



CHINA, SICHUAN: CUSTOM TRIP REPORT

JUNE - JULY 2018

By Andy Walker



Rufous-necked Snowfinch in early-summer flowers on the Tibetan Plateau.

Overview

This 19-day custom China tour visited the province of Sichuan and commenced in Chengdu on the 23th of June 2018 and concluded back there on the 11th of July 2018. The focus of the tour was trying to photograph the species found in the province.

After leaving Chengdu we started our birding in the high mountains of the Balangshan area (between approximately 3,500-4,500m), before dropping lower to Labahe where we birded at around 2,500m. After our stop in Labahe we continued to the city of Luding to go birding between 2,000-3,500m at Earlangshan. Our next location, Longcanggou is a really beautiful forest and we concentrated our efforts in the zone between 1,200-2,000m. We made a brief afternoon visit to some rice paddies near Jiangyou before continuing to the picturesque Tangjiahe area (1,500m). Following an unexpected diversion due to some flooding we reached Gonggangling Forest where we spent time in the mountains at around 3,500m. After a long drive we found ourselves in a very different environment, that of the very impressive Tibetan Plateau. This area may be part of China, but it is quite clearly Tibet and it was great fun birding around Ruergai. The plateau is at around 3,500m with hundreds of peaks bursting out from the vast plains. Really beautiful scenery here, and some fantastic birding, probably some of the most enjoyable of the tour. The final stop of our tour saw us heading back into the high mountains (c4,000m) at Mengbisha before returning to Chengdu where the tour concluded.

A total of 218 bird species were seen (plus eight species heard only), along with several other animals, including **Himalayan Marmot**, **Tibetan Macaque**, **Yellow-throated Marten**, **Plateau Pika**, **Tibetan Fox**, and **Chinese Goral**. Species lists are at the end of this report.

Some of the highlight birds included: **Snow Partridge**, **Verreaux's Monal-Partridge**, **Tibetan Snowcock**, **Blood Koklass**, and **Lady Amherst's Pheasants**, **Himalayan Vulture**, **Upland Buzzard**, **Chinese Sparrowhawk**, **Black-necked Crane**, **Snow Pigeon**, **Salim Ali's Swift**, **Saker Falcon**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, **Red-billed Blue Magpie**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Alpine and Red-billed Choughs**, **Daurian Jackdaw**, **Collared Crow**, **White-browed Tit**, **Ground Tit**, **Tibetan Lark**, **Alpine Leaf Warbler**, **Sichuan Leaf Warbler**, **Sichuan Bush Warbler**, **Chinese Babax**, **Giant Plain**, and **Elliot's Laughingthrushes**, **Emei Shan Liocichla**, **Golden-breasted David's**, and **Chinese Fulvettas**, **Rufous-tailed Babbler**, **Vinous-throated**, **Ashy-throated**, and **Golden Parrotbills**, **Grandala**, **Kessler's Thrush**, **Grey-winged Blackbird**, **Zappey's Flycatcher**, **Indian Blue Robin**, **Chinese Rubythroat**, **Firethroat**, **Himalayan Bluetail**, **Little and White-crowned Forktails**, **White-throated Daurian**, **White-capped**, and **Blue-fronted Redstarts**, **White-throated and Brown Dippers**, **Russet and Rock Sparrows**, **Tibetan White-rumped**, and **Rufous-necked Snowfinches**, **Alpine and Rufous-breasted Accentors**, **Przevalski's Finch**, **Grey-headed and Brown Bullfinches**, **Dark-breasted Streaked**, **Chinese Beautiful**, **Pink-rumped**, **Dark-rumped**, **Sharpe's**, **Vinaceous**, **Chinese White-browed**, and **Red-fronted Rosefinches**, **Grey-capped** and **Black-headed Greenfinches**, **Red Crossbill**, and **Slaty and Yellow-throated Buntings**.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 23rd June 2018. Chengdu, travel to Wolong, late afternoon birding at Balangshan

We met our local guide, Summer, and excellent driver, Mr. Liu, in Chengdu after breakfast and immediately started our journey northwest into the rather impressive mountains at Wolong. A bathroom break along the way produced our first birds of the trip, which included **Japanese Tit**, **Red-billed Leiothrix**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Collared Finchbill**, and **Grey-capped Greenfinch**.

After our first of many traditional local Chinese lunches we checked into our hotel and spent a couple of hours birding some higher elevation areas before dropping back down to help with our acclimatization. On our way up the mountain we got some wonderful eye-level looks at a small party of **Himalayan Vultures** cruising through the valley. As we walked around a few choice spots we found the stunning male **Firethroat**, **Sharpe's Rosefinch**, **Himalayan Bluetail**, **White-capped Redstart**, **Blue-fronted Redstart**, and nesting **Asian House Martin**, along with **Bianchi's**, **Buff-barred**, **Claudia's Leaf**, and **Greenish Warblers**. Other interesting birds included **Snow Pigeon**, **Chestnut Thrush**, **Plumbeous Water Redstart**, **Vinaceous** and **Common Rosefinches**, and the rather elegant **White-collared Yuhina**.



Sharpe's Rosefinch was a great find on our first proper birding session of the tour.

Day 2, 24th June 2018. Balangshan

We set off from our hotel in darkness with the aim of being back at yesterday's min-mountain birdwatching spot around dawn, which we were. The only problem was that the area was covered in low clouds with some accompanying drizzle. Unfortunately the low clouds and the drizzle turning into light rain would hamper us throughout most of the day, with poor visibility making things difficult. We spent time at a couple of different elevation zones during the day (around

3,500m and 4,500m), and despite the weather situation we still came away seeing some great birds. Highlights were **Snow Partridge** and **Snow Pigeons**, the latter giving some excellent views as they bathed and preened near a river. **Chinese Rubythroat** (a result of a recent spilt of the Himalayan/White-tailed Rubythroat complex) eventually showed well, with two males singing from bush tops and a female spotted running around on the ground in the area too.



*A male **Chinese Rubythroat** having a face-off with another nearby male.*

We did really well for rosefinches, and over the course of the day found **Dark-breasted**, **Streaked**, **Pink-rumped**, **Chinese White-browed**, **Red-fronted**, and **Common Rosefinches**, some very pretty birds there. Also very pretty were the male **Blue-fronted Redstarts** seen (along with the abundant **White-capped Redstarts** and **Plumbeous Water Redstarts**). **Plain Mountain Finches** were quite numerous here, as were **Alpine Accentors**. A lone **Rufous-breasted Accentor** was also noted, as was a pair of **Grey-headed Bullfinch**. **Rosy Pipits** were rather plentiful higher up, and a couple of **Common Cuckoos** were found, presumably looking for pipit nests. A welcome splash of color in one gloomy mountain area around lunchtime was provided by a **Eurasian Hoopoe**, our only sighting of the whole tour in a rather unlikely spot!

As we came off the mountain we came across a flock of **Salim Ali's Swifts** and at least one **White-throated Needletail**, and a **White-throated Dipper** was found in a section of whitewater rapids. Back at our hotel a pair of **Red-billed Blue Magpies** were vocalizing, and **Collared Finchbill** and **Blue Whistling Thrush** were in the vegetable garden, with an impressive flock of nearly one hundred **Asian House Martins** overhead (along with more **Salim Ali's Swifts**). So, despite the poor weather, some great birds!

Day 3, 25th June 2018. Balangshan

We followed the previous day's routine in the morning and headed to the Balangshan Pass. It was again cloudy but generally drier, and we had several breaks in the clouds to enable us to find some of our target birds. Top of the list were **Tibetan Snowcock** and **Grandala** that we saw during such breaks in the weather. We again saw a lot of the birds seen the previous day, improving our views of **White-throated Redstart** (a stunning male) and **Dark-breasted** and **Red-fronted Rosefinches**. New additions included **Red-billed Chough**, several **Kessler's Thrushes** (including a family group with recent fledglings), **Koklass Pheasant**, **Himalayan Buzzard**, **Hill Pigeon**, **Eurasian Wren**, **Two-barred Warbler**, and **Olive-backed Pipit**. We also found **Himalayan Marmot**, **Chinese Goral**, and many **Domestic Yaks**.

After a break back at our hotel we took a short walk up a small hill through some agricultural land, where we found some interesting birds and had some great views of most. Highlights over a couple of hours before the rain came down included numerous singing **Chestnut Thrushes**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Long-tailed Minivet**, **Green-backed Tit**, **Collared Finchbill**, **Elliot's Laughingthrush**, **White-collared Yuhina**, **Verditer Flycatcher**, **Grey Bush Chat**, and **Mrs. Gould's Sunbird**. However, the best birds were probably the group of nearly a dozen **Red Crossbills**, a surprise male **Grey-winged Blackbird**, and a gorgeous male **Daurian Redstart**.



Dark-breasted Rosefinch showed well on its favorite bush (phone-scoped with iPhone 7 and Swarovski ATX-95)

Day 4, 26th June 2018. Wolong to Labahe

This was essentially a travel day as we moved southwest from Wolong to Labahe. Our already-long travel day was compounded by a landslide that had us waiting for five hours while it was being cleared up. Luckily we had access to toilets, restaurants, and a few birds to pass some time,

with breeding behavior noted in **Blue Rock Thrush**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Light-vented** (Chinese) **Bulbul**, **Green-backed Tit**, **White Wagtail**, and **Eurasian Tree Sparrow**. All were either building nests, feeding nestlings, or had recently-fledged young. While waiting for the road to reopen we also found **Black Bulbul**, **Collared Finchbill**, **White-browed Laughingthrush**, and **Red-rumped Swallow**.

As we finally continued our journey we drove through plenty of tea plantations and noted several widespread Asian species such as **Crested Myna**, **Spotted Dove**, and **Eastern Cattle Egret**.

After a nice dinner we continued our very long day, eventually arriving at our truly comfortable hotel in the evening, much later than expected due to the unforeseen landslide slowing our progress considerably.

Day 5, 27th June 2018. Labahe

After a long day of travel the previous day it was nice to be back out birding, and the weather generally behaved too, until right at the end of the day. Our morning birding produced several waves of excitement as we found a number of new species for the tour or improved on sightings and photographs of others. A small flock of the very large **White-throated Needletails** were flying low over the lake in front of our hotel, dwarfing the tiny **Asian House Martins** that were doing likewise. Driving along the road to our hiking spot we first found a flock of approximately thirty **Speckled Wood Pigeons** and then a female **Lady Amherst's Pheasant** sitting low in a tree, and a short while later we found a male too – rather nice birds indeed!

After an uphill hike into a forest we could hear one of our target birds, but unfortunately the **Temminck's Tragopan** remained hidden deep in the undergrowth. Here, however, we did find **Stripe-throated Yuhina**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Aberrant Bush Warbler**, **Sichuan Leaf Warbler**, many **Claudia's Leaf Warblers**, and a couple of **Coal Tits**. After a while we moved to some different areas and found other interesting birds, such as **Bianchi's Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied**, **Green-backed**, and **Yellow-browed Tits**, **Large-billed Leaf Warbler**, **Ashy-throated Warbler**, **Vinaceous Rosefinch**, **Grey-hooded Fulvetta**, **Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher**, **White-collared Yuhina**, and **Red-billed Leiothrix**. Most exciting, though, was probably the views we had of half a dozen **Red-billed Blue Magpies** and nearly a dozen **Spotted Nutcrackers** foraging in the same area.

The afternoon birding session near our accommodation was cut short by some pretty heavy rain, but we saw a few of the species mentioned before (**Plumbeous Water Redstart**, **White-capped Redstart**, **Long-tailed Minivet**, and **Grey Wagtail**). An **Indian Blue Robin** was calling but would not break cover, being seen only briefly. We did also enjoy watching a couple of troops of **Tibetan Macaques** roving around the hotel complex and creating their usual mischief.

Day 6, 28th June 2018. Labahe to Luding via Erlangshan

We again awoke to light rain, but it was clear looking at (and hearing) the river that was roaring and a lot higher than on the previous day; there must have been an awful lot of rain overnight. Luckily there were no major landslides, but some very impressive waterfalls were pouring off the mountainsides. We headed out to the same area as on the previous morning and saw a lot of the same birds, including lots of *Phylloscopus* warblers such as **Sichuan Leaf Warbler**, **Large-billed Leaf Warbler**, **Ashy-throated Warbler**, **Buff-barred Warbler**, **Claudia's Leaf Warbler**, and **Greenish Warbler**. A female **Lady Amherst's Pheasant** with four young chicks was nice to see here too. We also had a couple of different birds to the previous day, such as very good views of **Pygmy Wren-babbler**, brief views of a pair of **Fujian Niltavas**, prolonged views of **Grey-headed**

Woodpecker, and also some close-range **Spotted Nutcrackers** to improve on the already good views we'd had previously.



Pygmy Wren-babbler gave us some very close views as it sang from a tree stump.

In the late-morning we started our journey to Luding, our base for the next couple of nights. Along the way we found **Hair-crested Drongo**, **Red-billed Blue Magpie**, **Kloss's Leaf Warbler**, **Marten's Warbler**, **Japanese White-eye**, and best of all a **Little Forktail** that was making the most of some roadworks and was actually foraging along the highway!

Day 7, 29th June 2018. Erlangshan

We had a really enjoyable day birding at Erlangshan, and the weather cooperated too, which was a definite bonus. As we drove up the mountain we found a small flock of **Eurasian Magpies**, **Grey-backed Shrike**, and best of all a flock of twenty **Black-headed Greenfinches** feeding in wildflower seeds. **Brown-breasted Bulbuls** were present, as were a couple of female **Lady Amherst's Pheasants** with babies. One stop gave us brief glimpses at a male **Firethroat**, a female **Slaty-blue Flycatcher**, **Japanese Tit**, and the local specialty **Rufous-tailed Babbler**, which showed well.

As we continued up the mountain a few stops along the way yielded many birds. One of the best stops again involved a male **Firethroat**, but also gave us prolonged views of **White-browed Fulvetta**, **Grey-crowned Warbler**, **White-crowned Yuhina**, **Yellow-bellied Tit**, and some simply incredible views of almost a dozen **Red Crossbills** that were feeding a mere six feet in front of us at eye-level! Just as spectacular were the two **Yellow-throated Buntings** seen along the road.



*The secretive **Firethroat** was intent on staying deep in cover, but it was amazing to see nonetheless – that throat color is shocking!*

Higher still, and we found a **Red Turtle Dove** feeding in the road and, once we had gained some elevation, **Chestnut Thrushes** and **Spotted Nutcrackers** were quite abundant, as were **Olive-backed Pipits**.

Now much nearer to the top of the mountain we spent time trying to photograph the many small passerines around, which was not always easy, but we had **Mrs. Gould's Sunbird** (which must be one of the best-looking sunbirds in the world), **Sharpe's**, **Vinaceous**, and **Dark-rumped Rosefinches**, **Sichuan Leaf Warbler**, **Claudia's Leaf Warbler**, **Buff-barred Warbler**, **Greenish Warbler**, **Bianchi's Warbler**, and **Grey-hooded Fulvetta**. A large female **Peregrine Falcon** cruised overhead and across the nearby valley before drifting out of sight.

Both **Common** and **Lesser Cuckoos** were recorded, with **Chestnut Thrushes** seemingly particularly alarmed by their presence. Two small groups of **Chinese Babax** and **Elliot's Laughingthrushes** were also seen as we dropped down off the top of the mountain to start our journey back to our hotel in Luding in order to spend a couple of hours relaxing before dinner. We picked up a few different birds on the way down, such as **Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler** and **Crested Honey Buzzard**.

Day 8, 30th June 2018. Luding to Longcanggou

This was again essentially a travel day as we moved between Luding and Longcanggou. After arriving in Longcanggou in the mid-afternoon we took a brief walk near our accommodation, finding a pair of **Ashy-throated Parrotbills**, a pair of **Brown Bullfinches**, and several **Brown-flanked Bush Warblers**. We also saw **Common Cuckoo**, **Large Hawk-Cuckoo**, several **Light-**

vented and **Black Bulbuls** (the latter of the white-headed morph), many **Grey-headed Greenfinches**, and a lone **Verditer Flycatcher**.

Day 9, 1st July 2018. Longcanggou

We spent the morning birding at the low and middle elevations of Longcanggou and had an enjoyable few hours, with excellent weather thrown in too. As we drove up the mountain we had very brief views of **Chinese Bamboo Partridge**, **Lady Amherst's Pheasant** (another female with babies), and **Temminck's Tragopan**, but unfortunately none were seen by all, though we saw more cooperative **White-browed Laughingthrushes** and **Red-billed Blue Magpies**.

After breakfast on the mountain we spent some time getting looks at the rather tricky, secretive, and restricted-range **Emei Shan Liocichla**. A **Pygmy Wren-babbler** was keeping to the dense understory vegetation, but then we got some good views of the very secretive and only recently described (2015) **Sichuan Bush Warbler**, this bird appearing invisible at times as it moved between bushes on the ground like a mouse!



*We had prolonged views of a rapidly moving flock of almost a dozen **Golden Parrotbills**.*

A short while later we were enjoying a lot of mixed-species activity in the form of **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Long-tailed Minivet**, **Slaty Bunting**, **Chestnut-crowned Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied, Green-backed**, and **Yellow-browed Tits**, **Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker**, and **Mrs. Gould's Sunbird**, with **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** and **Himalayan Swiftlet** overhead.

As we walked down the mountain access road over the course of the morning we saw most of the above-mentioned species again but also found several others, such as **White-crowned Forktail**, **Red-billed Leiothrix**, **Grey-headed Canary-Flycatcher**, **Blue-winged Minla**, **Red-tailed Minla**, **David's Fulvetta**, and **Rufous-capped Babbler**. We also had great looks at several

Kloss's Warblers (along with many **Claudia's Leaf Warblers** and **Large-billed Leaf Warblers**), a small flock of **Golden Parrotbills**, and the gorgeous **Golden-breasted Fulvetta**. **Red-winged** and **Buffy Laughingthrushes** as well as **Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler** were all heard but kept well hidden in the densely-vegetated undergrowth.

As the heat of the middle of the day picked up and the activity dropped off we decided to head back to our accommodation for a break, after which we had a walk around it, finding a flock of twenty **Brown Bullfinches**, several **David's Fulvettas**, **Black Bulbul**, **Grey-crowned Greenfinch**, **White-throated Needletail**, **Brown** and **Long-tailed Shrikes**, **Brown-flanked Bush Warbler**, **Grey Bush Chat**, and **White-browed Laughingthrush**.

Day 10, 2nd July 2018. Longcanggou to Jiangyou

This was another travel day as we drove north from Longcanggou back around Chengdu (through some tremendous thunderstorms and torrential rain) and continued on to Jiangyou, where we arrived mid-afternoon.

After a short break at our luxurious hotel we ventured out into some rice paddies on the edge of town, where during a brief visit we found several **Red-billed Starlings**, a flock of **Chinese Blackbirds** (including several young birds), and a few other new trip birds, such as **Black Drongo**, **Oriental Magpie-Robin**, **Plain Prinia**, **Chinese Pond Heron** (looking rather sharp in breeding plumage), **Eastern Cattle Egret**, and **Little Egret**. We then returned to our accommodation and enjoyed a wonderful buffet dinner.

Day 11, 3rd July 2018. Jiangyou to Tangjiahe Natural Nature Reserve

We spent the morning driving between Jiangyou and Tangjiahe, arriving at our accommodation in time for lunch. Most of the journey was through rain, so little was observed along the way. But we did have a good look at a pair of **Brown-breasted Bulbuls** and **Collared Finchbills**, several **Japanese White-eyes**, and singing and showing **Brown-flanked Bush Warbler** at the park entrance checkpoint, with numerous **Plumbeous Water Redstarts** along the many kilometers along rivers we drove through the morning. Several **Daurian Redstarts** were noted in the villages we passed through, with plenty of **Red-rumped Swallows** present too.

After lunch we took a walk along the river near our accommodation for a couple of kilometers. It was generally quiet, despite the much better weather, but we did find **Chinese Sparrowhawk**, **Black-chinned Yuhina**, **Brown Dipper**, a pair of **White-crowned Forktails** (actually quite showy for forktails), **Mountain Bulbul**, **Kloss's Leaf Warbler**, **Green-backed Tit**, **Common Swift**, and **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (along with dozens more **Plumbeous Water Redstarts**).

Day 12, 4th July 2018. Tangjiahe

After breakfast we headed out for a walk around our hotel grounds, where we found a roving flock of **Red-billed Blue Magpies**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Plumbeous Water Redstart**, **White Wagtail**, **Grey Wagtail**, and **Green-backed Tit** – all the usual suspects.



*The often-secretive **White-crowned Forktail** gave some good views along the river.*



*We enjoyed prolonged views of this **Crested Kingfisher** along the river too.*

As we headed further afield we found a bit of a mixed-flock that included **Yellow-bellied Tit**, **Sulphur-breasted Warbler**, **Ashy-throated Warbler**, **Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher**, **Black-chinned Yuhina**, **Mrs. Gould's Sunbird**, **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker**, **Chestnut-flanked White-eye**, and **Mountain Bulbul**, but best of all was a **Zappey's Flycatcher** that hung around for a while. Walking a little further we saw more **Red-billed Blue Magpies**, **Large-billed Crow**, several **Eurasian Jays**, and a pair of **Great Barbets**.

We dropped a bit lower down the river and found **Red-billed Leiothrix**, **David's Fulvetta**, **Alström's Warbler**, **Kloss's Leaf Warbler**, and **Japanese White-eye**. Here we also had excellent, prolonged views of the often shy and secretive **Crested Kingfisher** and a couple of **Brown Dippers** – great fun watching the dippers feeding underwater!

During the afternoon we took a walk along a smaller river valley and spent some time with a mixed flock of birds that were mobbing a **Yellow-throated Marten**. Birds present included **Streak-throated Scimitar Babbler**, **David's Fulvetta**, **Black-throated Bushtit**, **Rufous-faced Warbler**, **Sulphur-breasted Warbler**, **Black-chinned Yuhina**, **Asian Koel**, **Yellow-bellied Tit**, and **Collared Finchbill**.

Day 13, 5th July 2018. Tangjiahe to Jiuzhaigou

It turned out to be a lengthy travel day as we left Tangjiahe, initially heading to our scheduled destination of Chuanzhusi. However, after a road closure over half way through our journey through a valley (with one road) we had to subsequently backtrack our route for several hours. This could have been avoided had the police not being asleep at their post to tell us about the road closure, extremely frustrating for us all. We rapidly made alternative plans for the night and we stopped in the town of Jiuzhaigou, which was actually a really nice hotel, just a shame our time there was so brief.

Earlier in the day we had seen **Vinous-throated Parrotbill** at a roadside stop along with **Russet Sparrow**, **Brown-breasted Bulbul**, and **Hair-crested Drongo**, as well as several other more common and widespread species, such as **Collared Finchbill**, **Daurian Redstart**, and **Japanese White-eye**. The only plus side to the road diversion was finding a small flock of **Collared Crows** along a river. We arrived at our new hotel much later than anticipated and headed straight to bed, very tired after an unexpectedly long day.

Day 14, 6th July 2018. Jiuzhaigou to Gonggangling Forest to Ruorgai

We were back in our van early in the morning to head to Gonggangling Forest. On arrival at a high point we were greeted to a veil of clouds, but luckily it wasn't too thick and gradually lifted during the morning. We found a bit of activity and got glimpses of the secretive **White-bellied Redstart**, **Chinese Thrush**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Buff-barred Warbler**, **Sichuan Leaf Warbler**, **White-throated Redstart**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Chestnut Thrush**, **Kessler's Thrush**, **Elliot's Laughingthrush**, and **Grey-backed Shrike**.

As we walked down the road a **Lesser Cuckoo** flew in and showed briefly, and we had further views of some very confiding **Buff-barred Warblers**. A nearby flock held **Grey Crested Tit**, **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Goldcrest**, **Slaty-backed Flycatcher**, **Dark-sided Flycatcher**, and **Grey-headed Bullfinch**, among others. We also had some excellent views of a very confiding male **Chinese White-browed Rosefinch** that gave prolonged views.

Around lunchtime we headed off the mountain and down into town for lunch. Afterwards we continued our journey, mainly on the Tibetan Plateau, and really enjoyed the change of scenery

and traditional homesteads and villages. We picked up a few birds along the way, such as **Himalayan Vulture**, **Northern Raven**, **Black (Black-eared) Kite**, **White-capped Redstart**, **Asian House Martin**, and **Ruddy Shelduck**. We then hit some roadworks and again spent a couple of hours at the roadside waiting to get through. Here there were **Horned Lark** and **Tibetan Lark** and a lot of Chinese selfie-takers. After we got through the roadworks we continued to our base for the next couple of nights at Ruorgai. Just before we hit town we found one of the most-wanted birds of the trip, **Black-necked Crane** – a pair with one young bird. Fantastic to see! In this area we also saw **Oriental Skylark**, **Common Pheasant**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, and **Common Redshank**.



This male Chinese White-browed Rosefinch gave some extremely good views.

Day 15, 7th July 2018. Ruorgai Area

We spent the day exploring the Ruorgai area and saw some wonderful birds in some amazing landscape, interspersed with time spent stuck in roadworks and general road chaos associated with said roadworks, certainly very frustrating at times. But we persisted and saw some excellent restricted-range and highly-sought species throughout the day.

During the morning we found several new species, all giving excellent views. These included hundreds of **White-rumped** and **Rufous-necked Snowfinches**, many with fledged young. **Ground Tits** were busy taking nesting material into their cliff-hole nests while **Upland Buzzards**, **Little Owl**, and **Saker Falcons** also patrolled the skies and grasslands. We found a few **Tibetan Foxes**, presumably looking for baby **Domestic Yaks** or some of the hundreds of **Plateau Pika** or the fair few **Himalayan Marmots** we also enjoyed seeing.



*This young **White-rumped Snowfinch** was unconcerned by our presence.*



*This magnificent **Saker Falcon** was patrolling the skies over the Tibetan Plateau.*

Horned Lark, Tibetan Lark, and Oriental Skylark were also present and singing constantly in large numbers. Several **Black-necked Cranes** (distant), **Ruddy Shelduck, Brown-headed Gull, Black Redstart, Black (Black-eared) Kite, Himalayan Vulture, and Northern Raven** were also all noted as we traversed the area.

During the afternoon, after getting through the traffic chaos, we ventured into a different direction from town and found two highly-sought birds, first the endemic **White-browed Tit** and second **Przevalski's Finch**, a monotypic family of ancient finches found in Tibet and China and a major target bird of the trip. After success with both of these birds we headed back to our hotel, seeing some more **Saker Falcons, Himalayan Vultures, Upland Buzzards, Ruddy Shelducks, Common Redshanks**, and three **Black-necked Cranes** along the way. The cranes were even heard calling, their 'bugling' ringing out across the stunning late-afternoon Tibetan Plateau landscape.

Day 16, 8th July 2018. Ruorgai to Maerkang

Another travel day as we moved between Ruorgai and Maerkang. We made a few stops along the way, finding **Tibetan Snowfinch, Rock Sparrow, Daurian Jackdaw, Black-necked Crane, Saker Falcon, Upland Buzzard, Azure-winged Magpie, Ruddy Shelduck, and Plain Laughingthrush** along the way. We also enjoyed a rather wet male **Przevalski's Finch** singing in the rain, although wet it was a better-colored individual than the bird found the previous day (which had been a young male).



Przevalski's Finch belongs to its own monotypic family and is found only on the Tibetan Plateau.

Day 17, 9th July 2018. Mengbishan

After breakfast we headed to Mengbishan, at an altitude of about 4,000m, and we spent the majority of the day at that elevation, gradually walking down to around 3,600m. On our arrival at the summit we found a couple of distant **Verreaux's Monal-Partridges** and had some very close views of a pair of **Kessler's Thrushes** provisioning their nest. We also saw **Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch**, **Hume's Leaf Warbler**, and **Rufous-breasted Accentor**. **Chinese White-browed Rosefinches** were abundant, and **Common** and **Streaked Rosefinches** were also found. **Collared Grosbeak** showed very briefly, but we had great views of numerous **Blue-fronted Redstarts**, **White-throated Redstarts**, and **White-capped Redstarts** – all seriously beautiful birds. Some of the other species found during the course of the day included **Himalayan Buzzard**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Grey-backed Shrike**, **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Goldcrest**, **Chinese Fulvetta**, **Chestnut Thrush**, **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Grey-headed Bullfinch**, and **Himalayan Bluetail**. However, one of the main highlights was seeing **Blood Pheasant** at close range; we had a few birds cross the road in front of us, one of them pausing briefly for photos!



Blood Pheasant was heard through much of the day and occasionally seen too.

Day 18, 10th July 2018. Maerkang to Chengdu

This was a full travel day as we left Maerkang after breakfast and returned to Chengdu for our final evening meal of the tour, which was a really nice one too.

Day 19, 11th July 2018. Departure

The tour concluded after breakfast with international departure from Chengdu.

Bird List - Following IOC (8.1)

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: CE = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened. China endemics are bolded.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Ducks, Geese and Swans (Anatidae)	
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Pheasants and allies (Phasianidae)	
Snow Partridge	<i>Lerwa lerwa</i>
Verreaux's Monal-Partridge	<i>Tetraophasis obscurus</i>
Tibetan Snowcock	<i>Tetraogallus tibetanus</i>
Chinese Bamboo Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus</i>
Blood Pheasant	<i>Ithaginis cruentus</i>
Temminck's Tragopan	<i>Tragopan temminckii</i>
Koklass Pheasant	<i>Pucrasia macrolopha</i>
White Eared Pheasant (H)	<i>Crossoptilon crossoptilon</i>
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Lady Amherst's Pheasant	<i>Chrysolophus amherstiae</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Chinese Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Kites, Hawks and Eagles (Accipitridae)	
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
Himalayan Vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
Chinese Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter soloensis</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>
Himalayan Buzzard	<i>Buteo burmanicus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Rails, Crakes and Coots (Rallidae)	
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Cranes (Gruidae)	
Black-necked Crane - VU	<i>Grus nigricollis</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Gulls, Terns and Skimmers (Laridae)	
Brown-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Hill Pigeon	<i>Columba rupestris</i>
Snow Pigeon	<i>Columba leuconota</i>
Speckled Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba hodgsonii</i>
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
Red Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
Large Hawk-Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx sparveroides</i>
Lesser Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus poliocephalus</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Himalayan Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus brevirostris</i>
White-throated Needletail	<i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pacific Swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>
Salim Ali's Swift	<i>Apus salimalii</i>
House Swift	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)	
Crested Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>
Hoopoes (Upupidae)	
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Asian Barbets (Megalaimidae)	
Great Barbet	<i>Psilopogon virens</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus canicapillus</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Saker Falcon - EN	<i>Falco cherrug</i>
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Cuckooshrikes (Campephagidae)	
Long-tailed Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>
Shrikes (Laniidae)	
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>
Grey-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius tephronotus</i>
Figbirds, Orioles & Turnagra (Oriolidae)	
Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
Drongos (Dicruridae)	
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Hair-crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Red-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa erythroryncha</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>
Daurian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus dauuricus</i>
Collared Crow	<i>Corvus torquatus</i>
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Fairy Flycatchers (Stenostiridae)	
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
Tits, Chickadees (Paridae)	
Yellow-browed Tit	<i>Sylviparus modestus</i>
Rufous-vented Tit	<i>Periparus rubidiventris</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>
Yellow-bellied Tit	<i>Pardaliparus venustulus</i>
Grey Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes dichrous</i>
White-browed Tit	<i>Poecile superciliosus</i>
Ground Tit	<i>Pseudopodoces humilis</i>
Japanese Tit	<i>Parus minor</i>
Green-backed Tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>
Larks (Alaudidae)	
Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Tibetan Lark	<i>Melanocorypha maxima</i>
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	
Collared Finchbill	<i>Spizixos semitorques</i>
Brown-breasted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthorrhous</i>
Light-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis</i>
Mountain Bulbul	<i>Ixos mccllellandii</i>
Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Asian House Martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
Wren-babblers (Pnoepyidae)	
Pygmy Wren-babbler	<i>Pnoepyga pusilla</i>
Cettia Bush Warblers and allies (Cettiidae)	
Rufous-faced Warbler	<i>Abroscopus albogularis</i>
Brown-flanked Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis fortipes</i>
Yellow-bellied Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis acanthizoides</i>
Aberrant Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis flavolivaceus</i>
Chestnut-headed Tesia (H)	<i>Cettia castaneocoronata</i>
Bushtits (Aegithalidae)	
Black-throated Bushtit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>
Leaf Warblers and allies (Phylloscopidae)	
Alpine Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus occisinensis</i>
Buff-barred Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus pulcher</i>
Ashy-throated Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus maculipennis</i>
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>
Hume's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
Two-barred Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus</i>
Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
Claudia's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus claudiae</i>
Kloss's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus ogilviegranti</i>
Sichuan Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus forresti</i>
Sulphur-breasted Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus ricketti</i>
Grey-crowned Warbler	<i>Seicercus tephrocephalus</i>
Bianchi's Warbler	<i>Seicercus valentini</i>
Martens's Warbler	<i>Seicercus omeiensis</i>
Alström's Warbler	<i>Seicercus soror</i>
Chestnut-crowned Warbler	<i>Seicercus castaniceps</i>
Grassbirds and allies (Locustellidae)	
Sichuan Bush Warbler	<i>Locustella chengi</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Cisticolas and allies (Cisticolidae)	
Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
Babblers, Scimitar Babblers (Timaliidae)	
Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler (H)	<i>Pomatorhinus gravivox</i>
Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus ruficollis</i>
Rufous-capped Babbler	<i>Stachyridopsis ruficeps</i>
Fulvettas, Ground Babblers (Pellorneidae)	
David's Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe davidi</i>
Laughingthrushes & allies (Leiothrichidae)	
Chinese Babax	<i>Babax lanceolatus</i>
Giant Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax maximus</i>
Plain Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax davidi</i>
Buffy Laughingthrush (H)	<i>Garrulax berthemyi</i>
White-browed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax sannio</i>
Elliot's Laughingthrush	<i>Trochalopteron elliotii</i>
Red-winged Laughingthrush (H)	<i>Trochalopteron formosum</i>
Blue-winged Minla	<i>Minla cyanouroptera</i>
Red-tailed Minla	<i>Minla ignotincta</i>
Emei Shan Liocichla - VU	<i>Liocichla omeiensis</i>
Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i>
Sylviid Babblers (Sylviidae)	
Golden-breasted Fulvetta	<i>Lioparus chrysotis</i>
Rufous-tailed Babbler	<i>Moupinia poecilotis</i>
White-browed Fulvetta	<i>Fulvetta vinipectus</i>
Chinese Fulvetta	<i>Fulvetta striaticollis</i>
Grey-hooded Fulvetta	<i>Fulvetta cinereiceps</i>
Vinous-throated Parrotbill	<i>Sinosuthora webbiana</i>
Ashy-throated Parrotbill	<i>Sinosuthora alphonsiana</i>
Golden Parrotbill	<i>Suthora verreauxi</i>
White-eyes (Zosteropidae)	
Stripe-throated Yuhina	<i>Yuhina gularis</i>
White-collared Yuhina	<i>Yuhina diademata</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Black-chinned Yuhina	<i>Yuhina nigrimenta</i>
Chestnut-flanked White-eye	<i>Zosterops erythropleurus</i>
Japanese White-eye	<i>Zosterops japonicus</i>
Goldcrests, Kinglets (Regulidae)	
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Wrens (Troglodytidae)	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Nuthatches (Sittidae)	
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Treecreepers (Certhiidae)	
Hodgson's Treecreeper	<i>Certhia hodgsoni</i>
Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)	
Crested Myna	<i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>
Red-billed Starling	<i>Spodiopsar sericeus</i>
Thrushes (Turdidae)	
Grandala	<i>Grandala coelicolor</i>
Grey-winged Blackbird	<i>Turdus boulboul</i>
Chinese Blackbird	<i>Turdus mandarinus</i>
Chestnut Thrush	<i>Turdus rubrocanus</i>
Kessler's Thrush	<i>Turdus kessleri</i>
Chinese Thrush	<i>Turdus mupinensis</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Dark-sided Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>
Chinese Blue Flycatcher (H)	<i>Cyornis glaucicomans</i>
Fujian Niltava	<i>Niltava davidi</i>
Zappey's Flycatcher	<i>Cyanoptila cumatilis</i>
Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassinus</i>
White-browed Shortwing (H)	<i>Brachypteryx montana</i>
Indian Blue Robin	<i>Larvivora brunnea</i>
White-bellied Redstart	<i>Luscinia phaenicuroides</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Chinese Rubythroat	<i>Calliope tschebaiewi</i>
Firethroat	<i>Calliope pectardens</i>
White-tailed Robin	<i>Myiomela leucura</i>
Himalayan Bluetail	<i>Tarsiger rufilatus</i>
Little Forktail	<i>Enicurus scouleri</i>
White-crowned Forktail	<i>Enicurus leschenaulti</i>
Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>
Slaty-backed Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hodgsonii</i>
Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula strophciata</i>
Slaty-blue Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula tricolor</i>
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
White-throated Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i>
Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>
Blue-fronted Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>
Plumbeous Water Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus fuliginosus</i>
White-capped Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus leucocephalus</i>
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>
Grey Bush Chat	<i>Saxicola ferreus</i>
Dippers (Cinclidae)	
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>
Brown Dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>
Flowerpeckers (Dicaeidae)	
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>
Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)	
Mrs. Gould's Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i>
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches (Passeridae)	
Russet Sparrow	<i>Passer cinnamomeus</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
Tibetan Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla henrici</i>
White-rumped Snowfinch	<i>Onychostruthus taczanowskii</i>
Rufous-necked Snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda ruficollis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Waxbills, Munias and allies (Estrildidae)	
White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
Accentors (Prunellidae)	
Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
Rufous-breasted Accentor	<i>Prunella strophciata</i>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Olive-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
Rosy Pipit	<i>Anthus roseatus</i>
Przevalski's Finch (Urocynchramidae)	
Przevalski's Finch	<i>Urocynchramus pylzowi</i>
Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae)	
Collared Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas affinis</i>
White-winged Grosbeak (H)	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>
Brown Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula nipalensis</i>
Grey-headed Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula erythaca</i>
Dark-breasted Rosefinch	<i>Procarduelis nipalensis</i>
Plain Mountain Finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
Streaked Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rubicilloides</i>
Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus davidianus</i>
Pink-rumped Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus waltoni</i>
Dark-rumped Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus edwardsii</i>
Sharpe's Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus verreauxii</i>
Vinaceous Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus vinaceus</i>
Chinese White-browed Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus dubius</i>
Red-fronted Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus puniceus</i>
Grey-capped Greenfinch	<i>Chloris sinica</i>
Black-headed Greenfinch	<i>Chloris ambigua</i>
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
Buntings (Emberizidae)	

Common Name	Scientific Name
Slaty Bunting	<i>Emberiza siemsseni</i>
Yellow-throated Bunting	<i>Emberiza elegans</i>
Total Seen	218
Total Heard Only	8
Total Recorded	226

Mammal List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Cercopithecidae	
Tibetan Macaque	<i>Macaca thibetana</i>
Sciuridae	
Pallas's Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i>
Himalayan Marmot	<i>Marmota himalayana</i>
Pere David's Rock Squirrel	<i>Sciurotamias davidianus</i>
Siberian Chipmunk	<i>Eutamias sibiricus</i>
Ochotonidae	
Plateau Pika	<i>Ochotona curzoniae</i>
Leporidae	
Woolly Hare	<i>Lepus olostolus</i>
Canidae	
Tibetan Fox	<i>Vulpes ferrilata</i>
Mustelidae	
Yellow-throated Marten	<i>Martes flavigula</i>
Cervidae	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>
Bovidae	
Chinese Goral	<i>Naemorhedus griseus</i>
Domestic Yak	<i>Bos grunniens</i>
Total	13



*This **Plateau Pika** was one of hundreds seen while on the Tibetan Plateau – endearing little creatures of this harsh upland environment.*