

China: Sichuan – March/April 2014

Report by Sjef Öllers

This was my first visit to China in the hope to see a handful of target mammals and get a decent introduction to China's birdlife albeit with special emphasis on pheasants. Despite some misfortune at the beginning of the trip (Labahe closed, no red panda), I saw most species I hoped to see. Mammal highlights were wolf, takin, Tibetan fox and white-maned serow. We dipped on Pallas's cat but got Chinese mountain cat in return!!! Bird of the trip was Temminck's tragopan, which allowed incredible views at Wuyipeng. Golden pheasant and Tibetan snowcock were also seen at close range. Apart from enjoying a host of other pheasant species, other highlights were black-necked crane, both tit-warblers, tawny fish owl, bearded vulture, and a nice selection of redstarts, tits, rosefinches, laughing-thrushes and parrotbills.



Temminck's Tragopan

Itinerary

March 28	Overnight direct flight Frankfurt – Chengdu
March 29	Drive from Chengdu to Longcanggou – Afternoon Longcanggou
March 30	Morning: Longcanggou – Afternoon: Drive to Labahe – o/n Xin Gou Zhen
March 31	Morning: Erlang Shan – Afternoon: transfer to Xiaojin
April 1	Xiaojin – Rilong – Balang Shan – Wolong
April 2	Balang Shan (“Pheasant day”) – Wolong
April 3	Wolong/Wuyipeng Station – Balang Shan – Xiaojin
April 4	Xiaojin – Mengbi Shan (all morning) – Zhuokeji/Barkam – Hongyuan
April 5	Hongyuan – Yellow River – “Pallas Cat Site” – Ruo’ergai (Zoige)
April 6	Baixi area
April 7	Ruo’ergai (Zoige)– all day in “Pallas Cat area” – Ruo’ergai
April 8	Ruo’ergai – Baixi area – Mt. Gazang – Dalu – Jiuzhaigou
April 9	Jiuzhaigou – Dujuan Shan pass – Pingwu – Tangjiahe
April 10	Tangjiahe –core zone area above the hotel
April 11	Tangjiahe – walk to Motianling Mountain pass
April 12	Morning Tangjiahe – Afternoon/evening: drive to Dujiangyan/Chengdu
April 13	Return Flight to Frankfurt



Spectacular scenery in the Ruo’ergai area

Introduction

By mid-February this year I found out to my surprise that I had holidays left from last year and that I needed to use them before April 15. Unfortunately, my wife’s teaching commitments would not allow her to travel in March/April, so it had to be a solo trip. Since I had been almost exclusively to Africa and South America in recent years, I decided it was time to go back to Asia, which remains seriously under-visited by me.

Trying to bird Japan last minute proved to be naive. The accommodations at most of the birding sites had been completely booked out for months (almost exclusively by commercial tour companies). In the end I was glad that a March trip to Japan didn't work out, because this year the weather was awful in several places.

The one thing that convinced me to do a tour in Sichuan was Richard Webb's [report](#) from 2012, which reported sightings of both red panda and Pallas's cat. I contacted Sid Francis, the guide that Richard Webb had used. He was occupied in the limited time frame I could travel, but he suggested doing the tour with his colleague/friend Roland Zeidler. For my trip I basically copied Richard Webb's schedule and added Balang Shan for pheasants and Tangjiahe for mammals and takin in particular. Unusually busy times before the start of the trip prevented me from studying in much detail the mammals and birds of the region. This resulted in me departing on my worst prepared trip ever. This was rather frustrating in the beginning, when I was really struggling, but Roland reliably guided me through all the bird flocks and the finer diagnostic details of similar-looking bird species. Roland is first and foremost a birder, but he knows where to see the more common larger mammals. He is good company, works long days (much longer than I could do anyway; I had to sleep in a couple of mornings) and is very dedicated in finding certain bird species. He also speaks fluent Chinese, which proved very helpful to get things done.



The first wolf

Timing and Weather

A visit to the mountainous areas of Sichuan in early April is a couple of weeks too early for most of the migratory birds that breed in Sichuan in summer. In particular the drives from Baixi to Jiuzhaigou and Jiuzhaigou to Tangjiahe were frustrating. Lots of good habitat but few birds, especially above 2500 m. Strangely, the opposite seemed to be true on the Tibetan plateau, where the black-necked cranes had already arrived on April 4 (they were thought/supposed to be on the plateau at least 1-2 weeks later). We also encountered two unexpected vagrants/rarities in the Hongyuan area, (Eurasian) common starling and short-toed snake eagle!! April appears to be a good time to keep an eye open for interesting migrants passing through the area.

In the mountains a lot of the resident birds were not yet very responsive to their calls being played, but by the end of the tour this seemed to be improving, in particular below 2000 meters. Golden pheasant was completely unresponsive at Wolong, but was heard constantly in Tangjiahe a week later. In areas above 2500 m the landscape still had a winter-like appearance (no leaves on deciduous trees and bushes, dead grass, etc.), which was a distinct advantage for finding pheasants and mammals. In the mountains between the Tibetan plateau and the Chengdu basin – Balang Shan, Erlang Shan, Baixi, etc. – there was snow cover above about 3000-3500m. On the plateau itself there was little or no snow cover.



Blood Pheasant

Giant Laughing-thrush

Mountain Bulbul

The weather was variable with temperatures ranging from about -10 °C to almost +30 °C on the last day. Longcanggou and Erlang Shan were mostly wet and cold with temperatures typically between -3 and +5 °C, although in the mornings we had a couple of hours of sunshine. In Wolong/Balang Shan we had literally every type of weather (snow, hail, rain, sleet, dense fog, mist, overcast and even glorious sunshine), partly depending on the altitude, the time of day, and which side of the pass you were on. The famous km92-94 area had a particularly unfavourable microclimate where thick fog and rain/snow-filled clouds usually prevailed.

The weather on the plateau and in the Baixi area turned out more or less like I hoped and expected (bitter cold at night, but mostly dry and sunny by day and luckily not too much wind, which can sometimes be an issue). During the second half of the trip the weather remained pleasant with relatively cold nights but mostly sunny and dry weather by day (and temperatures of 10-20 °C) and the occasional shower or rain in the afternoon/evening.

In the mountains thermal underwear is not a luxury at this time of year. I wore mine about half of the days of the tour; it made life a lot more pleasant when scanning with the scope for extended periods for mammals and birds.

SITES VISITED

Longcanggou and Labahe nature reserves

On my arrival day we quickly changed cash at the Bank of China near the airport, then drove to Ya'an, where we had lunch and bought supplies, and next headed directly to Longcanggou. Closer to my departure date it had become clear that visiting Labahe might be a real problem, so Longcanggou was the back-up option although it wasn't even clear if that park would be open. So when we got there, we were glad to see that Longcanggou had not been closed entirely despite ongoing road works. Unfortunately, Longcanggou is scheduled to undergo major development. The current unpaved road (actually in good condition for birding and mammalwatching) will be replaced by a much wider paved road to allow tour busses to drive up all the way up the mountain to a "natural wonder" called the "Natural Bridge" (a large rock that spans a gully to form a bridge). There are also rumours of ski facilities being built, which may attract even more traffic and day-trippers.

Longcanggou nature reserve is about a 4-5 hour drive from Chengdu. The accessible part of the reserve is far from pristine, mostly regenerating secondary vegetation. Mammal diversity/visibility appears to be lower than in Labahe, but it can be a good place to see red panda, in particular in late autumn. Birdlife is quite similar to Labahe.

In Longcanggou we had dreary overcast weather most of the time, often accompanied by a foggy drizzle or proper rain. On our first afternoon in the park we encountered a few flocks of mostly relatively common birds (still all lifers for me) but in one flock we also got brief views of a gold-fronted fulvetta. Towards the end of the day we focused on pandas but most of the time we had icy cold rain and both mammal and bird activity was close to zero. The next day we got up before dawn and drove up the mountain just as it was getting light: not a single pheasant, tragopan or mammal to our disappointment. By mid-morning it was sunny and pleasant for a couple of hours and Roland managed to attract a red-winged laughing-thrush, of which I had excellent unobstructed views only 4-5 meters without my bins. When I very slowly managed to position the bins in front of my eyes, I had the laughing-thrush in there for a second and then it lost interest and vanished in the dense bamboo again. We slowly drove and walked the road section that should be good for pheasants, tragopans and pandas several times, but the best we got was a one-second glimpse of a male tragopan disappearing in the bamboo. Bird activity was moderate and the only mammal we encountered was a Swinhoe's striped squirrel. Because of our rather disappointing sightings in Longcanggou, Roland suggested by 2 pm that it would be better to try to get to Labahe and spend a full day there. After picking up our luggage and having a quick lunch, we headed off to Labahe. The drive to Labahe was very slow and quite awful (endless numbers of trucks on a bad and quite dangerous road). By 8.30 pm we arrived at a closed gate in Labahe. The park staff wouldn't let us in. Even a number of phone calls with park management officials proved fruitless; they just wouldn't let us in. Annoying. The other red panda alternative, Wawu Shan, was closed too. So we decided to count our losses, look for a place to sleep and try our luck in Erlang Shan next morning where red pandas theoretically should occur.

Erlang Shan

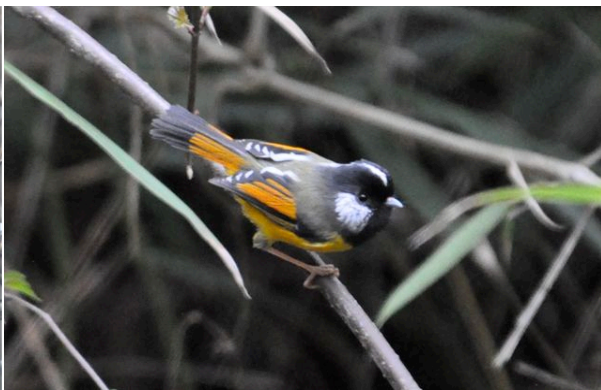
We got up early to be at Erlang Shan just before dawn. The old mountain pass road has been made obsolete by a tunnel but the pass road can usually still be driven. We arrived at the "wet" side of the pass around dawn and took the turn-off for the old pass road just before the tunnel. While it was still quite dark I spotted the silhouette of a pheasant, which turned out to be a Temminck's tragopan. We used our flashlights to admire the

spectacular plumage of the male bird. A bit further on we parked the car and walked up the pass road for a while. The birding was slow but we did see the only maroon-backed accentors of the trip. Very pretty birds! Streaked bar-wing was not present at his stake-out, and may not have arrived at his breeding territory at this time of year. Searching for red panda was hopeless with dense mist clouds rolling in all the time. Views were too restricted most of the time.

By about 7.30 we drove through the tunnel to check the old pass road on the other side of the tunnel. This side was significantly drier with different vegetation. Our main target here was Lady Amherst's pheasant. Before we reached the conifer forest where the pheasants are usually seen, a SUV with blinded windows and two cold-faced and rather out-of-place looking guys drove past down the mountain. Shortly after they had passed we found two Chinese babaxes next to the road. We stopped the car and walked around to see the babaxes and check what other birds were around. Next there was the deafening sound of a gun being fired. Only a couple of hundred meters down the slope we noticed that the SUV had stopped and seconds later one of the guys picked up a freshly killed female Lady Amherst's pheasant. So much for our chances to see this stunning pheasant; these guys had probably wiped out every roadside pheasant just before we came. Rather shocked and disillusioned we continued birding and we actually did find a couple of nice flocks that included black-browed tit, Hodgson's treecreeper and streak-breasted scimitar-bill. Unsurprisingly, we didn't encounter any pheasants or mammals that morning. We drove to the top of the pass to find that the road was impassable because several massive car-sized rocks completely blocked the road. So we had to go back the same way and drive back through the tunnel again for a return visit to the wet side of Erlang Shan, but our second visit there was relatively unproductive. Mid-afternoon we left Erlang Shan. Pretty much the rest of the day was taken up by the long drive (lots of road works and heavy traffic)) via Danba to Xiaojin, where we arrived by 10.30 pm. We decided to sleep in a bit after this long and frustrating day.



White-throated Redstart



Golden-breasted Fulvetta

Balang Shan

This site has been described well in trip reports by independent birders. I found the report written by [Raphaël Lebrun](#) particularly useful. Public transport seemed to be relatively frequent on the pass road but it is a distinct advantage to have your own transport because on both sides of the pass you pass through a large variety of habitats, and good birds and to a lesser extent mammals might be seen anywhere along the road. In addition, the buses will get to the pass area far too late; being out there early in the morning is definitely an advantage.

On our first day in the area (April 1) we drove up via the Rilong side and had our first stops slightly beyond Rilong with spectacular views on Mt. Siguniang (Four Sisters Mountain).



Mt. Siguniang

Here, we encountered a nice variety of tits, redstarts, rosefinches and a pair of white-browed tit-warblers. Overhead we had snow pigeons, peregrine, saker, upland buzzard, and Himalayan griffon vulture (among others). We had our first stab at pheasants, partridges, etc., but not much luck yet. The undisputed highlights today were the mammals: we had excellent views of a hog badger late afternoon and scope views of a group of blue sheep on one of the ridges near Balang Shan pass.

The next day was “pheasant day”. On our way up to the pass from Wolong things started off nicely with three Koklass pheasants along the road and at km 92-94 we had a chestnut-throated partidge land almost at our feet.

By mid-morning the sun managed to burn through the fog and most of the day we had sunshine with superb views of the mountains in all directions. We pretty much spent all day scoping various suitable looking areas for “pheasantidae”. Like so often on this tour finding birds didn’t quite go the expected way. The ones that are normally relatively easy proved to be difficult and required hard work (Chinese monal and snow partridge) and the difficult ones were sunbathing next to the road (Tibetan snowcock). Other goodies seen that day were blood pheasant and a pair of Temminck’s tragopans along the road late in the afternoon when we were heading back to Wolong. It had been a long day and on our way back to Wolong it had started raining and it was getting cold again. So I was not that keen on doing a night walk. After some back and forth discussion about whether it would be smarter to do a night walk at Dengsheng valley that evening or a pre-dawn walk at Wuyipeng the next morning, I somewhat reluctantly agreed to do the night walk at Dengsheng, expecting to see very little, but luckily the rain had slowed down to a drizzle when we started walking. We had already explored the walking trail in daytime and had noticed that there were a lot of droppings and footprints of small

carnivores and deer species, but the proximity of buildings and a worker's camp made me a bit skeptical about our chances. On the way up on the walking trail we saw nothing. When we worked our way down again, we heard a Himalayan tawny owl that remained invisible. Even on the way down we saw nothing for a long time but on the last 300-400 meters we had in quick succession two hog badgers, a mouse/rat and a female sambar, all at very close range. The hog badgers in particular pretty much ignored us and allowed excellent views. Amazing stuff. I was a little surprised but glad that I had been proven wrong about the night walk.



Balang Shan at km 92-94 at dawn on "pheasant day": as cold as it looks, and then some

Wolong/Wuyipeng Station

Wolong was another place of which it was not entirely clear whether it would be open or not, but when we got there we luckily had no problems walking up to Wuyipeng Research Station. This might change soon, because the new "upmarket" sleeping facilities for tourists at the research station have almost been finished; a nice touch was the "garden view" that allows future tourists to enjoy the remains of the old station and some random garbage, all of which have been dumped into the bamboo down the slope.

On April 2 we spent all morning and early afternoon birding the trail to Wuyipeng station. Most of the time it was raining. The muddy walk up to the ridge was rather unproductive in bird numbers; birds were not calling at all (golden pheasant) or just uncooperative (most others). I got a one-second view of a barred laughingthrush, which did call/respond, but my bins fogged up instantly. Best bird on the way up was a male tragopan on the trail that gave pretty good views, but disappeared in the undergrowth too quickly to take pictures. On the ridge it was luckily dry for a while but bird activity was still rather poor, although we got good views of a female tragopan. After we had admired the new tourist facilities at Wuyipeng, we slowly made our way back. Only a

couple of hundred meters from the station I noticed something that was glowing like a flame in the subdued browns and greens of the forest. It was the yellow-orange back of a male tragopan's neck. I slowly walked up to the bird, who eventually calmly walked away through the undergrowth allowing superb close-up views. Undoubtedly, one of the most sensational birds I have seen so far. On the walk down we saw very little until we got back to the start of the trail, where we saw a decent selection of mostly common birds but a crimson-breasted woodpecker was a nice tick. And red-billed blue magpies are the kind of eye candy that never fails to bore me. After the walk we first had lunch and then returned to our hotel to pick up our bags. We made our way up to Balang Shan pass for the last time, but didn't see much of note. New were red-fronted rosefinches on the pass. The night was spent in Xiaojing.



Bob-sledding Red-fronted Rosefinch

Wallcreeper

Mengbi Shan

A sketch map of the Mengbi Shan area can be found in the report by Vincent van der Spek (July 2007), but we just stopped anywhere where birds were calling or the habitat looked good for the birds we were chasing. Sichuan jay was not responsive and we dipped again on white eared pheasant. Best sightings near the pass and the old pine forests below the pass were a male three-banded rosefinch, a flock of snow pigeons and prolonged views of the attractive giant laughing-thrushes. Lower down in the valley en route to Mengbi Shan we had wallcreeper; white-throated dipper was seen on a short walk in a mountain valley in the Mengbi Shan area.

At the Barkam/Hongyuan junction we took a right turn and slowly worked our way up the plateau in the direction of Hongyuan. En route we kept looking for white eared pheasants, which so far had eluded us despite extensive searching at Balang Shan (finding white pheasants in a white landscape turned out be though) and hearing them several times. Pretty much at the last possible mountain slope with some forest before we would reach the plateau, Roland luckily spotted a group of about 8-10 birds. Amazing birds. In a transitional area with low hills (just before reaching the proper plateau) we successfully tracked down white-browed tit-warbler, robin accentor, rufous-breasted accentor and plain laughing-thrush.

The drive on the plateau initially produced little of interest, but closer to Hongyuan I was surprised but very happy to see a group of at least 30 black-necked cranes together with a single common crane. This stretch had some entertaining birding stops that produced black stork, bar-headed goose, ruddy shelduck, several raptor species and more black-necked cranes. By the end of the day we had a total of 45 black-necked cranes. Roland also showed me a Eurasian Eagle Owl at a stake-out/quarry north of Hongyuan.

After visiting the owl quarry we called it a day and headed back to Hongyuan for food and an overnight stop. We stayed at a fancier hotel with at least five different names including Panorama Hotel (not by a long shot!!), 318 Motel and more sensibly Hongyuan Hotel. We didn't eat in the hotel, but had excellent Sichuan food in a simple eatery a block away from the hotel.



Black-necked Cranes

Hongyuan area

The next morning it was bitter cold and overcast. Snow was in the air. We continued north and the first 40-50 kilometers it was snowing quite heavily for a while. This did not seem to affect the birds, who were very active in this area. Highlights were red-throated and black-throated (formerly dark-throated) thrush, red-necked and white-rumped snowfinch, and pine bunting. The original idea was to focus on mammals today but the visibility the first couple of hours was less than 30 meters in some areas. At a crossroads with a petrol station we were not quite sure what to do (drive to Ruo'ergai and wait until the weather would get better or just drive the original route to Richard Webb's Pallas's cat site and then drive south to Ruo'ergai). We did the latter and followed a rough road along the Yellow River and eventually the weather started to improve. Most amazing sighting was a short-toed eagle at close range, a rare visitor in this region.

At one of our mammal scanning stops Roland saw a cat/marmot-sized mammal disappear in a burrow. We managed to find a track that led to the area and walked around in the area finding many black-lipped pikas and larger burrows that could belong to marmots or cats. In the end we found no footprints in the snow that hinted at the presence of a cat.

After picking up some nice raptors such as saker, little owl, and male hen harrier, we saw another snow front coming our way quickly. When we were right in the middle of this, out of the blue a lone young wolf was found standing on a low ridge next to the road. Just when we stopped to photograph the wolf, faith would have it that a car came from the other side on this deserted road. Aaarrrrgh. The wolf started running, crossed the road and then raced down the valley and vanished in the low snow clouds on the

opposite hill. I only managed to get some record shots, but what a brilliant sighting. Just as quickly as the snow front had come in, it disappeared, and the combination of fresh snow and incredibly bright sunshine made us grab for our sunglasses and sun cream. Near the village Heihe (I think) we saw a single Tibetan lark together with the ubiquitous horned and Asian short-toed larks. A bit further on – in typical magnificent plateau scenery – we stopped and scanned the area for mammals. Just when we were about to pack up, I found a fox on one of the hill slopes, which turned out to be a red fox.



The first wolf keeping an eye on us just before it disappeared in a cloud of snow and fog.

In the afternoon we checked out the area where Richard Webb had seen Pallas's Cat. Here we found lots of plateau pikas and marmots, but no cat. Good birding again with bearded, black and Himalayan griffon vulture, Hume's ground-tit, plain mountain-finch, and several lark and snowfinch species. We then went through the toll gate in the direction of Ruo'ergai and stopped a few kilometres south after the turn-off for Flower Lake. Here, we found a steppe eagle and Tibetan fox fighting over some plateau pikas that one of them (or both) had caught. The fight was quite spectacular, but both left unharmed.

The last hour of the day was spent at another site with a series of low hills that looked like good cat territory. Apart from marmots and pikas we did not see much, but we decided that this area required further investigation, which we did two days later (see next entry).

Ruo'ergai (a.k.a. Zoige) and Pallas's Cat Area

On April 7 we spent all day in the area discussed in Richard Webb's report, which below I will just call "the Pallas's Cat area", but there are many other areas in the wider area that appear suitable for Pallas's cat. In his report Richard Webb describes the site as heavily disturbed and indeed it is, actually so much that I actually didn't quite believe Roland when he said that this was the site. There is a small settlement 2-3 km after the turn-off plus quite a lot of semi-permanent tents in the area. There are a lot of sheep and

yak in this area but more worrying a lot of Tibetan mastiffs. We didn't find wild cats or foxes in the area (scanning the area for about 3-4 hours in total), but the habitat itself seems quite adequate for a Pallas's cat. Nevertheless, I am still a bit sceptical about whether a wild cat would still be present in this area with so many sheep dogs around. Furthermore, while we were there, they were building a new set of electricity pylons right in this area. So there be must a lot of disturbance at the moment. The area is still worth scanning, or possibly even better worth spotlighting or it has moved only a couple of kilometres to a less disturbed area.



Bearded Vulture

So apart from the site described by Richard Webb we also explored a number of other places in the direct vicinity, north and south of the toll gate. We basically tried every suitable-looking elevated spot that allows you to scan a wide area. The local herdsmen may be a little suspicious so it helps if you can explain what you are doing. If not, maybe show them pictures of wolf, Tibetan fox and Pallas's cat, and they might point you in the right direction. All day we did a mixture of walking and scanning with the scopes from an elevated vantage point. This paid off: we had about 15 Tibetan gazelles, an adult wolf and at least five Tibetan foxes (usually quite wary though). Himalayan marmot and plateau pika were pretty much everywhere. We also had superb close-up views of upland buzzard, hen harrier, bearded and cinereous vulture, saker, Himalayan griffon, Hume's ground-tit, horned lark, rufous-necked and white-rumped snowfinches, among others. The whole area appears very open and at first it seems unlikely that a cat would escape one's attention, but upon closer inspection it was clear that there were many hiding places for small mammals. And every Himalayan marmot in the far distance has to be checked because at 1-2 km they can appear rather similar to a cat.

Late afternoon we witnessed something bizarre: a Tibetan mastiff dog seemed to have caught a Himalayan marmot by surprise away from his burrow; the dog was dancing around the marmot in a playful way. It seemed like the dog was just curious and having fun with the marmot, because it could have easily attacked and killed it. The marmot nevertheless kept a defensive posture all the time. We were then distracted for a minute

by a saker on a distant hillside. When we checked back with the dog and the marmot, things had gotten weirder: the dog and the marmot were lying next to each other on the ground, the marmot in an uneasy way with the dog clearly in control of the situation. At some point the dog got up and walked off. We couldn't see any obvious injuries on the marmot, but after a minute the marmot got up and slowly walked a few meters and then collapsed and never got up again. It had clearly died on the spot, possibly from stress-induced heart failure. Totally bizarre and kind of sad.



Tibetan Fox checking us out

About 45 minutes before sunset we admitted defeat after having scanned for hours and hours without a sign of a Pallas's cat and started slowly walking back to the car. Only after a few hundred meters I noticed some movement in the far left corner of my eyes. With little passion I lifted my bins one more time to confirm the 987th marmot but shockingly this time I was looking at a cat about 150-200 meters away! In all the excitement I automatically assumed it was a Pallas's cat, which others had seen in this area before. The cat calmly walked away from us, but regularly looked back at us and was clearly aware of our presence. We both tried to follow it with our scopes and note as many details as possible. What worried me a bit was that the head of the cat was not that flat and the ears were pointy, tufted and triangular and on the top of the head (not rounded and further down sideways) and while its pelage was thick, furry and greyish, something didn't seem quite right. I was so focused on turning it into a Pallas's Cat that I initially assumed it was a juvenile. Anyway, we kept following the cat in our scopes until it disappeared out of view on a hill slope in the distance. When the cat disappeared behind the hill slope we were 500 meters behind or so and walked as fast as we could to catch up but when we got to the place where we had last seen the cat, it had disappeared. We couldn't relocate the cat. We decided to call it a day since we both had seen it very well and decided to double-check in the mammal book. Back in the hotel I immediately checked *Mammals of China*. Both the description and the drawing confirmed without any doubt: what we had seen was a Chinese mountain cat!!! The drawing in the book is actually pleasingly accurate. A sensational ending to an already fantastic day. [Note added in September 2014: after having seen Pallas's Cat on our Qinghai trip in August I can say that it is near impossible to confuse the two cats: the jizz was as expected totally different from Chinese Mountain cat. Pallas's Cat is a short-legged tank-like beast with a massive round head.]

Worth mentioning is that the herdsmen seem to go out with their herds quite late, so the first 2-3 hours after sunrise we had the place to ourselves and saw most of the mammals. In the afternoon the herdsmen stayed out quite long and only about 30-45 minutes before sunset they had all gone back to their homes.



Scenery in the Baixi area

Baxi/Baixi Area

For directions to Baixi, see Raphael Lebrun's and Richard Webb's report. It is very easy to find. It is a beautiful area of alpine forests and meadows, and a few small villages with fields around them. However, Baixi was unfortunately surprisingly unproductive during a full day visit on April 6 and another full morning on April 8. We really struggled to find birds and mammals in this area despite the excellent looking habitat. It may simply have been too early in the season for this area (quite a bit of snow above 3500m), because otherwise the calm and sunny weather conditions on our visits seemed pretty ideal. In the morning and evening we scanned several stake-outs that are normally good for mammals and pheasants (i.e., any mountain slope with a mixture of fields, scrub, forest, and grassland that can be scoped conveniently from the road or a low hill next to the road). The results were nevertheless relatively disappointing: a few common pheasants, four blue eared pheasants, and an unidentified female deer that was seen for a second. Wild boar, goral, serow, roe deer, sika deer, tufted deer and musk deer have all been seen in this area (and we did see quite a bit of "spoor" in the area), so we were probably unlucky.

That said, we did have a couple of excellent sightings in the area. On a walk through pine forest a little below the tree line close to the mountain pass we finally connected with crested tit-warbler and had superb views of a Chinese grouse when it had to come out in the open and cross the track through thick snow. Here, we also had decent flight views of a grey-headed woodpecker. We also looked for Sichuan wood owl and Sichuan jay but no luck with both species.

Jiuzhaigou County

A few minor roads from Baixi to Jiuzhaigou city pass through magnificent mountain scenery and would deserve proper exploration. On April 8 we explored the Baixi area and Lama Mountain Pass area in the morning (seeing few birds and nothing new, and no mammals at all), but the scenery on the pass road was spectacular. After the pass we descended to Dalu. In the afternoon we wanted to drive to an area called "Fairy Pools", but a crossing over an iced-over waterfall (the ice covered the full width of the road) ripped open one of our tires and damaged another one. After exchanging the tire, we decided it was smarter to get our tire situation sorted out. So we never made it to the

Fairy Pools and the remainder of the day was spent getting back to Jiuzhaigou and fixing the tire.

After a night in Jiuzhaigou we drove to Tangjiahe via Pingwu. About an hour from Jiuzhaigou we explored a mountain valley along the S205 that borders on Wanglang nature reserve. Here, the birding was slow, but in the end we did find great parrotbill, blood pheasant, blue eared pheasant and a mountain hawk eagle. No mammals again. We made a stop in Pingwu for lunch and supplies, and quickly checked the birds in the botanical garden. A few new species were seen but nothing shocking. After leaving Pingwu we followed one of the main provincial roads (still the S205 I think) before taking a more idyllic minor country road to Tangjiahe, which produced several new birds, such as stripe-throated yuhina, white-throated laughing-thrush and best of all collared crow.



Sooty Tit



Red-billed Leiothrix



Blue-fronted Redstart

Tangjiahe Nature Reserve

A very enjoyable reserve with beautiful scenery, good mammal- and birdwatching, and a variety of hiking options (mostly short, but also some longer options, which I enjoyed a lot after the almost non-stop driving during the rest of the trip). Try to visit during the week, because it was a lot busier on Saturday when we left the reserve.



Tibetan Macaques in Tangjiahe

We spotlighted all three evenings in the park. The first drive was excellent with one masked palm civet, (at least) two Chinese serows, several takins, and Reeve's muntjac. The second drive was not that great and spoiled by rather persistent rain. We only saw a muntjac. The last drive was good again with two more Chinese serows, more takins and muntjacs, and three different deer sightings (one was a forest musk deer, but the other two remained unclear), plus a tawny fish owl along the river. In addition to the animals we managed to "lock" in the spotlight we regularly had eye-shine that disappeared too quickly. So activity was quite good overall. Like in so many of the mountainous areas in Sichuan the topography makes spotlighting quite a challenge: the valleys are very narrow and steep often with dense vegetation. Nevertheless, the stretch of paved road beyond the hotel that leads to the parking/forest station where the core area starts was particularly good. The forest was quite open in this area and you could often spotlight over long stretches along the river. This is the area where we saw all serows, most deer species, most of the takins at night and one palm civet.



Beautiful rural China near Tangjiahe

Literature, Acronyms and Nomenclature

The following trip reports were useful (apart from the ones mentioned elsewhere in the report) and can be found on www.cloudbirders.com: Remco Hofland (2006), John van der Woude (2011), Henk Hendriks (2007), Herve Jacob (2007) and Greg Roberts (2007).

I used the following books before, during or after the trip:

A Field Guide to the Birds of China by John MacKinnon & Karen Phillipps: its advantages and disadvantages are well known, see for example this excellent report by [C. Artuso](#) (July/August 2006) with a pretty accurate grilling of MacKinnon's book. Still, at the moment you have little choice and none of the alternatives are that great either in my opinion. It is worth making your own addendum with internet photos of species that are depicted poorly (warblers and rosefinches are two obvious groups) or have recently been split (warblers, treecreepers, nuthatches, swifts, etc.).

Mammals of China (Editors Andrew T. Smith and Yan Xie): overall better than the bird field guide. Some of the drawings are odd (e.g., tufted deer), but still the best work out there. Just like many other mammal field guides, the book is weak on clearly defining diagnostic features that would help you identify the animals in the field without having to trap or kill them. This may be impossible for bats and most rodents, but why only show male deers and antelopes when pictures/drawings of females, juveniles, colour variations, etc. would be equally essential! Flying squirrels are only shown in flight from above; looks cool, but it is the most unlikely way of seeing them in the field!

Birds of Europe, Russia, China and Japan (Princeton Illustrated Checklists) by Norman Arlott (two volumes: passerines and non-passerines): the plates look very appealing at first glance, but they are of variable quality (often too dark or certain colours are over the top). That said, most rosefinches and certain warblers, for example, are a major improvement on MacKinnon's book. Annoying is that certain splits or even proper species seem to have been forgotten completely. The text entries are very short (but it's a checklist, not a field guide). The distribution map is exactly the same for every species in the book, i.e., Europe, Russia, China and Japan are shown on a map of about 5 x 3 cm without country borders being indicated. Well, you can guess how useful that map is for a bird with a tiny distribution range. Since Europe is depicted distorted on the far left edge of the map and Japan is a tiny blob on the map, the maps are only moderately useful for species with a fairly large distribution in Russia and China. The books are lightweight and pocket-sized and thus easy to carry around in the field, but a little overpriced for what they are.

A Field Guide to the birds of South-east Asia by Craig Robson: mostly reasonable to good drawings but I never liked this book. Too much information crammed into one book. Some plates are awfully crowded. What puts me off most is the annoying and exceptionally non-intuitive order in which the birds appear. I only used it once at home to check some warblers.

Chinese Wildlife (Bradt Publishers): although their regular travel guides are usually good to excellent, this series is awful. This book and the others in the series are extremely poor on practical information. 70% of the book discusses an endless array of animal species with one or two sentences in the most trivial way possible. Only a fraction of the book is dedicated to discussing where to go, but again it is nothing more than an endless list of reserves that are discussed in one or two sentences. Photos are mostly good to excellent but with odd captions: "The Yellow-cheeked Tit has a pronounced crest"

(really, and what about grey crested tit and several other tits in China) and “The takin has an attractive golden coat”, “The lesser mouse deer is a tiny hoofed mammal” (well, thanks for that), etc., etc. This book is only good for superficial armchair reading, but even then the style of writing tends to annoy me. I really wonder which audience is targeted with these books (useless to plan a trip, way too superficial to excite dedicated hobby naturalists and too long-winded and boring for a general audience).

Handbook of the Mammals of the World, Vols 1-3: great books to just read or leaf through on rainy Sundays to get an overview of the bigger picture but I am still not convinced that they have a lot of added value otherwise.

Carnivores of the World (Luke Hunter): I had to get used to the style of the drawings, but this one is growing on me, I find myself checking things in this book more often than in the HMW series.

The following acronyms are used in the trip lists below:

WOL = Wolong village/community and Wuyipeng research station and walking trail

BAL = Balang Shan including Dengsheng valley halfway between Wolong and the pass and the area round Rilong

ERL = Erlang Shan

MBS = Mengbi Shan

PAL = “Richard Webb’s” Pallas’ cat site about 50-60 km north of Zoige

ZOI = the area around Ruo’ergai a.k.a. Zoige

TJH = Tangjiahe nature reserve

DUJ = Dujiangyan area (40-50 km west of Chengdu)

LCG = Longcangou nature reserve



Golden Pheasant

MAMMAL LIST

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta* – seen twice in TJH: one along the main road on April 11 and at least two behind one of the forest protection stations on April 12.

Tibetan Macaque *Macaca thibetana* – a group of at least 30 along the main road in TJH on April 12



Tibetan Macaques – Spring Bliss

Pallas's squirrel *Callosciurus erythraeus* – one en route near Pingwu on April 9, one along the country road that leads to TJH on April 9, one on an afternoon walk in TJH on April 10, one along one of the concrete walking trails in TJH on April 12, one near Dujiangyan on April 12

Père David's Rock Squirrel *Sciurotamias davidianus* – one in the MBS area on April 4, a probable one in TJH on April 11

Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel *Tamiops swinhoei* – one in LCG on March 30

Himalayan marmot *Marmota himalayana* – common in the Ruo'ergai/Hongyuan area

[Edward's Leopoldamys *Leopoldamys edwardsi* – on the entrance road to Labahe we saw a large rat (golden brown above, white below) with largish ears and a long "naked" tail that was longer than the body length (guestimate 125-150% HB). Size, habitat and altitudinal range seemed to fit with this species, but as so often with rats and mice, this is nothing more than a wild guess.]

[Small Rat/Large Mouse species *Niviventer*/*Apodemus* species?? – one seen well on the night walk in Dengsheng valley but I did not take my camera, so no photos. The animal was sandy coloured with a white belly and chest. The slender "naked" tail was guestimated at about 120% HB. *Niviventer confucianus* seems a decent candidate for this kind of altitude and habitat.]

[*Apodemus* species?? – one crossed the road in front of the car in TJH on April 11. Studies in Tangjiahe have shown that *Apodemus chevrieri*, *Apodemus draco* and *Niviventer confucianus* were the most recorded rodent species, so what we saw, was probably an *Apodemus* mouse given the smallish size].

[Bamboo Rat species – a few road kills in the Chengdu basin]

Moupin Pika *Ochotona thibetana* – two in Baixi on April 6. Gansu pika *Ochotona cansus* is another likely option.

Black-lipped (or Plateau) Pika *Ochotona curzoniae* – locally common/abundant on the plateau



Moupin/Gansu Pika

Black-lipped Pika

Woolly (a.k.a. Tibetan) Hare *Lepus oiostolus* – one in the Hongyuan area

[Bat Species – several were seen including one at the gate in Labahe and what was probably a pipistrelle species in TJH]

Chinese Mountain Cat *Felis bieti* – one south of the toll gate, 50-60 km north of Zoige

Masked Palm Civet *Paguma larvata* – seen twice on night drives in TJH

[Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens* – not seen, not a hint of them in LCG, and Labahe and Wawu Shan were closed, they also occur in BAL and TJH but are rarely seen there]

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata* – three on April 5 and at least five on April 7



Tibetan Fox

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* – one on April 5 near Heihe, about 90-100 km north of Ruo'ergai

Gray Wolf (Tibetan Wolf) *Canis lupus (chanco)* – one on April 5 about 10-15 km from Heihe and one on April 7 in the PAL area

[Steppe Polecat *Mustela eversmannii* – a fresh road kill about 25-30 km north of Zoige before sunrise on April 7]

Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* – one seen quite well on April 4 en route when it crossed the road in front of us

Hog Badger *Arctonyx collaris* – one above the treeline at BAL on the Wolong side of the pass, two seen at very close range on the nightwalk in Dengsheng valley (BAL) on April 2, also a fresh road kill near Ya’an



Hog Badger

Sambar *Rusa unicolor* – one rather light-coloured female on the night walk in Dengsheng valley (BAL). This deer gave us some headaches because it was very pale for a sambar, but the dark tail was quite long (25-30 cm) and the animal had no rump patch (as you would expect for white-lipped deer and red deer). The animal had a white chin, but not the white muzzle that would be typical for white-lipped deer.

Reeves's Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi* – single females on the night drives on April 9 and 10, one in daytime and one around dusk on April 10, four in daytime on April 11

Forest Musk Deer *Moschus berezovskii* – a female-type animal was seen on the night drive on April 11, only seen well for a couple of seconds when it had to cross a gap in the vegetation.

[Tufted Deer *Elaphodus cephalophus* – a female-type animal was seen on the night drive on April 11. I saw this animal well for at least 15-30 seconds, but somehow it didn't quite match any of the most likely deer in the area. During the drive I thought it was a tufted deer based on the photo in the *Mammals of China* book. What I saw looked very similar to what is shown in the book, but the problem is that "real" tufted deer don't really look like the drawing in the book. Anyway, the animal I saw appeared to be larger than a muntjac. It did not have black facial markings that would be typical for a muntjac. Overall appearance was that of a mid-sized deer with greyish/grizzled head and neck, slowly graduating into a washed-out reddish brown on the back and hindlegs with some indistinct pale yellowish discolourations (not really spots though). Underparts were pale/beige-ish/off-white. Oddly I saw nothing that hinted at a tuft on the head, but that may have been the perspective from which I was looking at the animal. All very confusing. Still, tufted deer is by far the most likely candidate in TJH. Another mid-sized deer was flushed along the river in daytime in TJH on April 10. I couldn't see the head but the body appeared all-dark-grey so may have been a tufted deer as well].

[Unidentified Deer Species – one seen for a second by me high on a mountain slope on April 6 in Baixi late in the afternoon, it was most likely at female roe or sika deer, but views were just too short to be sure.]

Tibetan Gazelle (a.k.a. Goa) *Procapra picticaudata* – a total of about 15 in the PAL area, seen in groups of 2-4 animals

Sichuan Takin *Budorcas tibetana* – a total of about 15 in TJH, seen early in the morning, around dusk and on night drives.



Takins

White-maned (a.k.a. Chinese) Serow *Capricornis milneedwardensis* – at least two animals on the night drives on April 9 and 11; three were males, one female.

Blue Sheep *Pseudois nayaur* – at least eight on April 1 at BAL on the steep rock faces on the Rilong side close to the pass



Blue Sheep

BIRD LIST

Chinese (a.k.a. Severtsov's Hazel) Grouse *Tetrastes sewerzowi* - one seen very well in Baixi when it crossed a forest track

Chestnut-throated partridge *Tetraophasis obscurus* - two of which one was seen very well at BAL in the area around the tunnel at km 92-94

Snow Partridge *Lerwa lerwa* - after a long search we finally found a group of at least 5 on a high ridge close to the mountain pass at BAL

Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus* - spectacular views of a pair that was seen at only 30-60 meters from the road a few kilometers below the pass at BAL on the Rilong side; later that day on the Wolong side of the pass we witnessed what looked a territorial dispute between three birds



Tibetan Snowcock

Blood Pheasant

Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus* - two at BAL of the relatively unexciting all-grey *ssp geoffroyi* on April 2; the much more colourful *ssp berezowskii* was found in the Mengbi Shan area, Baixi and Jiuzhaigou county: about 5-6 between Mengbi Shan and Hongyuan on April 4, a group of about 20 in the Baixi area on April 6 and at least 10 in Wujiao Nature Reserve bordering Wanglang reserve on April 9

Temminck's Tragopan *Tragopan temminckii* - a male was flushed from the road at LCG on March 31, a male was found roosting next to the old pass road at ERL at dawn on March 31, a pair was found along the road at BAL on April 2, two males and a female at WOL on April 3

Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha* - a male and a pair at BAL on April 2

Chinese Monal *Lophophorus lhuysii* - after a long search in tempting weather conditions we finally found two at BAL at the well known place at km 92 on the slopes above the tunnel



Record shots of Chestnut-throated Partridge, Koklass Pheasant and Chinese Grouse

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon* – We failed at BAL (too much snow, we heard them calling there) but we finally found a group of eight on April 4 just before we reached the grassy highlands of the Tibetan plateau

Blue Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon auritum* – a group of four and a pair at Baixi on April 6. A single bird was seen in Wujiao Nature Reserve bordering Wanglang reserve on April 9



Blue Eared Pheasant

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* – a male on April 4, two males together on April 5, three single males in the Baixi area on April 6

Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus* - a male was seen at close range in TJH on April 10, also regularly heard in TJH, was not yet calling at WOL a week earlier

[Lady Amherst's Pheasant *Chrysolophus amherstiae* – a female was shot by hunters pretty much right in front of our eyes at ERL]

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* – 4 and 2 north of Hongyuan on April 5

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* – common on the plateau, seen on April 4-7

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* – a few scattered sightings on the plateau, a total of eight on April 4 and two on April 5

Common Teal *Anas crecca* – at least three on April 5

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* – two sightings (4 and 2) on April 5

Common Merganser/Goosander *Mergus merganser* – a total of 20 on April 4

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – two on the river in Dujiangyan on April 12

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* – a total of four on April 4, south of Hongyuan

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* – one near Chengdu airport on March 29, several sightings in the Chengdu basin on April 12

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – one in the Chengdu basin on April 12

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* – one north of Hongyuan on April 5

Great Egret *Ardea alba* – about 4-5 in the Chengdu basin on April 12

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* – about 10 in the Chengdu basin on April 12

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* – one over forested hills near DUJ on April 12

Black-eared Kite *Milvus (migrans) lineatus* – about 4-6 daily seen on the Tibetan plateau between April 4 and 7, 100+ were migrating and roosting on the road between Zoige and Baixi on April 8, one en route on April 9

Bearded Vulture/Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* – one at BAL on April 2 at BAL, an adult on the ground on a carcass together with a black vulture on April 5 in the PAL area, spectacular close views on April 7 of an immature and later an adult in the PAL area

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* – daily 4-8 in BAL, and between 2 and 15 every day on the plateau
 Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* – a total of seven on April 5, and five in the PAL area on April 7
 Northern Harrier/Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* – a male at BAL on April 1, a female-type bird on April 4, two males and a female-type bird on April 4, two males on April 7
 [Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus* – a probable one on April 12]
 [Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* – a possible one on April 12]
 Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* – one on April 8, and two possible sightings on April 12
 Eurasian Buzzard *Buteo buteo* – 1-5 seen on April 3, 4, 6, 8 and 11. The races/(sub)species *B.b. refectus* (Himalayan Buzzard) and *B.b. rufinus* (Steppe Buzzard, mainly Baixi area) were seen.
 Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius* – regular sightings on the plateau and Balang Shan, 1-8 seen from April 1-8. A bit of a surprise was one migrating one over Motianling Mountain pass in TJH on April 11
 Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* – one about 50 km north of Zoige fighting with a Tibetan Fox over pikas
 Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* – singles seen on April 1 and 2 (BAL), 3, 6 (Baixi), and 11 (TJH)
 Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* – one on April 9 in a mountain valley bordering the Wanglang nature reserve, one in TJH on April 12
 Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* – one seen very well on April 5 north of Hongyuan, a rarity in the area



Record shot of Short-toed Snake-Eagle

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* – one on April 1, at least five en route on the plateau on April 5, one on April 7 in the PAL area, two in the Baixi area on April 8, and one on April 9
 Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* – one on BAL on April 1, three on the plateau on April 5, and one on April 7 in the PAL area
 Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* – one near Rilong at BAL on April 1
 Common Crane *Grus grus* – singles were seen together with black-necked cranes on April 4 and 5
 Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* – a total of 45 on April 4 and 20+ on April 5
 Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – one along the main river in DUJ
 [Gallinago Snipe species – one flushed on a night walk in Baixi]

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus* – one on the Yangtze River north of Hongyuan on April 5



[Rock Dove *Columba livia* – all feral I guess]

[Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris* – two pigeons on the plateau seemed to be this species but not 100% sure, mainly because we didn't stop to have a closer look]

Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota* – several flocks on April 1 at BAL including a group of about 30, a nice pair was seen perched at the km 92-94 tunnel, also seen at MBS

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* – a few sightings in cities/urbanized areas

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* – seen en route in the Chengdu basin

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* – one at a stake-out/quarry near Hongyuan on April 4

Tawny Fish Owl *Ketupa flavipes* – one seen on a branch over the river along the main road in TJH on the nightdrive on April 11

[Himalayan Tawny Owl *Strix Nivicolom* – heard only at BAL on the night walk]

[Owl species – one heard on the night walk in Baixi, on the nightdrive on April 11 two different, unidentified owls were flushed from the roadside in TJH]

[Sichuan Wood (formerly Ural) Owl *Strix davidi* – not seen, we tried at Baixi, but no luck]

[Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei* – heard regularly in LCG]

Little Owl *Athene noctua* – a total of four on April 5 between Hongyuan and the Pallas's Cat site

Himalayan Swiftlet *Aerodramus brevirostris* – a few on March 30 near Ya'an

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* – at least two migrating over Motianling Mountain pass in TJH on April 11

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus* – at least four migrating over Motianling Mountain pass in TJH on April 11

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* – between one and five seen every day, even above 4000 meters to my surprise

Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus* – one in a flock en route in Pingwu County on April 9

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus* – a group of 7+ was seen at LCG on March 29

[White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* - heard only in TJH]

Crimson-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos cathpharius* – one in WOL at the start of the trail to WUY, a probable one on April 10, and one seen well on Motianling Pass on April 11

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* – one seen in TJH on April 11, heard in other places with some regularity

[Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus* - heard only in Baixi]

[Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* - heard only in Baixi]

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* – one seen in TJH, heard about 4-5 times in various places

Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* - a male in LCG on March 30, one pair on April 9 in Pingwu, at least 20 migrating on Motianling Mountain pass in TJH, at least 10 on April 12

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* - two on March 29, one on April 4, two on April 12

Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius sphenocercus* - one between Hongyuan and the Pallas Cat Site on April 5, and one just outside Zoige on April 8

[Sichuan Jay *Perisoreus internigrans* - not seen despite extensive searching at MBS and Baixi]

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus* - one on April 5 on the plateau north of Hongyuan

Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* - four near our homestay in the LCG area on March 30, at least 5 on April 3 in Wolong village, daily about 3-6 in TJH



Red-billed Blue Magpie

Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* – one on March 31 in ERL, fairly common on the plateau especially in cities and around settlements, regular sightings en route to TJH on April 9 and back to Chengdu on April 12

Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* – 5+ of which several seen very well at ERL (dry side) on March 31

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* – regularly seen at BAL, the Tibetan plateau and in the Baixi area

Alpine Chough/Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* – only once with certainty, a group of at least 10 at BAL on April 2

Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus* – two on April 4 and 5+ on April 5

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* – a few scattered sightings en route

Collared Crow *Corvus pectoralis* – four in flight on April 9 and one on the ground on April 12



Collared Crow

Large-billed Crow/Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* – common, seen daily in small numbers (5-15)

Common Raven *Corvus corax* – 5+ daily on the plateau and in the Baixi area, one in TJH on April 11

Great Tit *Parus major* – seen on about 50% of the days including LCG, BAL, Baixi, and MBS but usually in small numbers (1-5).

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* – often the most common tit in mountainous areas and a flock leader, seen in LCG, TJH, and ERL among other places en route

Yellow-bellied Tit *Parus venustulus* – seen in the Pingwu area, DUJ, and TJH

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris* – fairly common in LCG, BAL, Baixi, also seen en route on April 8 and 9

Coal Tit *Parus ater* – one at BAL on April 1 and one in TJH on April 11

Sichuan Tit *Poecile weigoldicus* – one near Rilong (BAL) on April 1, one on April 2 and several at Baixi on April 6. We could not positively identify Marsh Tit, which may occur as well.

Père David's Tit *Parus davidi* – only Roland saw two in a flock en route on April 9, but good views for both of us of three birds in TJH on April 11

Grey-crested Tit *Parus dichrous* – common in BAL and Baixi

Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus* – a few in LCG, 5+ in ERL, one in the BAL area on April 3, two in TJH on April 11

Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus* – two at LCG on April 29, seen daily from April 9 to 12 including in TJH and DUJ

Black-browed Tit *Aegithalos iouschistos* – 6+ at ERL, 3+ at MBS, and regular sightings in TJH and surroundings

Sooty Tit *Aegithalos fuliginosus* – quite common in TJH with several sightings each day



White-browed Tit-warbler

White-browed Tit-Warbler *Leptopocile sophiae* – a pair on April 1 at BAL, and 5+ en route to Hongyuan on April 4

Crested Tit-Warbler *Leptopocile elegans* – a total of three (two males, one female) seen in the Baixi area on April 6

Hume's Ground-tit/Ground-pecker/Ground-jay *Pseudopodoces humilis* – fairly common on the plateau, first seen near Hongyuan, 20+ both on April 5 and 7



Turd Lovers: Hume's Ground Tit (left) and Rufous-necked Snowfinch (right)

Sand Martin/Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia* – 8+ at DUJ on April 12

Pale Sand Martin *Riparia diluta* – the martins migrating over the Moatianling pass on April 11 were very pale and assumed to be this species

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* – relatively few scattered sightings, seen on March 29 (LCG), April 9, 11 (Moatianling pass), and 12

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* – at least four at BAL (on the Rilong side of the pass)

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* – 2+ on April 3, 4+ on April 6 on the pass in the Baixi area, two on April 8

Tibetan Lark *Melanocorypha maxima* – one on April 5

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* – common to abundant on the Tibetan plateau on April 4, 5 and 7

Horned Lark/Shorelark *Eremophila alpestris* – fairly common on the Tibetan plateau on April 4, 5 and 7 (double digits on all those days)

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* – two at the airport on March 29, one on April 12 along the river in DUJ

Striated Prinia *Prinia crinigera* – one on April 8 along the entrance road to Baihe nature reserve

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* – one on March 29 (forgot location, but probably near the airport)

Collared Finchbill *Spizixos semitorques* – 7-15 daily in TJH on April 10-12, also seen in the DUJ area on April 12

Brown-breasted Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthorrhous* – three on the access road to TJH

Chinese/Light-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus sinensis* – about 5 in LCG on March 29, 7+ on April 12 in the DUJ area

Mountain Bulbul *Ixos mcclellandii* – 2-3 seen on April 10 and 11 in TJH

Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler *Cettia fortipes* – seen in TJH: one on April 10 and one seen very well on April 12. Heard only in LCG.

Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler *Cettia acanthizoides* – two seen in LCG on March 30, one on the WUY trail on April 3, two in TJH on April 11

Buff-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus subaffinis* – one in LCG on March 29

Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis* – two on March 29 and 30 in LCG, 4+ in ERL on March 31

Sichuan Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus forresti* – two on March 30 in LCG, two on April 9 en route

Sulphur-breasted Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus ricketti* – singles seen well on April 10 and 12 and heard on April 12, all in TJH

Claudia's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus claudiae* – identified by voice, seen in TJH on April 11 and 12

Kloss's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus ogilviegrantii* – identified by voice, at least one seen on April 10

Rufous-faced Warbler *Abroscopus albogularis* – heard on March 30 in LCG, single birds seen in TJH on April 10, 11 and 12

Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus gravivox* – one in ERL, one in TJH

Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis* – one on April 1, one on the entrance road to TJH on April 9, two on April 11 in TJH, heard in DUJ and LCG

[Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer* – heard only in LCG]

Pygmy Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla* – heard only in LCG, twice seen in quite well in TJH

Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps* – one seen well in a flock in LCG on March 30

Chinese Babax *Babax lanceolatus* – two seen well but a little short in ERL, another two seen quite well en route on April 4

White-throated Laughing-thrush *Garrulax albogularis* – 20+ seen on April 9 on the access road to TJH

Plain Laughing-thrush *Garrulax davidi* – good views twice (4 and 2) on April 4 and 5, respectively

Snowy-cheeked Laughing-thrush *Garrulax sukatschewi* – annoyingly uncooperative, in the end I flushed a group of at least five of which one gave half-decent views

Barred Laughing-thrush *Garrulax lunulatus* – another uncooperative species during our trip, and my bins completely fogged within one second when I finally had one curious bird that was out in the open on the walk to WUY. Heard at various sites including TJH and JZG county.

Giant Laughing-thrush *Garrulax maximus* – groups of 5-15 seen well several times in BAL, MBS and Baixi

Hwamei *Garrulax canorus* – one seen quite well in scrub on the access road to TJH, singles seen in TJH on April 10 and 11 (and depressing numbers seen as cage birds)

White-browed Laughing-thrush *Garrulax sannio* – first seen at the airport on March 29, but also at LCG and two in TJH on April 11

Elliot's Laughing-thrush *Garrulax elliotii* – common, heard only in LCG, seen at ERL, BAL, WOL, WUY, Baixi and TJH and regularly en route

[Black-faced Laughing-thrush *Garrulax affinis* – non-tickable flash of one disappearing in the undergrowth at LCG]

Red-winged Laughing-thrush *Garrulax formosus* – one on March 30 in LCG, seen well without bins (at less than 4-5 meters), but unfortunately flew off almost immediately I had it in my bins

Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* – a total of eight in several groups on April 9, 5+ on April 11 in TJH

Green Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus* – at least three on April 29 and two on April 30 in LCG, one in a flock in TJH on April 11

[Streaked Barwing *Actinodura souliei* – had not yet arrived at its stake-out in ERL]

Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis* – regular sightings in LCG on March 29 and 30, two on April 10 and 11 in TJH

Gold-fronted Fulvetta *Alcippe variegaticeps* – short views of one in a flock at LCG on March 29

Chinese Fulvetta *Alcippe striaticollis* – 2+ seen on April 1, 3+ on April 4 and one April 6 in the Baixi area

Spectacled Fulvetta *Alcippe ruficapilla* – good views of several groups en route on April 9, two on April 11 in TJH

Dusky Fulvetta *Alcippe brunnea* – very poor views of this notorious skulker at DUJ on April 12

Grey-hooded Fulvetta *Alcippe cinereiceps* – quite common at LCG, 4+ on April 3 en route, 4+ on April 11 in TJH

David's Fulvetta *Alcippe davidi* – several seen at LCG, but much better views of three in TJH on April 10

White-browed Fulvetta *Fulvetta vinipectus* – one on March 31 and two on April 1

Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis* – four in scrub on the entrance road to TJH

White-collared Yuhina *Yuhina diademata* – 3+ at ERL on March 31 and one in TJH on April 10

Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta* – several in LCG on March 29 and 8+ in TJH on April 10

Great Parrotbill *Conostoma aemodium* – two probably three on April 9 in Wujiao Nature Reserve bordering Wanglang nature reserve

[Three-toed/Brown Parrotbill/Spot-breasted/Fulvous Parrotbill – tried to call these in at various places, but no luck]

Vinous-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis webbiana* – two at the airport on March 29, 1 on April 9 en route, in TJH: 5+ on April 10, 3+ on April 11, and a nest-building pair on April 12, a group of at least 8 on April 12 in DUJ

Ashy-throated Parrotbill *Sinosuthora alphonsiana* – 5+ seen in LCG and ERL on March 30 and 31, respectively

Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus* – about 3-4 in the park in Pingwu, 5+ on the walk in TJH on April 11

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* – seen in LCG, ERL, Baixi and BAL area and en route on April 8

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* – 2-3 seen at LCG and ERL, one en route on April 9
 Chestnut-vented Nuthatch *Sitta nagaensis* – two in LCG on March 29, two at ERL on March 31, one on April 3 at WOL (Wuyipeng), one in TJH on April 11
 Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* – one seen at close range on April 4 en route in the MBS area
 Hodgson's Treecreeper *Certhia hodgsoni* – one on March 31 on the dry side of ERL, two on April 6 in the Baixi area
 Sichuan Treecreeper *Certhia tianquanensis* – two on March 31 on the dry side of ERL, 3+ on April 3 at WOL (Wuyipeng)
 Crested Myna *Acridotheres cristatellus* – several seen along motorways on March 29 and April 12
 White-cheeked Starling *Sturnus cineraceus* – two sightings on April 5, of which one seen well in the Pallas Cat area.
 European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* – a group of at least eight near Hongyuan. Rare/vagrant in the region!
 [Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* – heard only in TJH]
 Chinese (Eurasian) Blackbird *Turdus (merula) mandarinus* – one on March 29 at a site near the airport, one en route on April 9, one only seen by Roland on April 11
 Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus* – two at ERL on March 31, seen in good numbers on April 4, 6 and 9.
 Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* – daily at BAL (up to 50+), the plateau and the Baixi area, also regular sightings en route on April 9
 Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* – small groups on April 4, 5 and 7
 Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis* – two on April 5 and one on April 7, always together with the above species
 Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophris* – one seen for a second in TJH on April 11 on the walk to Motianling Mountain pass
 Himalayan Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus* – fairly common in mountainous areas, seen on April 1, 2, 3-5, 6 and 9
 Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis* – one in the village near the entrance of TJH
 Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* – fairly common on the plateau, in particular in the area around Hongyuan, and in the Baixi area, seen on April 4-8.
 Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni* – a female in DUJ along the main river on April 12
 White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps* – fairly common in mountainous areas, seen on April 1 near Rilong, and on April 4, 6, 8, and 9
 Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureoreus* – fairly common in valleys of mountainous areas, but usually lower than the other redstarts, also one at the airport on March 29
 Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* – fairly common in mountainous areas, seen in LCG, BAL, TJH, WOL, Baixi and Tujanshan among other places
 Plumbeous Water Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosa* – common in TJH, a pair in WOL village, occasionally seen en route
 White-capped Water Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* – one in WOL village, occasionally seen en route, 2-4 daily in TJH
 Grandala *Grandala coelicolor* – only frustrating and rather distant flight views at BAL on April 1 (>100) and April 3 (4)
 Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri* – one on April 11 and two on April 12 in TJH
 White-crowned Forktail *Enicurus leschenaulti* – one on April 11
 Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* – 5+ on April 4, one on April 5
 Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferreus* – singles seen well in LCG and ERL on March 30 and 31, respectively, one in TJH on April 11 migrating over the pass on the walk, one in forest near DUJ on April 12
 Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* – one in a city park in Pingwu

Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophhiata* – decent views of a male in LCH on March 30 and excellent views of another male in TJH on April 11



Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher



White-browed Snowfinch

Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* – common in TJH, several in the park in Pingwu, heard in LCG

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* – a total of three in the MBS area on April 4

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* – one along the river in Jiuzhaigou city, common in TJH (up to 15 daily)

Mrs. Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae* – two males on the walk to Wuyipeng in WOL, 5+ (4 males) in flocks en route on April 9, two males in TJH on April 10, a female in TJH on April 11

Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans* – a male in the village near the entrance of TJH

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* – quite common around cities on the Tibetan Plateau

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia* – one largish group north of Hongyuan on April 5

White-rumped Snowfinch *Onychostruthus taczanowskii* – fairly common on the plateau, in particular in the ZOI/PAL area, 100+ seen on April 5 and 7

Rufous-necked Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda rufi collis* – fairly common on the plateau, in particular in the ZOI/PAL area, 100+ seen on April 5 and 7

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* – common on BAL

Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides* – one en route to Hongyuan on April 4

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophhiata* – one at ERL on March 31, several in the BAL/WOL area, three en route to Hongyuan on April 4, singles on April 8 and 10.

Maroon-backed Accentor *Prunella immaculata* – three on ERL on March 31

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* – fairly common, seen in LCG on March 29/30, April 3,4,9-12

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* – common, seen on most days

[Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* – one on April 7 we saw a rather non-descript looking pipit, which may have been this species, definitely not a water pipit]

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* – regular sightings on the Tibetan plateau, also seen on the hotel grounds at TJH

Tibetan Siskin *Serinus thibetanus* – several groups seen flight while migrating over the pass at Motianling in TJH on April 11

[Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica* – heard only]

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* – a group of at least 50 on April 5, can be difficult to distinguish from the female rosefinches of the smaller species (e.g., Beautiful and Pink-rumped) in poor light

Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola* – quite common on BAL, several sightings on the Tibetan plateau

[Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti* – non-tickable flight views for me in the PAL area]

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* – a male en route to LCG on March 29, a pair seen well on April 8 on the entrance road to Baihe Nature Reserve

Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus pulcherrimus* – 5+ seen on April 1 and 2 in the BAL area and 3+ on April 4 in the MBS area

Pink-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus eos* – seen April 1–3 in the BAL area and on April 4 in the MBS area

Three-banded Rosefinch *Carpodacus trifasciatus* – a male on April 4 in the MBS area

White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus thura* – fairly common to common in mountainous areas (seen in BAL, MBS, Baixi and en route on April 8 and 9)

Streaked Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilloides* – a male on April 1 and a pair on April 2 in BAL, a female on April 8 en route

Red-fronted Rosefinch *Carpodacus puniceus* – 10+ right on the pass at BAL on April 3

[Collared Grosbeak *Mycerobas affinis* – heard only on April 11 at Motianling pass]

White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes* – a female on April 3, a male and female on April 4, males en route on April 8 and 9

Slaty Bunting *Latoucheornis siemsseni* – several males in LCG on March 29/30, one male in ERL on March 31, several en route in flocks on April 9, and a few in TJH on April 10, a pair was seen on April 12 in TJH

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* – several groups of 10-20 birds on the plateau on April 5

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* – one near Chengdu airport on April 29

Yellow-throated Bunting *Emberiza elegans* – seen remarkably often, first sighting at our homestay in the LCG area on March 30, more than 10 on March 31 on the dry side (after the tunnel) in ERL, regular sightings en route on April 9 on our way to TJH, one on April 12

Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii* – regular sightings between April 1 and 8, first at BAL, last near Jiuzhaigou, regular encounters on the plateau and in the Baixi area

[Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* – seen twice en route on April 8 but not convincing enough to tick]



Little Forktail