

Yunnan 13. February – 26 February 2012 and 11 species

Key species: Western Black-crested Gibbon, Eastern Hoolock Gibbon, Payne's Langur and Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey.

We did not know quite what to expect going to China for the first time having read some more or less successful mammal watching trips. Our usual motto 'hoping for everything, expect nothing' was never truer than this time.

We arranged this trip with Xianlian and Ben Han, father and son - lianxian.han@gmail.com. The trip was flawlessly executed and with some brilliant wildlife and very good food. Without them, we doubt this trip would have been as successful with so many species as we saw. We would go with them again, and are already planning to do so.

Our first stop was Wuliangshan NR, supposedly the best place to see the **Western Black-crested Gibbons**. From Kunming it takes some 13 hours by car and you need a 4*4 as the last short bit is very steep and rough. We stayed the first night in Jingdong, where we also got the permits for the reserve. The 13 hours excludes market days, and we were unlucky enough getting stuck in two, which added a couple of hours of fun. We did not see much on the way but one **Red-cheeked Squirrel** crossing the road some kilometers before the park entrance where we stopped to get our first photos of a daunting-looking monkey hunting site if there ever was one. We could almost feel our muscles aching already. The terraced hills are very steep with some remnants of forest on the top.



We arrived early afternoon and enjoyed our first tour shortly thereafter. The sun was shining and it was good to get out of the car. We did not see much but some domesticated goats. One of the species we really wanted to see was Payne's Langur, but rangers told Xianlian that they had not been seen for a while and that they probably were on the other side of the mountain. We should have a better chance seeing our second key species, the **Western Black-crested Gibbons**. A family of 6 Western Black-crested Gibbons was usually to be seen behind the office after 8 am, so we had to patience ourselves.

The first night walk produced two non-flying **Indian Flying Squirrel** and 2 mice, running on branches high above. We could not identify them. On the second night we saw another Indian Flying Squirrel, this time flying.

After a fast coffee we went to the platform where they even had a scope, and stood there freezing from 8 to 10, when the first rays of the sun managed to climb over the ridge. The Gibbons clearly enjoyed them as much as we did. The whole family of six played happily in the trees high up on the slope maybe 100m away but with the scope we got a clear view and enjoyed them for an hour or so, but too far away to get any usable photos. Sometimes they do come down closer to the trail but no such luck today.



On the second morning we only heard one Gibbon, so we decided to leave, as it was unlikely that they would come closer during the next few days and we had more things we wanted to see and the distances are huge.

At the time we were there they were building some new standard rooms as the old rooms were rough, to say the least with some wafer-thin mattresses, even for Chinese standards. Close to the rangers station they are planting trees to attract gibbons to increase the chances that you get a close-up encounter.

Gaoligongshan National Reserve, another of the many high altitude reserves, was our next stop some 15 hours away. We divided the trip into 2 days, 10 hours to Dali (without a market day) and another 5 hours from Dali. As usual, permits had to be organized from the wildlife management bureau in advance, this time in Baoshan. The director of the reserve turned out to be an old student of Xianlian's, and after the usual tee, we were invited to a very nice restaurant and maybe had the nicest food of the whole trip, and the whole office accompanied us.

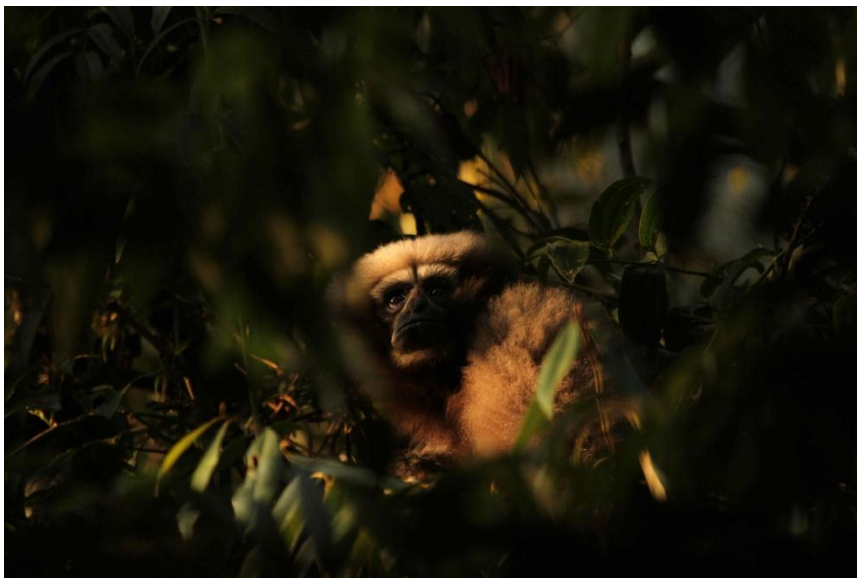
Gaoligongshan NR is supposed to be a prime spot for the **Eastern Hoolock Gibbon**, and we cannot believe that it gets much better than this. We arrived late afternoon and took a walk on the legendary Silk Road, before unpacking, on a Rhododendron strewn path leading to Shangri La, a later stop on our journey. The path is conveniently just behind the hut so we had quite a few walks there. The first day did not produce much.



On the second day, after breakfast we went with 5 rangers some 15 kilometers down the road as the rangers had spotted a group of **Payne's Langurs** there the day before. It was as usual quite cold but at least the very steep paths have one advantage, you get warm fast. It only took us some 30min to find the group but they turned out to be quite un-cooperative and did not stay long for and photos and did not let us get up too close, but according to the rangers, this group was the most cooperative of all groups around. Researchers have been following this group for a while so they are slowly getting used to our presence. They did however give us a run for the money and we followed them as well as we could, often making the paths as we walked, destroying one shirt in the effort and getting stuck with one ear in a spine. A few exhausting hours later we had seen them a number of times, although we still hadn't get any good photo of them but were nevertheless quite happy.

After lunch Xianlian wanted to look for the Gibbons. An odd time looking for Gibbons we thought but we were all game. It turned out that two of the rangers who had left us earlier this morning went looking for them. A few days earlier the director had called to the managers and told them that we were coming and what we wanted to see. If the morning walk was hard it was a walk in the park compared in comparison. The bush was very thick and we ran up and down the hills not being quite sure where the other two rangers were. After some yelling and a lot of sweating we found them. When we found the family of three we were quite tired. To find position to see them well was not very easy but after a while the family of three very obligingly left with us on following as well as we could. After a short while we found them again high up in a lonely tree feeding. Finally an advantage with these sugar loaf narrow hills. We just climbed up on the next one and got a clear view and spent the rest of the afternoon with them.

The next morning we were not sure which species to follow, but decided to go for the Gibbons. A very good call. We found them close to the place we left them yesterday and the light was superb. We have always wanted to see Gibbons swinging in front of our cameras in perfect light, and today we got just that.



The afternoon took us to another part of the park where we found one **Anderson's Squirrel**, two **Giant Black Squirrels** hunting each other and also heard a group of Macaques. They were not that far away but no path led in that direction and it was just too steep.

On the second night we first went back close to where we had seen the Gibbons and walked for an hour and saw one **Red Giant Flying Squirrel**. Back in the camp we walked 3 hours behind the hut by ourselves and spotted one **Spotted Giant Flying Squirrel** very high up in a tree.

The next day we left very early as we had a 15 hours car ride to the Baima Snow-Mountain NR in front of us, passing the giant rivers of Yangzi and Mekong. The snowcapped peaks of the reserve, the highest in Yunnan, reach over 5,600m above sea level. This is the place for **Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkeys** with their characteristically black and white shaggy coat and with deep thick pink lips, looking like a failed Hollywood plastic surgery.. Our basis was in the small Tibetan village Tacheng, some 7km from the reserve. The last time Xianlian was here, the fed habituated monkeys only came down for some 30 minutes or so before retreating up into the alpine coniferous forest again, so on the first morning we were quite nervous and insisted skipping breakfast as we did not want to risk anything. We thought we could eat coming back early morning. We never came back early morning and we were clearly over the top. This time they were higher up. It was snowing and after walking up a very steep muddy slope we came to a clearing where we waited for them. Around 9 we saw the

first individuals first climbing in the trees then coming down to the ground. It was very nice to be above them having they climbing up towards us. We spent the next 2 days with them from early morning to their bed time, about 18 - 18:15. The troop was about 50 strong and in all age groups with the youngest only 2 days old. There is a ranger station at an altitude of 2800m and the rangers can tell you were the monkeys are. There are many more snubbies higher up in the mountains, but this section is restricted.





Young master Yoda



practicing Kung Fu.



The last couple of days we went to some cultural sites in Shangri La and in Lijiang with the Buddhist Gedan Songzanlin Gompa being the most spectacular of them.



Xianlian suggested we should make one last try for mammals. In Xia Geza, a forested area about 50km from Shangri La, he had seen a Red Panda and a Yellow-throated Marten last time he made a survey and as a panda happened to be just what we wanted to see, and we would not mind to see a

martin either, we went. We walked on a bad dirt road for a few hours. We never saw a Panda, but we spotted our last mammal on this trip, apart for some domesticated Yaks, one **Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel**.

Until next time

Carmen and Torbjörn Lundqvist