our needs and delivered quickly and with a smile. Just like restaurant food in Australia isn't. Complimentary green tea is a feature of every meal except breakfast (which is when you might actually want tea).



As we spent some time along the Burmese border we had the advantage of eating some Burmese specialties. Food popular in Sichuan was also common. As Yunnan is awash with every type of vegetable, fruit and fungus imaginable we never tired of eating. I think that the food in Yunnan was probably the freshest, tastiest, most varied and cheapest I have had on any overseas trip. This is a big call.....

Food was very inexpensive with meals ranging in price from about \$A0.25 to \$A3.00. Whilst many of the “restaurants” looked pretty disgusting Barry-Sean and I only managed to get sick once each.

Hong Kong and Chinese people

I cannot emphasise how safe you feel walking the streets or forests of Hong Kong or Yunnan Province. Here the similarities end.

Aside from some members of the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society we found the vast majority of people we met or saw in Hong Kong to be sad, boring, listless and downright unattractive compared to the billion or so on the other side of “the fence”. We couldn’t even get babies to laugh or cry in Hong Kong, even when actively tormenting them. We were told that the fence separating Hong Kong from the mainland is to stop hordes of Chinese looking for work and swamping Hong Kong. Why? The razor wire is on the wrong side.



When we arrived in Kunming we were greeted by beaming children, smiling adults and very energetic people who looked to be high on life. Try it and see for yourself.

During our stay in Yunnan we travelled in areas populated, in part, by a number of ethnic minorities. These included the Burmese and Dai people along the border from Ruili to Nabang and to a lesser extent, Tengchong. This area had a distinct South-East Asian look, smell and feel, but with far fewer mangy dogs. The Yi people proved elusive but we saw some of their houses I am told. Bai folk dominated Dali, while the Naxi had Lijiang as their stronghold. Tiger Leaping Gorge held the ethnically rare Muosuo – known for their odd understanding of the concept of marriage (look it up). As Zhongdian lies within a Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (whatever that means), Tibetans and their distinctive architecture were dominant there.

A trained eye might be able to spot the physical differences between many of the Chinese ethnic minorities but for the likes of us the women's clothing and the styles of housing were the most obvious clues.



All the people we met were friendly and welcoming. Many were genuinely excited to interact with us. A simple walk in the street could result in many splendid, joyful and even moving encounters. We were certainly a curiosity to many, as foreign tourists are very rare over much of Yunnan. We spent the first three weeks without seeing another foreigner. We just loved the place.

The children of Yunnan were the holiday's highlight for me. Kids of all ages waved enthusiastically, smiled and often became quite animated as they said "hello" or "bye-bye". It is no exaggeration to say that at times we had a simultaneous "hello" from hundreds of kids. They tried all sorts of tricks to get to talk with us or have our photos taken with them. Teenage girls tried (with moderate success) to smuggle us inside their schools; they tried (with no success) to take us home to meet their family – at least that is what I hope they intended to do; and if we saw them two days running they would ask us if we remembered them. I can't remember an unhappy kid and come to think of it I can't remember too many fatties either. And guess how much graffiti we saw?



If the future of China is predicated by the behaviour and attitude of its children now, then it has a bright future indeed. I might offer just a couple of tips for them – stop cutting down trees and throw away the slingshots. I guess these are boy-specific tips. Come to think of it the world might be a better place with just girls (and me).

Whilst Yunnanese (if that's a word) of all ages were curious about us generally, they were far more interested in our lower legs and feet. Barry-Sean's thong-clad feet were of particular interest to people of all ages, ethnic backgrounds and sex. Many would chance a sly glance as they passed, but at times group ogling would occur. This was often accompanied by shocked grunts, groans and grimaces. At times we feared riots. Barry-Sean was so affected by this that he was wont to shower with his socks on. Maybe his feet offended some ancient Feng Shui principle.



wow – look at those feet!!

I have one other minor criticism of some Yunnan folk. They have an amazing propensity for making noise in scenic or forested places and outside three star hotels in the middle of the night. Some of the noises are associated with normal, but generally private, bodily functions whilst others seem to be more associated with the previously unknown sport of “Pissing off Steve Anyon-Smith while he is trying to look at something or sleep”. They didn’t seem to bother each other so my passing will go unnoticed. I guess it may have been possible that they were yelling to each other about Barry-Sean’s feet but I have no proof of this.

Hotels

Hotels remain the only accommodation option for most tourists, including us. Camping would be brilliant, safe and allow close access to some great sites but camping hasn’t caught on in China. There is a business opportunity here – seriously.

SCYTS booked mainly three star hotels for us, and these more than met our needs, despite my petty comments about cleanliness and functional plumbing. They were all safe and secure.

Hotel room layouts appear to be dictated by the government – they are all the same except for the toilet flushing systems (see *Toilets*). As with Sichuan, no hotel room has ever seen any maintenance so any star rating system is nonsense. Barry-Sean surveyed hotels in Tengchong to test this hypothesis. He found that a no star hotel was every bit as good as a three star, in our case the oddly named “Hump Hotel”. I’m not sure if the “Hump” is a reference to camels or rooms that can be hired by the hour.

Beds in Chinese hotels are all wonderfully firm. I loved them. This is important after your cold shower.

Travel tip – always disconnect the room phone before retiring, unless of course you’re indiscriminating enough to want the nocturnal special service “house lucky dip”. My choice of words here is not based on any personal experience, but on the observations of others.

Hotel front desk staff often require guests to provide a little information about themselves based on the contents of their passports, school grades, batting averages and the likelihood that the hotel condoms, genital sterilisation kits and personal lubricants will be sufficient for their stay. My current passport owns two previous Chinese visas and these were the ones the front desk would copy. Any suggestion from me that these were yesterday’s news would be ignored. They would dutifully copy the details and then just to make sure, they would put them on a scanner. And while this was going on they would try to avoid eye contact and do their best to ignore our feet.

One of the good features of hotels is the bottled / boiling water machines in the rooms. But you must bring your own coffee and spoon (Ming - by the way, thanks again for the coffee). Some hotels even accept the fact that you are going to do some washing in the bathroom (like everyone does everywhere) and offer tips on where you can hang it – very civilised!

Kevin Rudd and harmony

Krudd is very well known in China it appears. Since his speech in Mandarin two things have happened:

- The Australian media and the Australian Liberal Party had a field day dumping shit on him, and
- Ordinary Chinese people love him for speaking in their language.

I really shouldn't write about important things that I have little knowledge of, but hey, my opinion here might just be reasonable, who knows? Here goes. Chinese people crave acceptance from foreigners (unlike the citizens of some Western countries). There are many reasons for this I am sure.

I made a bit of a joke about "harmony" in Yunnan with Barry-Sean and our new friends. But thinking more about the word and its application to the Chinese, it all starts to make more sense to me. The attitudes and behaviour of the people we met and their interactions with one another, their families, community and presumably everyone else in the country suggest to me that Chinese society is far more harmonious than anything I have seen in the West. I am not necessarily an advocate for a one party political system or a long list of crimes that should see people executed. All I am saying is that if visitors to China keep their eyes open and their prejudices to a minimum they will learn much that is very positive about human relationships and social harmony without needing to learn a single word of Mandarin. In fact it probably helps if you don't learn the language.

Normal transmission now resumes.....



Weather

Our holiday was supposed to coincide with the late winter / early spring dry period. Ming, our guide, reconfirmed this. When rain was forecast on the TV news, Ming explained that rain would not occur, as it was the dry season in Yunnan. When it subsequently rained he sensibly announced the start of the wet season.

The wet weather was more of a nuisance than a misery, although unfortunately our time at Baihauling, a premier birding site, was more wet than dry.

Temperatures were variable ranging from near freezing nights at Zhongdian to daytime highs of around 30° at Ruili.

Beer and Wine etc

Not much can be said about the quality of beer and wine in Yunnan. Every town and village seemed to have beer with a different label but they all tasted the same, or else they would have if they had any taste. One “popular” beer is named Tsingtao. Ming told us that “Tsingtao” is an acronym for “This Shit Is No Good Try Another One”. There would really be no point in doing this. On the positive side, beer was available just about everywhere and was very cheap, costing as little as \$A0.60 for a longneck. There is an added benefit – the beer at home (if you don’t live in the USA) tastes so much better when you get back. Perhaps there is another business opportunity here...

We tried a Yunnan-bred Cab Sav that cost us around \$A10 for a bottle. We ended up drinking it anyway. It would not be saleable in Australia at any price. We did not try any other wine.

Other medicinal end-of-day fluids could be procured. These were contained in small green, brown or clear bottles. The labels contained lots of information that may have been relevant to the contents but we couldn’t be sure about this. Despite years of exposure to obscure foreign spirits the contents of the small bottles confounded our alcohol identification skills. We had no idea what we were drinking or even if we were supposed to drink it in the first place – for all we knew tree poison might have been sold next to the beer and wine. We agreed on one thing - there was no way to make it taste good. We tried mixing it with anything ranging from cold coffee to coconut milk but the principal ingredients shone through. These concoctions are highly recommended, although we left a number of roadside trees dead in our wake.

Mr Bo offered us a clear fluid sourced, I think, from a Tibetan family’s dog. It tasted vaguely like something we once drank in Nepal after everything else alcoholic in the Langtang Valley had been exhausted. It was nice, I think.

Roads and traffic

Driving in China relies on the art of not hitting anything. Whilst this is a universal principle, in China drivers make a number of assumptions:

- biggest wins (no surprises here),

- the other guy thinks the same as you do and is just as impatient, in a harmonious sort of way,
- there is still some room to miss everything (even if measured in millimetres), and
- an accident would cause massive loss of face (or chest, leg, groin etc), and much harmony would also be lost.

Overtaking is compulsory in all situations.

Drivers in China know very little about the machines they operate. Someone must have told all of them that fuel can be saved by driving around in a gear that is at least two gears too high. Occasionally I found it hard to relax whilst continuously saying to myself “please change down”.

The roads in Yunnan are not too bad. Many are cobbled and whilst the ride can be noisy, there are few car-swallowing surprises. The lack of signposting would make hiring and driving a car yourself, which is illegal for foreigners anyway, utterly impossible. Traffic is not too heavy anywhere, and if drivers did not have the habit of stopping in the middle of the road to have a chat with who knows who, then travel times would be lower.

There is an image and a sound that is impossible for any visitor to Yunnan to forget. The Province is awash with small trucks with 36HP two cylinder belt-driven engines mounted forward of the cabin and totally exposed to the elements. These things carry everything - stone, bulk steel, wet concrete, food, each other, Chinese people, etc. They appear to be indestructible and they occur absolutely everywhere, often in long convoys. Happily they know their place in the hierarchy of things and quickly get out of the way of other vehicles.





Scenery and the cost of viewing it

There is much scenery in Yunnan, particularly from Dali through to Zhongdian, where deep gorges, snow capped mountains, rivers and exotic architecture are the norm. The whole region we visited is quite mountainous. Although primary forest was hard to find anywhere near a road there was plenty of good regrowth forest, interesting crops, people, vehicles, villages and signs in Chinglish to keep us entertained.

Roadside scenery presented very good value for money. But many of the better photographic points had been strategically hidden behind entrance fee gates, sometimes many kilometres from anywhere that might offer a free sneak preview. Some entry fees were positively absurd. If you wish to visit the AAAAAA Class Attraction known as Jade Dragon Snow Mountain (near Lijiang), then entry fees, chair lift tickets and the compulsory fee to “preserve Old Lijiang” would cost you well in excess of \$A100 per person per day. Old Lijiang is a shopping mall that shows no signs of needing any further preservation and as Ming pointed out – there is not a single building that constitutes of anything other than a tourist trinket shop or restaurant.



We got sick of paying entrance fees, but domestic Chinese tourists don't even blink at them. Jade Dragon Snow Mountain caters for many HUNDREDS of tourist BUSES daily. For me the continuous entry fees, even for places that turn out to be utterly boring or totally maintenance free, is one of the most disappointing features of travel in China.

If there is any worthwhile scenery around Ruili we missed it on account of the worst smoke haze I have ever seen. I believe much of this comes from Burma.

Toilets

Another three hotel toilet flushing systems have been added to my burgeoning world list. All of our hotels had toilets, except one. This toilet-challenged example also had no shower, bucket or other container that might have held water, or the local equivalent thereof. *See diary entry for Day 15.*

By far the most interesting toilet was one of those at the Yung Fen Shan Taoist Monastery. Incidentally you can determine when you are anywhere near a Taoist Monastery by the quality, density, displacement and variety of plastic and other rubbish that surrounds it.

Anyway, the toilet. This wonderful bathroom is perched on the edge of a granite mountain. In fact the mountain forms a part of the convenience as some of the "plumbing" is carved from it. The dunny is of the open plan style with sloping slots carved into the stone beneath the donors. Personal slots are angled downwards to the main carrier slot. The angle of the slots is critical. If the angle is too great then there is a danger that any solid matter might eventually be carried away by gravity. The ancient

Taoist plumbers (or their agents) knew that it would be bad karma if the monastery founder's initial turd were to move from its original position. You can still view this masterpiece in Slot Four, the farthest and most private when counting from the entrance. Don't count aloud as this might require breathing.

Some toilets were strategically located so that the whole town, if so disposed, could view anyone using them.



Diary

Day 0 - Friday 13th March 2009

Preshus, the more senior of my tame Lesbians, kindly took Barry-Sean and I to the airport for our 0835 Cathay Pacific A330 flight to Hong Kong. The check-in queue did not exist so that part of the airport mystery bag was easy. The custom's dragon gave me a short lecture on why I should not try to be helpful to her. I tendered a smart-arse response that she utterly failed to understand, which was nice.

The plane for our Hong Kong flight was quite new with large personal video screens and fancy seating. The cabin crew was exceptionally friendly. In fact one of them, Tiff, was so friendly I thought I had died and gone to heaven.....

I watched a couple of movies until I managed to break the video control handset by pressing too many buttons at once. As a result the rest of the flight, aside from frequent visits from Tiff, was quite boring.

Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Airport thing was pretty well understood and quite efficient. We cleared immigration the very second our baggage arrived. We then paid for a couple of airport express train tickets to Kowloon and found a lazy \$HK50 in coins sitting unloved in the change slot. How long has this been going on? Why is nobody at the airport onto this?

Our hotel, the Dorsett Kowloon had small clean rooms that cost us \$A100 per night. This is cheap for three star hotels in Hong Kong. We then strolled the streets buying essentials of the kind that fill the hotel room's fridge. After an ordinary dinner in an ordinary (boring) restaurant we had a couple of liquid sleeping pills and went to bed. A good travel day.

Day 1 - Saturday 14th March 2009

I was awake and ready to go at 0220. Problem belong me.

An early opening bakery provided breakfast and take-away lunch for a much-anticipated visit to the Mai Po Marshes, an extremely important and wonderful wetland sandwiched between Hong Kong and the "mainland". To get there we first walked to Mongkok East Railway Station where we caught a fast, clean, silent, flat-screen-television-filled and graffiti-free train chock full of locals who all appeared to be barely alive. I must confess that the 0600 Jannali to The City service in Sydney is very similar and only differs insofar as it is slow, dirty, noisy and nowadays lacks any scenery on account of the terminally scratched windows. The people look much the same.

A bus was taken from the train station to Mai Po Village. The marshes were a short walk away. We were lucky in that it was apparently the first sunny day for over a week. This must have been the reason that the Hong Kong locals were so cheerful.

The WWF (not the World Wrestling Federation – the other one) manages Mai Po and does a wonderful job. As it was Saturday and the incoming tide was a promising one for seeing many birds, there were scores of Hong Kong birders present and this was good news for us for a number of reasons. Firstly we were clueless in terms of where to look and had even less idea on when. Members of the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society sorted this out and to them we are very grateful.



I managed five new birds at Mai Po, but none were waders, despite Nordmann's greenshanks and a long-billed dowitcher. Black-faced spoonbills were very welcome as were three new gulls (black-tailed, Saunders's and slaty-backed). Also new were some masked laughingthrushes.

After we exhausted the contents of the hotel room's cold storage facility we found a Vietnamese restaurant near the hotel, which provided wonderfully fluffy fried rice.

Day 2 - Sunday 15th March 2009

Hong Kong folk must be amazingly honest. Police of any plumage were not seen and on public buses customers seemed to dump a random assortment of coins which may or may not have added up to the total bus fare, into a bin. Or maybe nobody cared.

We thought we may have unwittingly become extras in a zombie movie as we made our way to Tai Po Kau Nature Reserve, a fairly large forested hill and said to be occasionally fairly birdy. The beings that shared the train and bus with us looked right through us and seemed incapable of emotions of any kind. They even failed to

become animated after the bus driver took us several stops past the entrance to Tai Po Kau after we had earlier announced to all and sundry that we were looking to go there. This is fascinating. Here is this thumping big mountain in the middle of the driver's (and presumably passengers') run and nobody had ever heard of it. We even had a map written in English and Cantonese but that received blank stares from all.

Half an hour's walk back down the road was the grand entrance to the reserve. The forest is all advanced secondary growth. Birds were at first easy to see but soon got very tough indeed. The Sunday crowds and the attendant noise pushed us to the farthest reaches of the reserve. As many of the local punters took their dogs with them, interesting birds soon vanished or else they all turned into bulbuls.

As I had never visited Hong Kong I still managed four lifers with fork-tailed sunbird, chestnut bulbul, yellow-cheeked tit and rufous-tailed robin, with the robin probably the best of them.

Back in Kowloon we searched for a spot to enjoy some cleansing ale and watch the world go by. We sat near a fairly busy street corner and during the course of drinking cans of Skol, Tsingtao and San Miguel we spied a sum total of exactly no attractive women whatsoever. Now we know that our own male modeling / stripping careers have almost reached their peak, but we thought someone would catch our eye. Even a smile might have got somebody across the line. We gave thought to the idea that a local law might be responsible.



the most cheerful bar we could find

Our dinner was back at the Vietnamese place. The dish advertised as “large mixed food” looked great on the picture on the wall but was less agreeable on the palate. The stomach concurred.

I had a bizarre dream that included the following: an anthill in South America, gay priests, nudity (isn't there always!), distorted time and space, and everyone we had seen in the previous two days in Hong Kong. Although the dream was a little scary it failed to wake me.

Day 3 - Monday 16th March 2009

We tried the hotel restaurant's “Sumptuous Buffet Breakfast”. This cost \$A11 and was awful. We were the only guinea pigs and we now know why.

We decided to catch the airport bus from the hotel for the same price as the express train. This removed the need to get to the train station. It also allowed us to build a great working knowledge of Kowloon streets as we crisscrossed the city picking up others from their hotels. The views of the port and other sights were better seen from the bus than the train.



The duty free shop's chemist sold us some medicinal one litre bottles of Talisker and Balvennie with our leftover \$HK, although the prices were much higher than those at Sydney Airport.

We decided that Hong Kong citizens are born bored. I stared, smiled and then grimaced at a baby in a pram and it just stared at me and acted bored. And that's how we were after two days in Hong Kong.

Yunnan Province, China

Our Dragonair A320-200 flight left Hong Kong on time at 1155 and arrived in Kunming at 1405. The airport stuff was straightforward.

We were warmly greeted by Mr Ming Wei, our guide. He acted like he was gay but he reassured us by talking of his wife, Nana, a girl. Ming seemed very obliging and was recommended by Zu, my excellent guide from Sichuan.

We visited Dianchi Lake, where the locals were fattening over-wintering black-headed gulls with bread. I am not sure the gulls need this. This failed to inspire us so we asked to go to Xishan (West Hill) a forested mountain cum recreation park on the edge of the city and quite nearby. We found a few birds there but given the time of day we weren't shocked that we saw nothing remarkable.

But something was remarkable - the people. No more sad faces. There were happy giggling girls, singing women and high fives from passing men. The world had changed. Meeting people on the trails suddenly meant warm and wonderful interactions.

We left West Hill late in the afternoon and drove to our hotel, the New Golden Number Seven Lucky Dragon Chrysanthemum, or something like that. The rooms were three times the size of our Hong Kong shoebox.

Ming took us to a fancy all-singing all-dancing noodle + mystery bag restaurant. The internal fountains and very pretty cloned female dancers were almost outgunned by some great Chinglish signs. I loved "Mind the Soup". What they actually meant was "Mind the Soup". Apparently it is dangerous if spilled on your lap. Nothing new here. The food was good, the nearby ATM was generous and the Balvennie 12yo doublewood single malt whisky rounded off a good travel day.



Day 4 - Tuesday 17th March 2009

We arrived at the hotel's breakfast melee just before the 100+ Chinese package tourists. We felt very sorry for these folk, for despite their healthy appearance they had clearly not eaten for some days. Fortunately the free-for-all quickly subsided as the tour buses started their engines.

We went back to West Hill, arriving just after sunrise. We thought we may have had the place to ourselves but we were wrong. We walked between the lower and upper cable car stations and whilst there were always birds around the diversity wasn't high. The birds were skittish and we missed a number of flighty tree-top things. We managed an Asian stubtail hiding in some dense creek-side vegetation. Crested finchbill were reasonably common. Eighteen birds were added to our trip list as well as the only non-squirrel mammal we were to see on the entire trip – a northern treeshrew.

A few dozen men in full uniform and carrying charged CO₂ bottles came jogging in formation up the mountain's road. It turns out they were firemen. Their commanding officer insisted on having their photos taken with us. We all held hands and smiled. In hindsight we should have charged a fee of 5 yuan for every time someone in Yunnan took our photos – we could have paid for the trip.....

We enjoyed a delicious lunch at a Sichuanese restaurant, and whilst there Dion Hobcroft called to pass on some relevant info regarding later birding sites, which was very good of him.

We transferred to the airport for our flight to Luxi (Mangshi). We had seen a plane at Kunming Airport when we arrived the day before – with the name "Lucky Air". We laughed that at least we weren't flying on that!

Ming took out a life insurance policy (I'm deadly serious) before we all boarded our Lucky Air 737-700. Almost everyone booked on the flight was allowed to try flying on it. The exception was a chappy who was the last to board. Two guys who looked like the local equivalent of the Men in Black, superbly attired in all sorts of scary stuff, entered the plane and looked menacingly in the direction of the hapless occupant of Row 4B. They silently escorted him to a place unknown. We guessed it wouldn't be sunny. Everyone else sat very still and nobody said a word.

The air had taken a holiday for our arrival in Mangshi and for the drive with our new driver, Mr Bo, to Ruili. Sticking your head in a bushfire would have been more pleasant. My eyes burn just by looking at a picture of it. Barry-Sean optimistically thought that dust might have been to blame, but in Ruili the dust never settled.

Ruili is very South-East Asian in appearance, but with extra smoke. The area is home to the Dai people as well as a large population of Burmese, with the Myanmar border just three kilometers away.

We stayed at the very comfortable and inexpensive Ruili Hotel. Dinner was at a local street-side restaurant where six dishes, five bowls of rice and four longnecks of beer cost us a total of \$A8, including tips.

We purchased a thermos and some food from a local supermarket. I reckon the shop had 50 uniformed staff and 48 of these were women. Their job description simply said - "stand in the aisle somewhere". It did not state where they should stand or why they should stand there, so the distribution of yellow-plumaged ornaments could best be described as random. They were very happy to see us for some reason. This was before we discovered it was all to do with Barry-Sean's feet.

Day 5 - Wednesday 18th March 2009

Mr Bo's Pajero hated mornings and for reasons we didn't explore the engine never wanted to start.

After breakfast we visited the Moli Waterfall. We were the first to arrive and although I had to pay the entry fee of 50 yuan, Barry-Sean got in for free on account of being an old codger (locally defined as being over 70). The car park had birds in every tree and distant valley slope treetops were very lively indeed. We walked to the waterfall. We had to do this on account of Barry-Sean's well-known fondness for such things, irrespective of their quality. This was all fine, but the combination of a noisy watercourse and an aggressive campaign by park workers to rid the valley of what must have been considered unattractive undergrowth, meant that few birds were seen on this trail.

This highly recommended site had its best birding along the road between the car park and the entrance gate, a distance of a kilometre or so. We identified 63 birds and almost all of these were from this road. Had we had a good working knowledge of how to convert the illustrations of warblers from the plates in the guide book into real life, we would have added several more. Best were an obliging eye-browed wren-babbler posing low in some bamboo, white-tailed robin, red-billed scimitar-babbler, red junglefowl and black-breasted thrush.

The post-lunch site, Wandering "zoo" should be avoided. There were a few birds but nothing that could not be more easily seen elsewhere.

Mr Bo had taken the motor to get some repairs. He sent a taxi to find us enjoying a cup of tea with a local Dai family.



We had time to have a look for birds around the Jiele Reservoir, and again we saw a few list-fillers but nothing of any great note.

We bought a large watermelon for \$A1 from a roadside vendor.

We called early drinks but Ming wanted to go to the Burmese border to have a look. I guess coming from Australia, a country without national borders, we don't get too excited to be near one, but the Chinese are seemingly obsessed with them. That is when they are not redefining them. Thinking about it, a border between Queensland and Australia might be okay.

The Burmese border saw many Chinese tourists excitedly taking pictures. While this was going on Barry-Sean and I were assaulted by a Burmese lass from the local jade shop. She argued she was trying to practice her English but she really wanted to sell us jade, or something. She was soon joined by a person named Frankiepenny, who was introduced as her sister although this seemed unlikely as the two of them appeared to come from different planets.



Back in Ruili and we found ourselves distracted by a wedding party. They invited us to share their wedding feast with them! How long has this been going on? More pertinently, why didn't we join them? I'm still trying to work that one out.



Meanwhile the streets held threatening packs of goofy-looking hairy-arsed Chinese boys who tried to block our way, taunting us with threats like “Welcome to China” and “How do you like Ruili?” They reminded me of the kids back home, not.

Our drinking venue turned out to be strategically located across the road from a girl’s high school. Many of the girls bought their dinner from the very establishment we were patronizing. Lucky, huh. Vast scrums of 14 to 16 year old girls wedged in ever closer to the aliens from Australia. I was reminded of a scene from Monty Python and The Holy Grail where Sir Galahad had similar problems. As the crowds dwindled the more persistent of the girls asked us questions of what we thought of China, how long people have had blue eyes and why our feet looked the way they did. This was the defining experience of my holiday – the kids of Ruili – well done!



Ming arrived and we chatted about Tibet and Taiwan. Interesting.

Day 6 - Thursday 19th March 2009

We arrived at the “Old Church” on the Nanjinli road just after sunrise. Apparently the church is a long forgotten film set prop, not a functioning Christian church so please don't panic here – Ruili is not about to be overcome by Christian Taliban hordes. We walked various trails but the trail to the village downhill from the church was the most productive. The birding was continuous, even well into the afternoon and we finished the day with 65 species. The best were Chinese francolin (twice), red-faced liocichla, rufous-backed sibia, striated bulbul, grey-headed parrotbill and the very common rusty-fronted barwing. Old favorites included silver-breasted and long-tailed broadbills.



Our drinking site was the same – opposite the school. Not surprising really. The number of teenage girls we met was overwhelming. Some came up to ask whether we remembered them from the day before whilst others joined a queue to meet us. One remarked about my (apparently) beautiful eyes. She and her friend asked if we wished to meet their teacher. We guzzled our beers and set forth with a girl at each arm and into the unknown depths of the biggest school I have ever visited. We managed to get through three sets of archways and gates, and past several security officers (of unknown purpose and blank expression), before we were confronted by a very polite and apologetic gentleman, who, through our interpreters, managed to convey that we should leave the school without delay. We could take the girls with us if we wished. In fact I think he preferred it that way. If this had been in Australia we would have been unfairly charged with various crimes.....



Back on the street we said goodbye to our escorts, along with several other kids and assorted officials, and took solace in more beer. We sulked in the furthest recesses of the restaurant, about 2.5 metres away from the street.





Day 7 - Friday 20th March 2009

We left Ruili and drove to Zhangfeng where we had a simple but delicious breakfast of – noodles. After a 45 minute drive toward Yingjiang we reached Hu Sa Dong Shan. A trail leads slowly up the mountain from the road. It starts at an elevation of 2000m. The trail is easy to find. After the road makes a fairly long uphill climb it is on the right hand side heading north. It is opposite a large odd-looking concrete sign with big arrows pointing out of it and located at the top of a saddle. The trail eventually reaches a recently constructed and rather rustic Buddhist temple that was nicely abandoned for the time of our visit. Just before the temple a series of trails lead through primary montane forest. These would be worth exploring.

The birding was excellent all along the trail and fabulous near the temple. Here we had a mixed flock with four different laughingthrushes – red-tailed (an amazing bird!), greater necklaced, rufous-collared and red-faced liocichla. Grey sibilas were seen on eight occasions. Lady Amherst's pheasants were around but not seen.

We moved on. Mr Bo knew a site along a major river that was accessed past some fish farms at the back of Yingjiang town. Here we found good gallery forest and bamboo stands. The highlight here was a dark-sided thrush digging in the leaf litter in a muddy anabranch of the river. Chinese babax and a host of other common birds were also seen.

We checked into the Dong Nan Hotel and soon found ourselves with a host of new friends as we found a retailer of cold beer. Dinner was superb - chili eggplant, fish balls (yeah, I know), beef with garlic leaves and egg with shallots.

Day 8 - Saturday 21st March 2009

We left Yingjiang well before sunrise for the border town of Nabang. The road passes through the Tongbiguan Nature Reserve. There are no obvious trails and the best birding involves walking along the road as it descends through the advanced secondary forest. We walked for about eight kilometers with the birding almost continuous. Although the traffic was never heavy it was irritating. Three different squirrels were seen – black giant, Himalayan striped and Anderson's with multiple sightings of each. Grey sibia and pin-tailed green pigeon were the best of the birds. White-crested laughingthrush were very common. 39 other birds were identified. The best of the traffic was - big black truck, smoky green truck (quite common), overloaded motorcycle in angel gear and public bus with dead brakes.

Just before we reached Nabang, Mr Bo stopped at a brick-walled pond with reeds and grazed bamboo inside. Superficially it looked bird-less aside from a few kingfishers. I scanned the enclosure from the road a few times and saw nothing. I then imagined Dion Hobcroft standing next to me saying "lesser crested nargler, two of them, oh, and what's this?" So another slow scan turned up a cinnamon bittorn. A few lobbed bits of cow-turd later and we had Swinhoe's snipe, a few greater painted-snipe, striated grassbird and a happily singing lone Blyth's reed-warbler.

The Bian Chui Hotel was our digs in Nabang and it was just fine – hot showers and electricity for much of the time. Bring earplugs for when the generator kicks in for the nightly blackout.

We learnt a few Burmese words to aid communication in a town where more Burmese than Mandarin is spoken. Although the locals were not as spontaneously friendly as Ruili, the town still felt like good fun.

During a sidewalk dinner we became surrounded by young women professional "hairdressers" along with their advisor on health matters, a Vietnamese girl who no doubt knew a thing or two about sterilizing plastic and rubber gear and blow-drying equipment. We were to gain an unnecessary insight into Chinese and Burmese sexuality without having to ask many questions.

A wonderful day that had a good mix of birds, birds and culture.



Day 9 - Sunday 22nd March 2009

Just four kilometers upstream of Nabang is a forested hill with a trail that zigzags its way to the hilltop and beyond. The trail was an old road and had just been cleared of vegetation a day or two before our visit. The birds were quite different to those we had seen and more like the birds of South-East Asia, and for this reason it is popular with Chinese birders. Here we managed a wreathed hornbill (great hornbill is also present), black baza, greater yellownape and greater flameback. A flock of 19 long-tailed broadbills was also seen.

But the trail lacked variety and had few mixed flocks, although there was an amazing number of a small variety of bulbuls and barbets.

Back in town by 1330, we had a beer and a bit of a rest before walking south from the hotel and out of town. Or at least that was the plan. A truck driver gave Barry-Sean some pantomime that included drug injection, crime (especially theft), young people of Burmese origin, poor anger management skills, us, and the direction we were heading. So we trudged back to town, smiling and waving at the gaggles of under-employed hairstressers in the section of town given over to personal services, preferring to further test our beer-drinking skills.



Bianchui Hotel in Nabang

Ming found us - Nabang is a very small town - and excitedly told us about his excellent, although illegal, adventure into neighboring Burma, a place located 122 metres away from where we were drinking. Nothing could stop Ming's "life-on-the-edge" tale, where images of the possibility of being raped and beaten, torn from his loved ones and living in an even more smoky environment were explained in some detail.



recycling contractor

Our dinner table guest was a middle-aged Indian / Burmese itinerant jade and amber (or hard molded plastic) saleslady who took a very active interest in the contents of my wallet. She failed to lighten it and eventually departed. The restaurant's kitchen staff requested a viewing of the photos I always carry around. However the highlight of the evening's festivities probably belonged to Ming. We had never seen anyone mix green tea with beer. He appeared to be sober at the time and the only thing we could think of was that his cross-border experience might have temporarily addled his brain. On reflection, I am not sure which of the liquids should have been most offended – probably the tea. Maybe he was on to something after all.

Day 10 - Monday 23rd March 2009

We left at 0700 for the “big banyan tree”. Locals have it that this tree is the largest of its type in South-East Asia. It might be. How can these things be measured anyway? The turnoff is signposted and is about twenty minutes drive from Nabang on the eastern side of the road. The walk (or drive) to the tree is about four kilometers long, rarely used and mostly within good quality forest and bamboo. It was very productive and much better than Day 9's trail for birders who have already traveled to countries like Thailand.





A fruiting fig tree attracted very large flocks of pin-tailed and thick-billed green pigeons, an ashy wood-pigeon or two, several mountain imperial pigeons, and for a long period, us. Other birds seen included two groups of the brilliant lesser rufous-headed parrotbill. These were in a mixed flock that included yellow-eyed and white-hooded babblers and red-billed scimitar-babblers. Mountain bamboo-partridges were common.

The banyan tree is pretty awesome, as is the forest along the trail that leads beyond it. The tree has caretakers, a pleasant and relaxed local couple. They had been collecting the 2 yuan entry fee for 15 years or so and told us that sun bears, deer, two types of monkey, leopards and jungle cats still occur in the surrounding forest. We saw much evidence of many deer, along with jungle and possibly leopard cat spoor. We flushed what sounded like a large wallaby or kangaroo, although it is more likely to have been a two-legged deer, on the basis of the sound it made as it crashed away whilst craftily avoiding being seen. This is a really good site and although I managed only one lifer we felt as though anything might pop into view.

Early drinks were called. Mr Bo procured us a Burmese stout made by the “Archipelago Brewing Company” – very nice.

Day 11 - Tuesday 24th March 2009

We checked out of our hotel, had brekkie at the 24hr convenience hovel across the road and then hit the road with our final destination as Tengchong. We decided to spend a few early morning hours on Day10’s banyan tree trail. The flocks of pigeons were still present but the highlight was five collared treepies, along with more road-loving mountain bamboo-partridges.

Lunch was taken at Yingjiang. We continued to Tengchong, where we were thrilled to tick off a grey-headed lapwing in the rice fields just near town.

We checked into the oddly named Hump Hotel and had a quick rest before attacking Lai Feng Shan, a forested hill cum cemetery right on the edge of town and only several hundred metres from the hotel. The very modest entry fee (10 yuan) is waived for those over 60 so neither of us had to pay. I decided that the lady in the entry fee booth was having a joke with me. Oh well, I'll soon get a pensioner discount at home I suppose. Mr Bo drove us to the top of the almost abandoned park adjacent to a rather impressive viewing tower.



viewing tower, Lai Fen Shan Park, Tengchong

This park is one of the birdiest sites we found and as a bonus many of the birds are losing their fear of people. The shrubby vegetation below the toilet block had brown-winged parrotbill, red-tailed minla, red-faced liocichla, Chinese babax, an almost tame male silver pheasants and a large variety of other birds.

Day 12 - Wednesday 25th March 2009

Back at Lai Feng Shan, we walked up the steps from the bottom (entrance) of the park to the lookout tower. Birds and exercising locals were both in high numbers. I added slender-billed oriole to my life list. There were quite a few passage migrants present with slaty-blue flycatcher and a surprise sighting of a Tristram's bunting. Other birds included Eurasian jay, black-headed greenfinch and scaly thrush.

After a delicious lunch we gathered our gear and set forth for the much-anticipated journey to the Yun Feng Shan Taoist Monastery, located on top of a very high and very pointy granite mountain. Luckily a cable car runs from the foot of the mountain to within a donkey's screech of the summit. The cable car at the time of our visit was contributing to the world's atmosphere a sum total of approximately no greenhouse gases whatsoever because it was offline due to maintenance. We were already very tired when we peered up at the start of the almost vertical trail that clings to the granite mountain.



We felt like death when we arrived at the monastery, but we revived a little as a scrum of local women formed around us trying to take our photos.

Because the cable car was not running the monastery liquor shop was running a special deal on beer – it was free. Sadly they had just exhausted their supplies. Not surprising really. We soon determined to try the contents of some small green-coloured bottles. These worked.

Our room was comfortable enough (in a very Buddhist way) except that it had no roof. This was being replaced.

Our dinner was a large meal of fungus, beans and rice. Other birders had written that the food at the monastery was absurdly cheap. We found it to be the most expensive food of the entire holiday, and probably the least exciting.

Almost certainly the first single malt whisky ever consumed at Yun Feng Shan was enjoyed in our room as a nightcap and prelude to us being assaulted by all manner

of otherworldly noises made by monastery devotees. I can only speculate on what they were doing.

Day 13 - Thursday 26th March 2009

Before breakfast I descended the famed backside of Yun Feng Shan. This was prior to anyone else using the trail. Just before sunrise a large mixed herd of chestnut-crowned and grey-sided laughingthrushes, Chinese babax and rusty-fronted barwings gave great views from the middle of the main trail. They went nuts as I stood rigidly still. They dared me to move and when I eventually did they disappeared at great speed. I would have too.

I was silly enough to return for the 0830 breakfast and by the time we got back on the trails the birds had become very quiet. Lady Amherst's pheasant was seen on the main trail but all other birds seen were rather common ones.

The afternoon produced little with red-headed trogons the only birds of any interest.

It had become cold and windy and with local thunderstorms and a few spots of rain we decided to go indoors and try our hand at making cocktails. White spirit + peanut milk is unlikely to catch on, especially as it curdles horribly in the glass. We then tried to teach a Taoist Mandarin-speaking Chinese nun and palm reader basic Burmese, in English. This took some time.



afternoon drinks at Yun Feng Shan

Meanwhile the roof tilers had become bored with randomly raining used roof tiles onto the heads of passers-by. They managed to get a chain saw started. Hopefully they would use this to cut each other in half but sadly this did not happen.



extreme roof tiling



the abacus versus calculator
"East Meets West" challenge

Dinner was followed by the contents of most of the rest of the monastery's stock of small green bottles. By the time we descended to our roofless accommodation we were singing a bit. This attracted large numbers of female devotees. Their average age was indeterminate but must have been close to triple figures. Two of the more nimble, including an attractive hunchback, chased me in to our room to get at my photo albums. I herded them downstairs to a point where I became besieged. But I was never scared, well, perhaps just a little. Photos have never been so closely studied.



It was an interesting night once the rain started. Water started dripping on my head. I played musical beds.

Day 14 - Friday 27th March 2009

Another wander down the far side of the mountain and I managed many of the same birds including the same mixed flock of laughingthrushes. Other target birds were not seen. I was disappointed with the birds of Yun Feng Shan but not at all sorry about the time spent there.

We caught the cable car back down the mountain. I walked along the road rather than wait in the car park for our driver. I managed to find hill prinia and Pallas's bunting before flushing a Eurasian woodcock. Now this is rather fun – I managed more lifers in ten minutes of Car Park Theory work than two full days in the forest.

We stopped at a dam near Tengchong but spot-billed ducks were the only ones close enough to be identified without a scope.

After checking back into the Hump Hotel and having lunch I had time to traipse about the lower parts of Lai Feng Shan. I managed a spot-billed parrotbill and a set of Jemi and John Holmes. Whilst it was great to see a famous Hong Kong birding couple it did break my new 12 day record of not seeing a foreigner. But maybe not – as Jemi and John are Hong Kong passport holders, maybe they are not foreigners in China at all??

Various body parts were in full revolt so I determined to alleviate the pain by using two time-honoured methods. The other one was an early night's sleep.

Day 15 - Saturday 28th March 2009

We checked out of the Hump Hotel and visited the Bao Feng Monastery, a collection of buildings of indeterminate age located amid an impressive pile of rubbish and located quite near Tengchong. There was so much colourful trash that I suspect that any birds that live there (and there are not very many) will have to evolve more colourful plumage in order to attract a mate.

Science has yet to describe the forest type at Bao Feng. Whilst the area is forested the number of times the trees have been cut is truly extraordinary. Most of the trees appeared to be the same type. I am calling them crofton trees. Don't go there.

We picked up the washing we had left at the Chinese laundry (!) and set forth for the Gaoligong Range. The drive started with a long ascent and followed by an equally extended fall. The downhill bit passed through steeply terraced fields.

Ten metres past an impressive bridge over a major tributary of the Mekong River was our equally impressive accommodation – the Long Wang Hostel at Long Wang Chau.

The Long Wang Hostel was not impressive in terms of its architecture, size or siting - although this was pretty enough - but it shone brightly on account of its guests' facilities. These consisted of a 40 watt light bulb. The facilities were hung from the ceiling near one end of the room. We didn't really expect to find a shower but we made an enquiry. We thought there might have been a rustic toilet facility, you know, a hole in the ground or failing that, a bucket or something. No. Maybe a large dish that could be used to throw river water over one's self? No.



our room at the Long Wang Hostel

There was an adjoining village that owned a town toilet. Barry-Sean assures me that the most utilitarian part of the dunny was in full view of the town. This must have been designed to avoid the embarrassing prospect of multiple users arriving to use it at the same time. I had decided early on where the toilet was – the road that ran behind the hostel, outside the “kitchen”, the car park, the bridge over the river and the hole through the room’s window. After dark the options would increase.

I’d say we arrived at Long Wang about five years too late. That was our guess for how long much of the nearby forest ceased to be.

We went for a bit of a drive but we soon returned to Long Wang. We explained to Ming and Mr Bo in careful terms that we were not at all unhappy and that they were in no way accountable for any site that was not on the original program – we had asked to go to Long Wang after all – so we settled into a beer or four.

The day’s highlight was the arrival of a road crew who crept along the unsealed road outside the hostel’s main bar and entertainment area and busily rearranged offensive pebbles with their hand tools. These were an equal opportunity gang of men and women, and old and young. One of the younger ladies had a wonderful smile to complement her sparkling eyes. These contrasted her rough hands and simple work-wear. I pounced on her with a stuffed toy kangaroo. She sensibly hid behind one of her giggling friends. When I finally arrested her she removed her apron and according to Ming bestowed great honour upon me. As I had given her a gift she felt obliged to give me something in return. She demonstrably removed her bamboo peaked hat and handed it to me. I accepted the hat and after the crass photo shoot I graciously (*well gracious for me anyway*) handed the hat back to her. She was so thrilled – I will never forget her happy face.



a wonderful encounter



drinks and fried yak's meat at Long Wang Chau

Dinner was much feared. The vegetable options were considered to be best for us and these were quite okay.

Just as I retired I was surprised by a visit from the aged one-eyed chief executive and general manager of the hostel. He had come with good news – we had been upgraded! He handed me a 60 watt light globe so that I could change it. He would have done this himself, but I assume there were very good occupational health and safety reasons for why he did not. Like he wasn't tall enough for starters. Additionally, given that he was blind in one eye, the lighting was poor, and with me being in my usual sleeping attire his depth perception might have resulted in the light globe being placed into a socket that it wasn't really designed to be in.

Barry-Sean expected a long fight with bed wildlife and was kicking and punching as he reluctantly went to "bed". I reckoned that so few people ever stayed at the hostel that most of the larger quilt creatures would have long starved.

Day 16 – Sunday 29th March 2009

After driving up the road on the Gaoligong Range side of the valley for just under one hour we crashed unexpectedly into the Gaoligong Nature Reserve. Abruptly the road entered primary forest. Apparently it was built by the US Army (General Stilwell) in WWII to ferry arms from India through Burma. So the road was not built because the local Chinese needed to get from A to B. This is important for seeing wildlife as very little traffic uses the road.

We walked for three hours from the start of the old growth forest to the top of the pass at 2800m. It was a delightful walk – lots of birds and very few vehicles. The best were red-tailed laughingthrush, beautiful sibia, yellow-crested bunting, yellow-throated fulvetta, bay woodpecker and lots of old favourites. Had we started earlier and spent the whole day we would have seen many more birds and possibly some mammals other than squirrels as well. Mountain bamboo-partridges were common along the roadsides.

We had lunch at an abandoned forest workers' hostel near the top of the pass. This would make a sensational campsite. It has a level area and running water. You could camp here for a few days – no entry fees or people, just stacks of birds and possibly some of the best spotlighting opportunities in Yunnan.

We drove to Baihauling, a few hours to the east of Gaoligong Mountain. We were greeted by the smiling Mr Lee and his very obliging wife, the managers of the Forest Reserve Station. They took our money and showed us to our really comfortable accommodation – just like a three star hotel. Mr Lee put our pallet of longnecks into the kitchen's fridge. This was all good. The "welcoming dinner" was superb.

Much has been written about the flexible nature of the entry fees at Baihauling. For the record, we paid 300 yuan per person per day, full board including entry fees.

Day 17 – Monday 30th March 2009

The Forest Reserve Station at Baihauling is located about three kilometres from the start of the forest. By the time you read this you will be able to drive to this point in any kind of car, but at the time of our visit the road was being reconstructed so we had to walk much of the way. The forest for the first couple of kilometres is secondary. It has birds in it but the better forest is further away (like it normally is!). At the first fork in the trail you should turn left. This short trail then arrives at a saddle and clearing on the C7th Ancient Tea and Horse Caravan Road or “Southern Silk Road” (SSR) at 1900m. The clearing is the site of an ancient marketplace where Indian, Burmese and Chinese traders met. See this link for a fascinating history –

<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org/newsletter/2004vol2num1/tea.htm>

It appears that the route has been in use for 4,000 to 5,000 years.



We found some good birds despite frequent rain-showers. Long-tailed wren-babbler was seen in the regrowth forest. At the SSR clearing we had broad-billed warbler, brown-winged parrotbill and red-tailed laughingthrush.

By midday thunderstorms were rolling in so we started to descend. It rained most of the way down but then cleared as we reached the lodge. Bugger.

Early drinks near the scrubby bushes at the front of the lodge produced Asian barred owlet (being harassed by long-tailed shrikes) and a number of greater whitethroats.

Day 18 – Tuesday 31st March 2009

We learnt more about the SSR's history from Ming as we walked further along it. Apparently it was a lifeline for southern China when the Chinese were fighting the Japanese before WWII. Medicine and arms from India were being ferried along this forest path mostly out of sight of the Japanese who had bombed all the obvious transport corridors.

After a steep uphill walk from the SSR marketplace clearing we eventually found some really good almost primary "cloud" forest at about 2100m. This is where we were visited by a hailstorm. The hail was quickly replaced by impenetrable fog, so thick that binoculars were rendered useless. We climbed to about 2200m to a point where the trail levels out. We started our lunch. This was interrupted by a loud screaming match coming from the nearby forest floor. I attributed the amazing number of different noises and their volume to a boundary squabble between macaques. We couldn't see anything. *(The next day at the same site we spotted a scrum of fighting male silver pheasants – making the same noise – show's how much I know.....)*

The birding was continually interrupted by the weather. The best of the birds included a Gould's shortwing, which was close and stationary in the rocky boulder ascent through the cloud forest. At this same site were grey-sided, red-tailed and chestnut-crowned laughingthrushes. At the point where the trail levels out we had a speckled wood-pigeon, a pair of brown-throated treecreepers and a number of mountain bamboo-partridge, which had been seen so often they were starting to irritate me.



The descent was quiet and only interrupted by hail and rain. We followed the SSR down past the clearing and almost back to the lodge, arriving at 1600. For much of

the afternoon my knees and back had been chatting to one another about the prospect of a divorce, or, failing that, the likelihood of benefiting from some medicinal longnecks that I knew to be languishing in the fridge.

A continuous convoy of cement trucks at our primary drinks and observation point kept us entertained. We then had a splendid dinner of fried beer nuts, corn kernels with chopped beans, fried dried beef and broccoli with shallots. And rice of course. Yum.

Day 19 – Wednesday 1st April 2009

After a disappointing sleep punctuated by dreams of unfulfilled romance, rain, noisy motorcycles and excited Mah Jong players, Barry-Sean decided to call a lay day. He opted not to join Ming and I on our last attack on the SSR. Mr Bo, in his mechanically challenged “Palfro” drove Ming and I to the end of the roadwork. As we had left before sunrise we keenly anticipated the arrival of the dawn chorus. This occurred at just after five in the afternoon, when the sun came up, for two minutes. Otherwise it rained more or less continuously and in the intervening bits it was foggy. The light was that bad that at one point I trod on a male silver pheasant (*well* close – less than a metre).

To add interest to the precipitation bits, the temperature plunged and stayed that way. After giving the rain a number of deadlines I capitulated and sloshed back down the hill. My turnaround point was the “Japanese bomb crater” site. I retreated without pause. Some birds loved the crap weather. The path was crawling with silver pheasants and Chinese thrushes with six pheasants seen on the path alone. The best of the wet birds were red-tailed laughingthrush (three sightings), Darjeeling woodpecker, yellow-throated fulvetta, beautiful sibia and yellow-throated bunting.



A hot shower, beer and Talisker 10 y.o. were all taken, in that order. Dinner was again superb. Mrs Lee was as at all times a beacon of good cheer.

Day 20 – Thursday 2nd April 2009

We left Baihauling feeling positive about the world despite the fact that there wasn't a cloud in the sky. The tops of the Gaoligong Range were covered in snow for our drive to Baoshan. It was an interesting drive with much scenery and culture on show.

Upon arrival in Baoshan Mr Bo took us to a reservoir that was home to hundreds of over-wintering waterfowl. Eight different ducks were present. These were in the company of almost 100 great crested grebes.



We had hotpot for lunch before visiting a forested hillside recreation park. This added a few birds to our list but the highlight was a sleepy grey-headed flying squirrel that was sunning itself outside its tree hollow. I kicked the bejesus out of the tree to get it to put its head up but it eventually did and we were rewarded with excellent daytime views.

Back at the hotel our “staff” left us to our own devices. This turned into a bread roll and beer pilgrimage that met with eventual success but not without a few scares along the way. Dinner consisted of some leftover lunches stuck in the bread rolls.

Day 21 – Friday 3rd April 2009

We swapped vehicles – no longer did we have the Palfro, we now had a VW Santana. This old black probable ex-taxi didn't let us down but it looked like it should have. The relic had unusual and unattractive stains adorning the backs of the

seats, “carpet” and most other surfaces. These were most likely caused by long dead patrons on the way home from the boozier. Nevertheless it was roomy and comfortable and showed no signs of terminal mechanical failure.

The road from Baoshan to Dali is expressway throughout. We passed through umpteen tunnels and over many viaducts as we traveled in continuously hilly terrain. It was boring, like most motorways.

It took us a little while to find our hotel, the Tian Chi, in Dali City, as neither driver nor guide had a working knowledge of the place. Barry-Sean and I reckoned this would be a feature of the rest of the trip and we were right. We were now out of range of Mr Bo’s road knowledge and as neither driver nor guide could read a map (and neither could I, but for different reasons) we were at the mercy of mobile phones, pedestrians and in extreme cases, taxis.

We visited Old Dali, reputedly a walled C13th town with authentic buildings. What crap. When we eventually found the place we discovered a grid of narrow streets with many modern buildings. Some of these looked old. Every one was occupied by a tourist shop of some sort. But the people were very friendly.



The Bai people, who are noticeably different in dress and physical appearance to the Hans, dominate the area around Dali. Disappointingly, we also saw our first foreigners since arriving in Kunming.

After returning to our hotel in Dali City we walked to the nearby lake. It was windy and not too exciting but we added upland pipit and little bunting to our bird list.

We broke out and bought a bottle of Yunnan Cab Sav. We regretted it. Dinner was at the hotel's Islamic restaurant. The food was good.

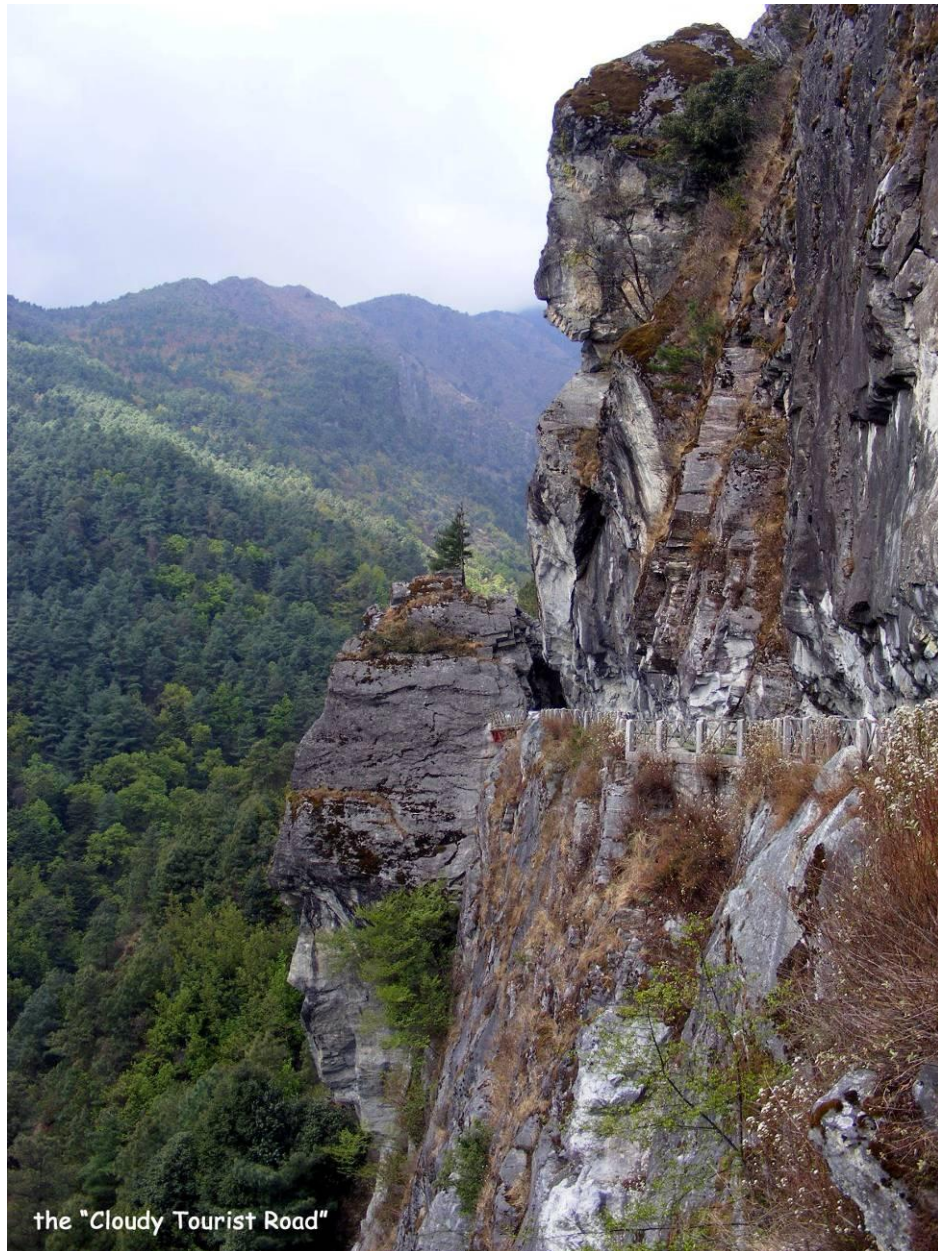
Day 22 – Saturday 4th April 2009

A monster breakfast in the hotel preceded our mission to get to the Higherland Inn, located near the upper chair lift station in the Cang Shan Mountains National Geopark, above Old Dali. The lodge is simply awesome. It is surrounded by forest just a short walk uphill from the ranger station and chair lift. It is owned and managed by Li Ping, who is gorgeous, charming and speaks the best English in China (and most other places).

The Higherland Inn was recommended to me by Jemi and John Holmes. The time we spent there was a trip highlight, not just for Barry-Sean and I, but for Ming as well. The lodge was unpopulated by other tourists, had excellent facilities and food and was jammed in a forest! The architecture is best described as eccentric hippy, but with everything that was supposed to be working, like hot water, actually working. The peace and quiet was very welcome. If we had our holiday again we agreed that we would have spent more nights at the Higherland.

By the time we hit the quite level and scenically rather stunning trail known as the “Cloudy Tourist Road” it was close to 10am. We walked south (this means the view is on your left hand side) and although the forest teemed with birds they were familiar friends until we reached the first of two spectacular gorges. Best birds were fire-capped tit, Tibetan siskin, Lady Amherst's pheasant, nutcracker and ultramarine flycatcher.





We enjoyed a few beers before a lavish dinner and conversation with Li Ping and her all-female staff.....

Day 23 – Sunday 5th April 2009

After a cooked mixed omelet (*I can't believe that's how you spell omelet...*) breakfast we headed up the trail that climbs to the top of the Cang Shan range. Superb views of a male Lady Amherst's pheasant were followed by crap views of various treetop rosefinches that failed to be identified. Then I heard Ming yelling in the distance. Thinking something was wrong I followed the noise until I came across Ming playing with the Higherland's dog. Why do lodge owners have dogs? Ming didn't seem to understand the basic incompatibility of dogs with any form of wildlife and seemed disappointed when I hurled a few tree branches at it. Deciding that it might be best if I cool off a bit I stomped back to the lodge and packed my gear ready to leave.

We caught the sluggish but relaxing cable car back down the mountain, all the while listening to the messages being blurted out over the speakers attached to the cable car towers. I assume the messages said things like “be careful in case your belongings have shifted during the journey”, or “please remember to get off without falling over and making an idiot of yourself”, or perhaps “vote for Mao – he knows how to march”. I’ll never know for sure. We also noted that the fine for even carrying a lighter or match in your baggage was over \$A1000.

After a few false starts we were on our way to Lijiang. We stopped for lunch at a roadside place, and the meals were very good.

Our arrival in Lijiang coincided with a comedy of errors. We sought Black Dragon Pool Park in order to search for the giant nuthatch. It took an hour of driving most of Lijiang’s major roads before Ming gave up and hired a taxi to follow. Traveling behind, we had our car severely chastised by a cross-eyed middle-aged female school-crossing supervisor for not obeying her instructions. She may have had a better result by yelling at the very calm driver and not the car. The entry fee for the park was around \$A20, which is ridiculous. When we tried to gain access to a path that led to a largely deforested hillside, and alleged abode of the nuthatches, we were screeched at by an officious lady who prevented us going any further because we were “not in a group of four”. I’m not sure whether the number “four” is locally significant. It hadn’t been the greatest of days to this point so I practiced my English on this particular lady. Had she known any English I would not be typing this.



We struggled to find our hotel and when we did they made the silly mistake of telling us they had no hot water. Why they did this is a mystery because the hotel

we then transferred to, the Cai Lu, had no hot water either, but they weren't silly enough to tell us this.

Barry-Sean and I strolled down to Old Lijiang "Town". This is listed by UNESCO for reasons that are not clear to me, as I didn't think massive theme park shopping malls would qualify for a listing of world-class anything. The shops specialized in things that no thinking person ever needs, so they traded rather well I suspect. Eight and a half minutes later we left this major tourist attraction and looked for somewhere to eat.



We ordered some meals at a moderately fancy restaurant. We decided on "pork with eggs" which looked and tasted like a plate full of mushrooms, which was not all that surprising, as this is what it was. Our other choice was unavailable (much like the pork perhaps?) so we ordered fried yak's meat with mint. What we got was fried yaks meat and fried mint. For some reason we expected a heap of mushrooms as well.

Day 24 – Monday 6th April 2009

When we checked into the Cai Lu Hotel we had asked whether they had any hot water. Perhaps we should have started with simpler questions and worked our way up to the really challenging ones. We were assured that there were two complimentary hot water systems. This is what happened: We turned the hot water tap on and watched as cold water flooded the shower recess and onto the bathroom floor. It then covered the whole bathroom. We made a cotter dam out of redundant towels in an attempt to direct the water to any co-operative drain holes, but there

weren't any. The water never did get hot but at least we could have a cold bath on the floor in the very unlikely event that we wanted one.

After a clear night we drove to the AAAAA rated Jade Snow Mountain National Park. As soon as we reached the city limits it started to rain and it stayed that way. At the entry gate an unusually snappy lady explained the extensive range of entry fees. Some sort of disagreement developed between the lady and those in the car that understood Mandarin. We all decided to bail.



Next port of call was Lashi Hai Lake. We asked a number of pedestrians where it was. They all pointed somewhere but their directions were all useless. We couldn't find it either so we chartered a local Naxi lady off the street who came with us. She took us to her friend's horse riding ranch and lakeshore viewing area. It was a waste of time.

We drove to where we saw some hillside vegetation. As soon as we stopped the car and got out a throng of locals tried to extort money from us for a:

- breathing the local air fee,
- stepping on fresh horse-shit fee,
- cobblestone maintenance fee,
- five minute argument fee,
- walking toward the forest fee, and
- a fee for not paying the other fees.

Although we ignored these otherwise decent folk the day was lost for me. Unfortunately tourism seemed to have energized some of the locals into thinking that all they had to do was find a street corner and put their hand out.

We all wanted to leave Lijiang.

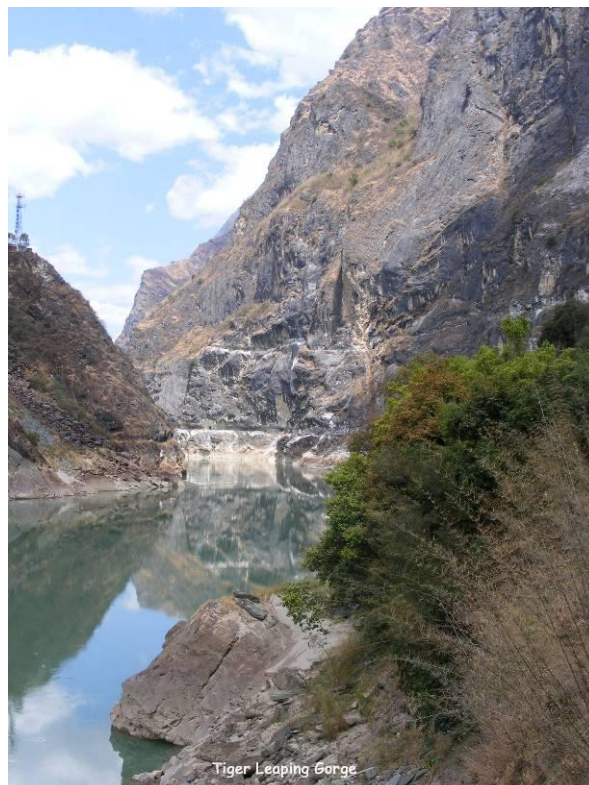
Day 25 – Monday 7th April 2009

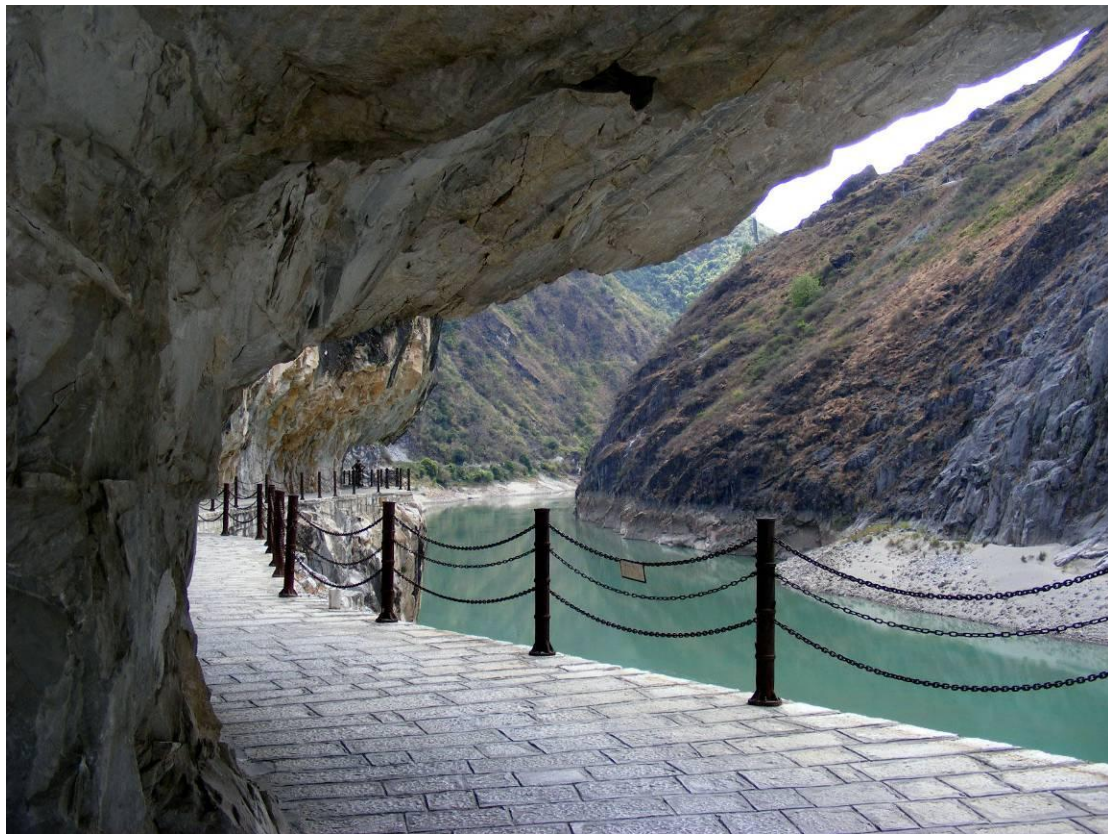
We asked if we could exit Lijiang a day early and go to Tiger Leaping Gorge instead. No arguments anywhere.

Despite dire predictions from the weather forecasters, the day was warm and clear. We spent the early morning on a trail that followed a creek from Lashi Hai Lake up into the hills. The wooded valley showed lots of potential for birds but was largely disappointing. We started before 0800 and saw nobody on our walk up the valley. The return was a different story. If we didn't see five hundred mounted horses and their handlers we didn't see one. All were friendly (yes, the horses as well) and many of the local tourists took photos of the odd-looking foreigners walking the other way.

By late morning we were heading towards Tiger Leaping Gorge, stopping a few times along the way to take photos of the mountains and river scenery. The gorge claims to be one of the world's deepest with 3700m rises on each side. Legend has it that a tiger leaped from one side to the other. As the South China tiger is now extinct, there is no modern way of testing this proposition.

The walk along the southern side of the upper gorge is pleasant, relatively uncrowded and fairly kind on the pocket, entry fee-wise. Although the scenery is quite good, I was expecting something better.





We booked a room in the Huanyingguanglin Hotel at Qiatou. The room had never been cleaned but it did have hot water. Smoking in bed is encouraged and as the hotel has no cleaner it is easy to determine the most popular brands of cigarettes by examining the butts on the floor. The desk staff were prone to disappearing. This is quite significant because the Lonely Planet Guide says the same thing. The significance lies in the fact that this is the first accurate bit of information I have gleaned from Lonely Planet in years.

Our room was the venue for my second best out-of-stomach experience of all time - after the “zebu steak in Madagascar affair” of 1998. I had the unpleasant thought that I might expire in the hotel’s bathroom. Maybe the hotel could have used the publicity. I felt much better after turning inside-out. Slept well.

Day 26 – Tuesday 8th April 2009

The drive to Zhongdian (or Shangri-la) started with a long winding ascent through a steep gorge. Our abrupt arrival onto the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau saw us almost as high (at 3400m) as the snowline and in a very different looking landscape. There were none of the fruit trees, vegetables and grains we had seen since our arrival in Yunnan. Bare ploughed fields and forests in various states of destruction replaced them. Tibetan style buildings were the only architecture, and very attractive too, although a large amount of local timber goes into their construction. There appeared to be a massive building effort underway with almost as many partially constructed homes as completed ones.

We stopped at a small river and had a poke around for birds. We snared a pair of long-legged buzzards, a black stork, chestnut thrushes and many Daurian jackdaws.

Our new home, the very nice Salong Hotel in Zhongdian, was clean, well appointed and had great views of the town and the surrounding mountains.

Napa Lake was much anticipated and was visited in the afternoon. The water in the lake had shrunk to a point where it could only accommodate a thousand or so ducks, forty odd black-necked cranes (down from 200 a couple of months earlier), a couple of dozen black storks and a good mix of raptors. A university masters student was studying white-tailed eagles and showed me one in his scope. Sadly for me he couldn’t find the falcated ducks he had seen the day before, despite my prolonged lurking with intent (not having a scope of my own). Other raptors included a merlin, steppe eagle and Himalayan griffin vultures.

Zhongdian Old Town was quite good. Also visited were some Buddhist temples including one with the world’s largest prayer wheel.





This was a wonderful day that washed away many of the disappointments of Lijiang.

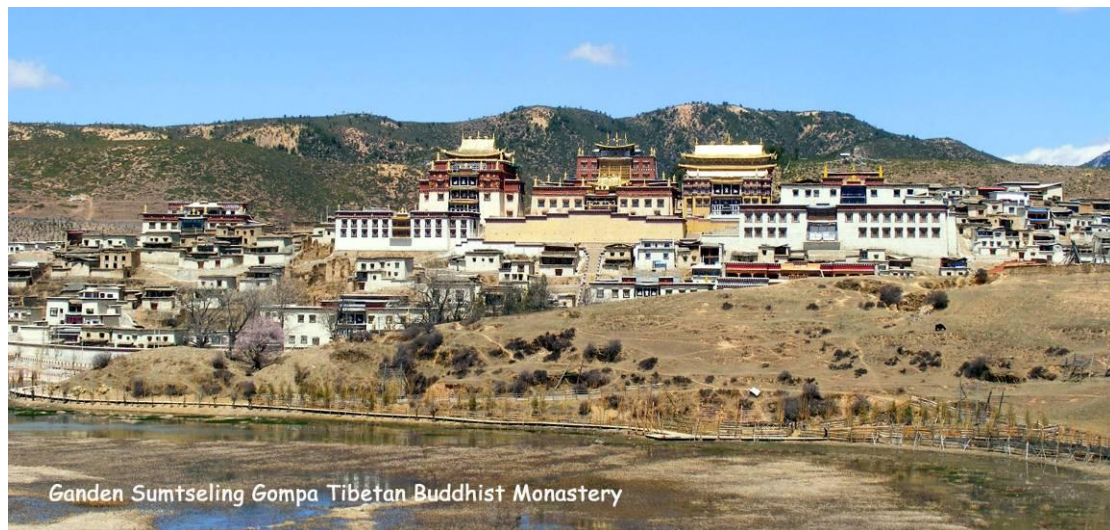
Day 27 – Wednesday 9th April 2009

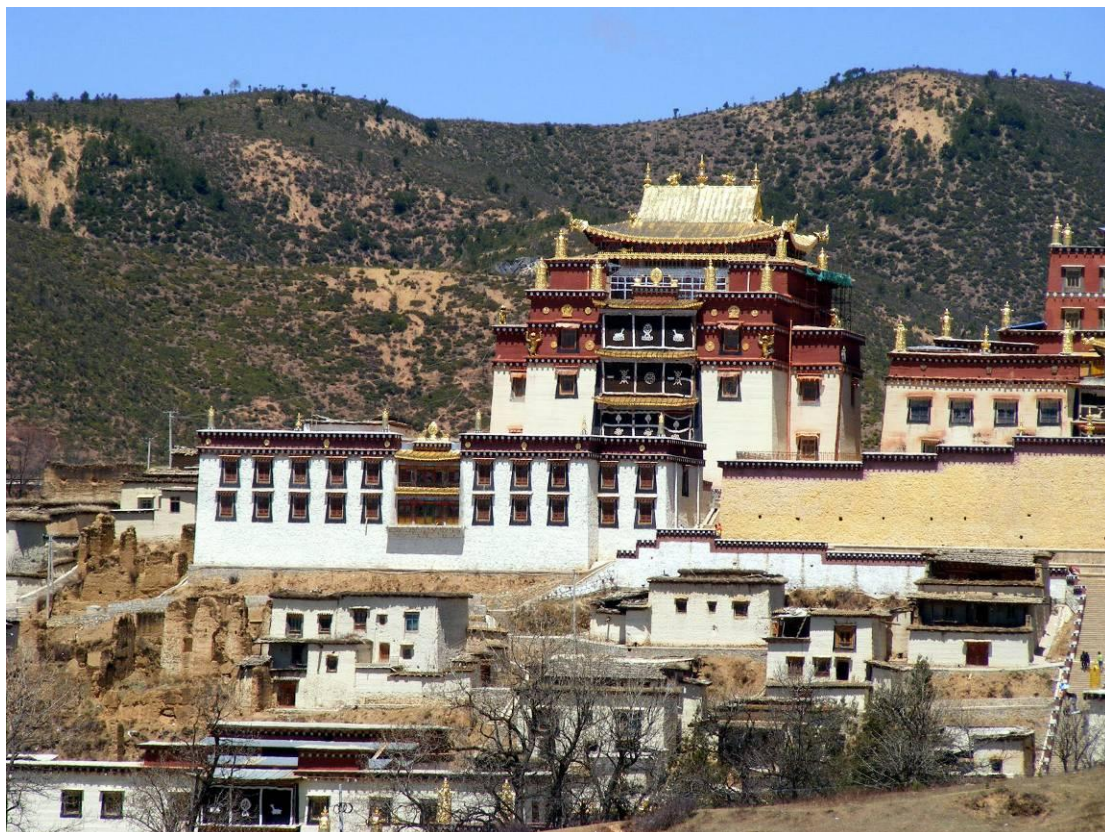
I didn't expect much for our day in Zhongdian. We drove to Potatso National Park but declined to enter it. Instead we drove a couple of kilometers past the park entrance and stopped at a valley on the right hand side of the road where there is a yak herder's hut. The valley was catching the morning sun so we decided to do a little exploring. Although very recent logging had diminished the forest to some degree it was very birdy. Best were blood pheasants (common), white-browed and pink-rumped rosefinches, black-bibbed tit, Chinese babax, northern goshawk and a host of more widespread birds.

On the return to town we stopped at a cleared grassy area surrounded by pines and a couple of kilometres from town. Here we found very active and almost tame Yunnan nuthatches as well as rufous-tailed babblers (aka moupinia).

Lunch was at a dumpling restaurant Barry-Sean and I had cunningly discovered the night before and again the food was delicious.

The afternoon saw one of the trip's highlights, a visit to the c1681 Ganden Sumtseling Gumpa Tibetan Buddhist Monastery, located a few kilometres from the main area of the town. Apparently this is the fourth biggest Tibetan monastery, with about 1000 monks, and known colloquially as the "Little Potala". We hired a young Tibetan lass who proved to be a very informative guide. This precinct is not to be missed, and for birders there is a whopping great swamp sitting right in front of it. A great bittern stood in the open and ferruginous pochards were among the commonest of the ducks present.







We shopped for a few clothes for our loved ones on a day that turned out to be the best of the trip in my book.

Dinner courtesy of Mr Bo was at an exclusive eight-seat restaurant. The food was wonderful, as expected.

Day 28 – Thursday 10th April 2009

The airport terminal in Zhongdian was being replaced by a much larger one. The old one is not very old. China Eastern Airlines flew us to Kunming on a 737-700. Our flight was almost full and was described as an “extra flight”. An identical fully loaded plane left for Kunming five minutes before ours. The flight was brief and the view, when the clouds permitted, was occasionally spectacular, with mountains extending in every direction.

A Mr Lee picked us up in Kunming and took us first to our hotel, then the pirate DVD shop and finally the rather dull and poorly maintained Kunming Botanic Gardens. The best part of the gardens experience was the interaction with hundreds of wonderful schoolkids. There were about ten busloads of them, carefully stacked into just five buses. They were all so spontaneously friendly it was almost life-changing. The 1000+ children’s school’s Chinglish teacher came to chat with us and practise the ‘glish part of his knowledge of languages. I felt quite excited about the future of so many Chinese kids.



I felt pretty drained when I got back to the hotel and so did the last of the Talisker. The start of the post mortem had begun.

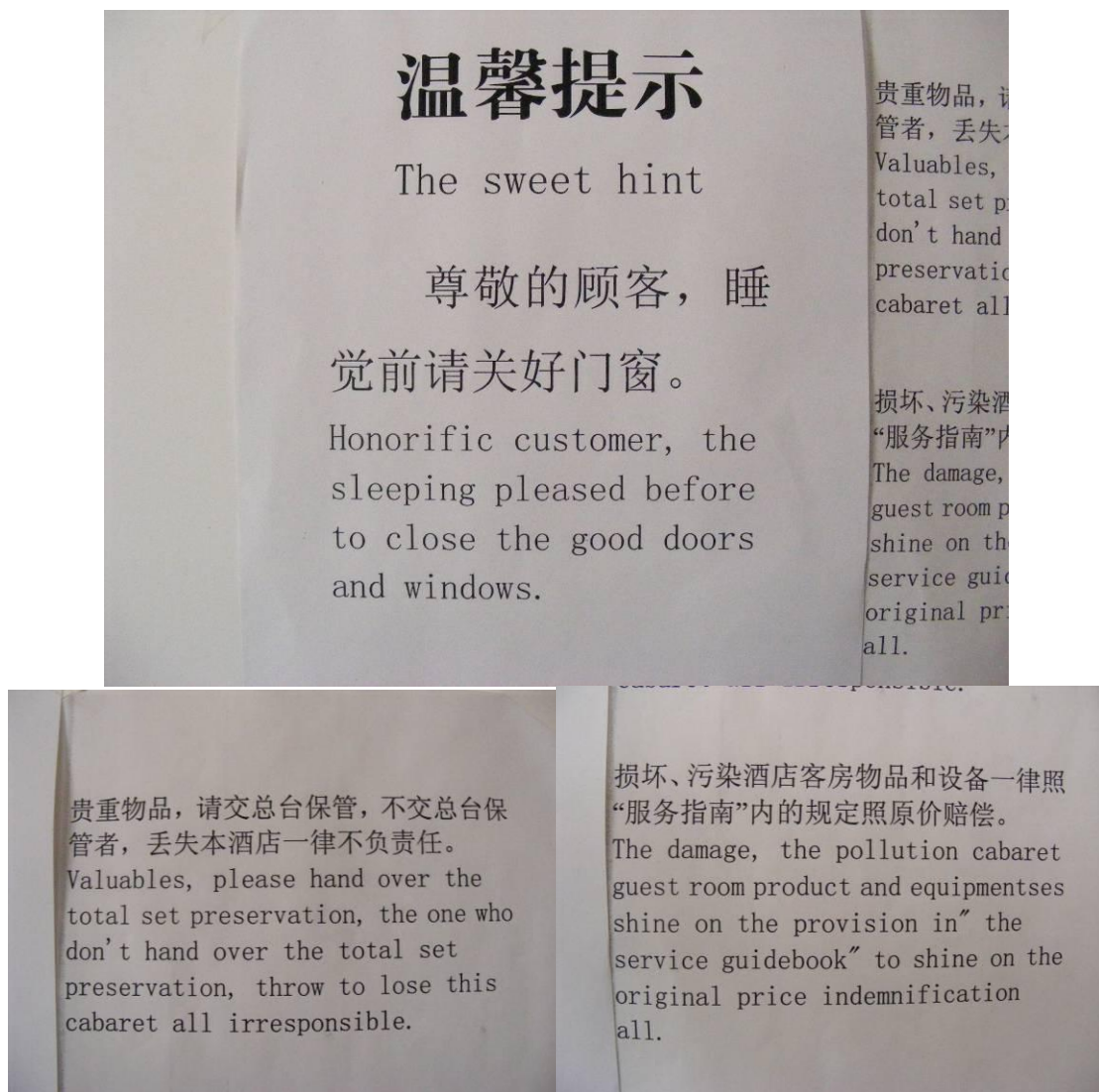
Our dinner was just around the corner from the hotel on the opening day for the restaurant. The very inexpensive food was predictably good.

Day 29 – Friday 11th April 2009

Our last excursion to West Hill saw us arrive just ahead of the main horde. I managed to add striated prinia to the trip list before a combination of lack of interest and 750,000 locals called an early end to the outing.

We said our goodbyes to Ming Wei, our still-smiling and excellent guide, and soon boarded our Dragonair A330 flight to Hong Kong. Our connecting flight to Sydney meant that we only spent about ten minutes on our bums in Hong Kong Airport. Cathay Pacific's A330 flight to Sydney was superb, not just because of the crew and the service, but because I was in Row 69. Not just a seat in Row 69, but all of it. Bedtime.

A great end to a very smooth and enjoyable holiday.



Bird List

Notes:

Page - the plate number in MacKinnon and Phillips

HK – Hong Kong

KM – Kunming (visited twice)

Rui – Ruili

Yin – Yingjiang

Na – Nabang

Te – Tengchong

Ga – Gaoligong

Ba- Baoshan

Dal- Dali

Lij – Lijiang

Zh – Zhongdian

The numbers in the columns represent the first “Day Number” – see diary, that each bird was seen at each site. Some common birds (and warblers) may be under-recorded. Birds in red indicate “lifers”.

page	bird	HK	KM	Rui	Yin	Na	Te	Ga	Ba	Dal	Lij	Zh
1	Chinese Francolin			6								
2	Mountain Bamboo-Partridge					8	15	15				
3	Red Junglefowl			5								
3	Blood Pheasant											27
4	Silver Pheasant						11	19				
5	Lady Amherst's Pheasant						13			22		
7	Bar-headed Goose											26
8	Common Shelduck											26
8	Mallard	1							20			26
8	Northern Pintail	1							20			26
8	Northern Shoveler	1							20		24	26
8	Ruddy Shelduck								20	23	24	26
8	Spot-billed Duck						14					26
9	Common Teal								20			26
9	Eurasian Wigeon	1							20		24	26
9	Gadwall								20			
9	Garganey	1							20			
10	Ferruginous Pochard											27
10	Tufted Duck	1										
11	Common Merganser											26
12	Bay Woodpecker							16				
12	Greater Flameback					9						
13	Crimson-breasted Woodpecker						12					
13	Darjeeling Woodpecker							19				
13	Gray-capped Woodpecker			6	7		11	11	20			
14	Greater Yellownape					9						
14	Lesser Yellownape					8						

page	bird	HK	KM	Rui	Yin	Na	Te	Ga	Ba	Dal	Lij	Zh
15	Blue-throated Barbet			5		8		17				
15	Brown-throated Treecreeper							18				
15	Coppersmith Barbet			5								
15	Golden-throated Barbet				7			16				
15	Great Barbet			6		10	12					
16	Wreathed Hornbill					9						
17	Common Kingfisher	1		5	7	8	11					
17	Pied Kingfisher	1		5								
17	White-throated Kingfisher			4	7	8						
18	Blue-bearded Bee-eater					10						
18	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater			5		8						
18	Dollarbird					10						
18	Eurasian Hoopoe					8		17				
19	Asian Koel	1										
19	Greater Coucal	1		5								
19	Green-billed Malkoha			6		9						
20	Large Hawk-Cuckoo								20			
21	Red-headed Trogon			5			13	18				
22	Asian Palm-Swift			6		8						
22	Crested Treeswift					8						
22	Fork-tailed Swift									22		
22	Himalayan Swiftlet			6					20			
22	House (Little) Swift	1		5			14		20			
24	Asian Barred Owlet							17				
24	Collared (Indian) Scops-Owl							16				
27	Jungle (Grey) Nightjar							16				
28	Ashy Wood Pigeon					10						
28	Rock Dove	1	29				14	16	20			
28	Speckled Wood Pigeon							18				
29	Emerald Dove					11						
29	Oriental Turtle-Dove	1				8	11	15			24	26
29	Spotted Dove	1	28	5	7					21		
30	Green Imperial-Pigeon			5								
30	Mountain Imperial-Pigeon					10						
30	Pin-tailed Pigeon					8						
30	Thick-billed Pigeon					10						
31	Black-necked Crane											26
33	Common Moorhen	1		5								
33	Eurasian Coot								20			27
33	White-breasted Waterhen	1		5		8	14	15				
34	Greater Painted-snipe					8						
35	Black-winged Stilt	1										
35	Pied Avocet	1										
36	Eurasian Woodcock						14					
36	Gray-headed Lapwing						11					
36	Red-wattled Lapwing					8						
36	Swinhoe's Snipe					8						

page	bird	HK	KM	Rui	Yin	Na	Te	Ga	Ba	Dal	Lij	Zh
37	Long-billed Dowitcher	1										
37	Bar-tailed Godwit	1										
37	Black-tailed Godwit	1										
37	Eurasian Curlew	1										
37	Far Eastern Curlew	1										
37	Whimbrel	1										
38	Common Greenshank	1										
38	Common Redshank	1										
38	Common Sandpiper	1			7	8	14		20			26
38	Marsh Sandpiper	1										
38	Nordmann's Greenshank	1										
39	Curlew Sandpiper	1										
40	Temminck's Stint	1										
41	Gray Plover	1										
41	Little Ringed Plover	1										
43	Black-tailed Gull	1										
44	Slaty-backed Gull	1										
45	Black-headed Gull	1	3									26
45	Saunders' Gull	1										
47	Caspian Tern	1										
49	Black Baza					9						
49	Black Kite	1										
49	Black-eared Kite										25	
49	Black-shouldered Kite				7			16			24	
49	Oriental Honey-buzzard			5			12					
50	Crested Serpent-Eagle	2						15				
50	Himalayan Griffon											26
50	White-tailed Eagle											26
51	Eastern Marsh-Harrier	1										
52	Besra			5				15				
52	Crested Goshawk			6		10						
52	Northern Goshawk											27
53	Common Buzzard			5		8	14				23	
53	Long-legged Buzzard											26
54	Black Eagle				7							
54	Mountain Hawk-Eagle							16				
54	Osprey	1										
55	Eurasian Kestrel		29		7							
55	Merlin											26
55	Peregrine Falcon			5			12					
56	Black-necked Grebe											27
56	Great Crested Grebe								20	21		
56	Little Grebe	1							20	23		
58	Great Cormorant	1								23		
58	Little Cormorant			5	7							
59	Cattle Egret	1			7		11			23		
59	Great Egret	1					11					26

page	bird	HK	KM	Rui	Yin	Na	Te	Ga	Ba	Dal	Lij	Zh
59	Little Egret	1		5	7		11				24	
60	Chinese Pond-Heron	1			7		11					
60	Gray Heron	1										26
61	Cinnamon Bittern					8						
61	Great Bittern											27
62	Black Stork											26
62	Black-faced Spoonbill	1										
64	Long-tailed Broadbill			6		9						
64	Silver-breasted Broadbill			6								
65	Golden-fronted Leafbird			6	7	8						
65	Orange-bellied Leafbird			5		8						
66	Burmese Shrike			5								
66	Gray-backed Shrike										23	27
66	Long-tailed Shrike	1		5		8	11	16	20		23	
67	Azure-winged Magpie	1										
67	Black-billed (Eurasian) Magpie	1										
67	Blue Magpie				7			15				
67	Eurasian Jay						12					
67	Gray Treepie					11						
67	Collared Treepie					11						
68	Daurian Jackdaw											26
68	Eurasian Nutcracker									22		
68	Red-billed Chough											26
68	Large-billed Crow	2				8	14	15	20			26
69	Maroon Oriole			5		9		18				
69	Slender-billed Oriole						12					
70	Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike			6								
70	Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike			6		8	14					
70	Gray-chinned Minivet	2					13					
70	Large Cuckoo-shrike					8	11	18				
70	Long-tailed Minivet		4				13					
70	Rosy Minivet			6	7		12					
70	Scarlet Minivet	2		5		8	11	15				
70	Short-billed Minivet		3									
71	Ashy Drongo		29	5	7		12		20		23	
71	Black Drongo			5		8	11	16	20			
71	Bronzed Drongo			5								
71	Hair-crested (Spangled) Drongo	1				11						
71	Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo			5	7	8						
72	Black-naped Monarch			5	7	10						
72	Gray-headed Canary-flycatcher	2		5		8	12	16				
72	White-throated Fantail		4	5	7	8	11	18				
72	Yellow-bellied Fantail			5	7			16				
73	Blue Rock-Thrush								20			
73	Blue Whistling-Thrush			5	7							
73	Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush			6			14					
73	Dark-sided Thrush				7							

page	bird	HK	KM	Rui	Yin	Na	Te	Ga	Ba	Dal	Lij	Zh
73	Plain-backed Thrush							18				
73	Scaly (White's) Thrush		28				12					
74	Black-breasted Thrush			5		8	11		20	22		
74	Eurasian Blackbird		28	6								
75	E Chinese Thrush		4					18				
76	Orange-flanked Bush-Robin						13	18				
76	Gould's Shortwing							18				
77	Rufous-tailed Robin	2										
78	Blue-fronted Redstart		4						20			27
78	Daurian Redstart	1					15		20		23	27
78	Plumbeous Redstart			5				15			25	
78	White-capped Redstart			5	7	8				22		
80	Little Pied Flycatcher					8	11	16				
80	Ultramarine Flycatcher								20	22		
80	Slaty-backed Flycatcher			6				15				
80	Slaty-blue Flycatcher						12					
80	Snowy-browed Flycatcher						13	16				
80	Verditer Flycatcher			6	7		12	15		22		
81	Fujian Niltava						12					
81	Hill Blue-Flycatcher			5		8						
81	Large Niltava			5		8	11	17				
81	Rufous-bellied Niltava			6				19				
82	Oriental Magpie-Robin	1		5	7	8	11	15	20	21		
82	White-crowned Forktail			5								
82	White-rumped Shama			5								
83	Common Stonechat	1		5					20	21	24	27
83	Gray Bushchat					11	11	17				
83	Pied Bushchat				7	8	11					
84	Black-collared Starling	1										
84	Chestnut-tailed Starling			5								
85	Crested Myna	1										
86	Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch						12					
86	Chestnut-vented (Naga) Nuthatch		4		7	8	12	17				
86	Velvet-fronted Nuthatch			6		8						
86	Yunnan Nuthatch											27
87	Coal (Grey) Tit											27
87	Fire-capped Tit									22		
87	Gray-crested Tit										23	
87	Great Tit	1	4	5			11	15	20		24	26
87	Green-backed Tit		4				12			22		
87	Yellow-browed Tit						12	19				
87	Yellow-cheeked Tit	2		6	7	8	13	18				
88	Black-bibbed Tit											27
88	Black-browed Tit									22	23	
88	Black-throated Tit		3		7		13	18			24	
89	Barn Swallow	1	4	5	7	8		15		23	25	
89	Plain Martin						9			20		

page	bird	HK	KM	Rui	Yin	Na	Te	Ga	Ba	Dal	Lij	Zh
89	Red-rumped Swallow									20		
90	Black-crested Bulbul			5								
90	Brown-breasted Bulbul		4				12	15	20		23	
90	Flavescent Bulbul			5		8	11	15				
90	Light-vented Bulbul	1										
90	Red-vented Bulbul			5		8	12		20			
90	Red-whiskered Bulbul	1		5		10			20			
90	Sooty-headed Bulbul							17				
90	Striated Bulbul			6	7	8		16				
91	Ashy Bulbul			6		9						
91	Black Bulbul		28	5		8	11	15				
91	Chestnut Bulbul	2										
91	Crested Finchbill		4	6	7	8		15			25	
91	Mountain Bulbul				7	9	11	16				
91	White-throated Bulbul			5		8						
92	Hill Prinia						14	15		23		
92	Plain Prinia	1							20			
92	Striated Prinia		29									
92	Yellow-bellied Prinia	1										
92	Zitting Cisticola								20			
93	Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler	2				9						
93	Dusky Warbler	1										
94	Asian Stubtail		4									
94	Chestnut-headed Tesia			6			17					
94	Slaty-bellied Tesia			5								
96	Blyth's Reed-Warbler					8						
97	Ashy-throated Warbler							18				
97	Yellow-browed Warbler	1	4									
97	Two-barred Warbler			6								
98	Buff-barred Warbler		4									
98	Greenish Warbler			5								
99	Blyth's Leaf-Warbler		4	6								
99	Chestnut-crowned Warbler						13					
99	Common Tailorbird		3						20			
99	Mountain Tailorbird		3			8	13					
99	Golden-spectacled Warbler			5	7		11	18				
99	White-tailed Leaf-Warbler						13					
100	Greater Whitethroat							17				
100	Broad-billed warbler							17				
100	Striated Grassbird					8						
100	Yellow-bellied Warbler					10						
101	Greater Necklaced Laughingthr					9						
101	Masked Laughingthrush	1										
101	Rufous-necked Laughingthrush				7							
101	White-crested Laughingthrush					8						
102	Gray-sided Laughingthrush						13	18				
102	White-browed Laughingthrush		4	5		11	14	15				

page	bird	HK	KM	Rui	Yin	Na	Te	Ga	Ba	Dal	Lij	Zh
103	Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush						13	18				
103	Red-faced Liocichla			6	7		11	16				
103	Red-tailed Laughingthrush				7			16				
103	E Elliot's Laughingthrush							18		23	24	26
104	Puff-throated Babbler					9						
104	Red-billed Scimitar-Babbler			5		9						
104	Spot-breasted Scimitar-Babbler		4				11			22		
104	Streak-breasted Scimitar-Bab		29		7		12	17		22	25	
105	Eyebrowed Wren-Babbler			5								
105	Long-tailed Wren-Babbler							17				
105	Streaked Wren-Babbler			5								
105	Winter Wren											27
106	Blue-winged Minla	2	3		7	11	11	18	20		23	
106	Chestnut-capped Babbler				7							
106	Chestnut-tailed Minla						12	16			25	
106	Golden Babbler			5	7	10						
106	Gray-throated Babbler			5								
106	Red-billed Leiothrix (Mesia)		29	6			12				23	
106	Red-tailed Minla						11	16	20			
106	Rufous-capped Babbler	2			7		12	17				
106	Silver-eared Mesia	2		6		8	11	19				
106	Rufous-fronted Babbler							18				
106	Yellow-eyed Babbler					10						
106	E Rufous-tailed Babbler											27
107	Black-eared Shrike-Babbler							16				
107	Chinese Babax				7		11					27
107	White-browed Shrike-Babbler				7		12	17				
107	White-hooded Babbler					10						
108	Golden-breasted Fulvetta						13					
108	Gray-cheeked Fulvetta		3					17			23	
108	Rufous-winged Fulvetta				7			16				
108	Spectacled Fulvetta		3					18				
108	Streak-throated Fulvetta						13					
108	White-browed Fulvetta									22		
108	Rusty-capped Fulvetta		3		7		13	17			25	
108	Yellow-throated Fulvetta							16				
109	Beautiful Sibia							16				
109	Black-headed Sibia				7		12				24	
109	Gray Sibia				7	8						
109	Long-tailed Sibia			5		8						
109	Rufous-backed Sibia			6								
109	Rusty-fronted Barwing			6	7		13	17				
110	Rufous-vented Yuhina			6				16		22		
110	Striated Yuhina			6		8						
110	Whiskered Yuhina			6	7	8	11	15				
110	White-bellied Yuhina			6	7	8		16				
110	White-collared Yuhina		4				12			22	24	

[illegible]

Mammals seen

Numbers seen in brackets - C for common

Rhesus macaque – feral in Hong Kong at Tai Po Kau (C)
Grey-headed flying squirrel – Baoshan recreation park (1)
Asian red-cheeked squirrel – Baihailing (2)
Indo-Chinese ground squirrel – Nabang (1)
Swinhoe's striped squirrel – Gaoligong Nature Reserve (3)
Himalayan striped squirrel - Tongbiguan Nature Reserve (C)
Black giant squirrel – various sites (C)
Red-bellied squirrel – various sites (C)
Forrest's rock squirrel (?) – Cang Shan Mountains National Geopark (2)
Perney's long-nosed squirrel – Zhongdian (1)
Anderson's squirrel – Tongbiguan Nature Reserve (C)
Northern tree shrew – West Hill, Kunming (C), Ruili (1)

