



birdtour **ASIA**
specialists in asian birding tours

South-east China; Jiangxi, Henan and Guangxi

23rd December 2008 - 1st January 2009

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Nonggang Babbler

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This return visit to south-east China followed on from our successful recce earlier in the year, which can be read [here](#). This time we visited different sites in Jiangxi and also visited Henan and Guangxi provinces. Highlights began with Scaly-sided Merganser along the fast-flowing rivers in Jiangxi followed by Siberian Crane, Lesser White-fronted Geese, Baikal Teal and Swan Geese among huge numbers of water-birds at the mighty Poyang Lake. After scouring the foot-hills of Nanchang we headed north to Henan, enjoying a fine male Reeve's Pheasant and plenty of Yellow-browed Buntings. Finally in the limestone karst forest of Guangxi province we were privileged to be among the first field observers of the Nonggang Babbler, a species discovered as recently as 2005 and formally described earlier in 2008.

After arriving into Guangzhou an overnight ride brought us to Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi province, and within three hours of arriving we were watching our first of several endangered Scaly-sided Merganser feeding on the fast-flowing rivers that run through the eastern portion of Jiangxi. These beautifully marked saw-bills were surprisingly unwary and allowed a reasonable approach without taking flight enabling us to obtain some scope-filling views although sadly they were just a little too distant for our camera lenses.

Although the landscape here can appear rather bleak in winter, it is actually home to good numbers of wintering passerines; Black-faced Bunting, Buff-bellied Pipit and Masked Laughingthrush were found in numbers along with a handsome 1st winter Bull-headed Shrike feeding from a low telegraph wire and a distinctive melanistic '*fuscatus*' Long-tailed Shrike. Pairs of Collared Crow were occasionally encountered, a species largely confined to south-east China and seemingly in a deep population decline.



Scaly-sided Merganser © Rob Hutchinson

After an overnight stay in bustling Nanchang we headed the following morning to the mighty Poyang Lake, famous for its vast numbers of water-birds. Although both the lake and water-birds have reduced drastically in size and numbers over the past 20 years due to hunting, climate change and the construction of the Three Gorges Dam we were still impressed by the sheer volume of geese, ducks, cranes and waders. This vast area requires plenty of exploration but with diligent scanning we successfully located all of our major targets in a little more than a day of birding. Along the marshy lake edges thousands of Greater White-fronted Geese fed and flew around us, Taiga Bean Geese soon became a common sight, as did Oriental Stork, from seeing just ones and two's we eventually came across two flocks containing well over 400 birds in each, a sizeable chunk of the wild population. Fortuitously the only close flock of grazing White-fronts contained 4 adult and 1 immature Lesser White-fronted Geese, a species now in drastic decline and a rare sight indeed at Poyang Lake. The endangered Swan Goose took some time to locate due to the sheer size of the area but eventually proved plentiful and could be seen to dwarf the other accompanying goose species. Bewick's Swans flew over in V-formation at regular intervals, with their eerie calls providing a wonderful back-drop. Dabbling ducks were well represented along the lake shore; Chinese Spot-billed Duck, Mallard, Gadwall, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Pintail were all present and we were delighted to find a small number of Baikal Teal including at least three stunning males. Surprisingly, these were all outnumbered by several hundred beautiful Falcated Duck.

Passerines along the marshy shore and lurking in the grasslands were dominated by *japonica* Buff-bellied Pipits although they were accompanied by quite a few *blakistoni* Water Pipit feeding in the roadside channels along with Zitting Cisticola's and excellent views were had of a couple Japanese Swamp Warblers, here at its stronghold. Both Eurasian and Oriental Skylarks gave us a unique opportunity to compare them directly at close proximity and agree that they can appear remarkably similar in appearance, the latter surely a long overdue species to be found in Europe. Scouring cultivated fields eventually yielded a suite of desirable buntings; Little and Black-faced were the most numerous but we also encountered several Chestnut-eared, single Meadow Bunting and a surprise Ochre-rumped Bunting – an absolutely stunning individual showing off his full suite of characters. Grey-capped Greenfinch, Chinese Blackbird, Chinese Grosbeak, a flock of 80 Vinous-throated Parrotbill and Hwamei were also enjoyed along with both the beautifully marked Dusky and even two, seemingly pure, Naumann's Thrushes perched atop a dead tree.

The crane flocks took some locating until we progressed beyond the village of Wucheng where we finally found a flock of 200 Hooded Crane with 40 or so White-naped Crane mingled in, and Common Cranes circling overhead though still no sign of the Holy Grail. After some repositioning we rescanned the flock to find a family of regal Siberian Crane giving nice views and what's more in the distance there was a blanket of white comprising in excess of 1000 of these elegant birds. Dawn the following morning, Christmas Day, was celebrated with the wonderful sight of small flocks of Siberian Cranes slowly flying overhead against a blue sky and unusually for this site, a beautiful sunrise.



Bull-headed Shrike and Yellow-throated Bunting © Rob Hutchinson

Moving on we spent two nights in the hills to the north-west of Nanchang exploring the forests and rivers for the highly secretive White-eared Night Heron which had been sighted there recently. Unfortunately despite dusk and dawn vigils we could not locate this species and the steep hillsides made for difficult birding and overall a frustrating Boxing Day! The forest contained a few feeding flocks, comprised largely of Pere David's Fulvetta – a range-restricted split from the Grey-cheeked Fulvetta complex, Red-billed Liothrix, Rufous-faced Warbler, Siberian Bluetail and the seven-striped sprite – Pallas's Leaf Warbler. The rivers played host to raucous Crested Kingfishers and surprisingly even a small flock of Scaly-sided Merganser. The surrounding fields and hedgerows were very birdy, especially for our bunting quest as we notched up much the same as at Poyang plus three striking male Yellow-throated, a single Rustic and best of all, two Yellow-browed Buntings – a species with a limited breeding and wintering range both of which are rarely visited by birders. Yet more Dusky and Naumann's Thrushes were encountered along with ground-dwelling Grey-backed Thrush and large numbers of endemic Yellow-bellied Tit gouging themselves on fallen berries along with a couple of Brambling.

Following almost a full day of travel north along China's impressive expressway system we arrived in Henan province at the headquarters of Dongzhai National Park. Dongzhai is one of just a few small, forested, reserves in central-east China but these reserves are essential as they protect most of the world's population of the beautiful Reeve's Pheasant. Awakening full of enthusiasm we were somewhat concerned upon bursting out of the hotel room to be greeted by damp, thick fog and a long, hard day was expected. Generally birding was slow-going with few birds heard or seen, in fact, one of our first birds of the morning was found as we pondered what one of the researchers currently on-site was attempting to do on top of a hill when a black-and-white head poked its head above a nearby rock and just as we realised what it was, the huge male Reeve's Pheasant took to the open sky giving us a wonderful flight view as we slowly headed into the mist through the tree-tops with his two meter tail waving behind him.

Delighted by our luck, especially with seeing a male so well we weren't quite sure what to do next! Despite the inclement weather we did pick up some goodies during the day as we birded the forest and fields and scrub that border the forest. Several Hwamei fed in the leaf-litter and a flock of buntings

comprised of several Yellow-throated, single Rustic and great views of several more Yellow-browed Buntings. A flock of well over 50 Yellow-bellied Tits was a surprise and some equally impressive flocks of Vinous-throated Parrotbill zipped through the under-storey. Around our accommodation several smart male Siberian Bluetail flicked around and the larger trees attracted several Grey-capped and Great Spotted Woodpeckers.



Japanese Swamp Warbler © Rob Hutchinson *White-headed Langur* © James Eaton

The final leg of our tour took us to Guangxi province, straddled on the Vietnamese border. Here we visited Nonggang NNR, primarily in search of Nonggang Babbler, a limestone-karst specialist only described to science earlier this year and observed for the very first time just three years ago. It was with great anticipation that we hit a track cutting through the impressively tall limestone karst structures in the early morning and as we took our first breather after a surge uphill we were being shown the very locality where the species was first observed when a movement caught our eye... a dark passerine hopping along a small piece of track-side limestone and the whisper of 'Nonggang Babbler' uttered from both of our mouths as we watched in totally amazement that the very first bird of the morning would be our target! For the next 10 minutes we watched a small group of this entralling bird, astonished at just how distinct it appeared, yet clearly behaviourally and structurally similar to Sooty Babbler, a similarly dark babbler restricted to the same habitat in the Annamites of central Vietnam and Lao. These birds were quite vocal and showy before eventually leaving the track-side and heading deeper into the forest. Elated with our early success we carried on along the track picking up various feeding flocks that enjoyed the open habitat; Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, Silver-eared Mesia and Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler dominated the flocks but careful scanning also revealed Common Green Magpie, Streaked Wren Babbler, Rufous-capped Babbler, Bianchi's Warbler, Pallas's Leaf and White-tailed Leaf Warbler along with a single Sulphur-breasted Warbler and later in the day another party, numbering 12, Nonggang Babbler slowly moved through the dense tangles in the dark under-storey. Walking towards an area of limestone where the rare Francois's Langur sometimes feed we came across a group of unusually showy White-winged Magpie calling raucously from open branches and a large troop of Rhesus Macaques though unfortunately no sign of the langurs which had been seen by the local farmers the previous day.

Satisfied with our views of the babbler the previous day we planned for some monkey-watching day on our final day. A visit to one of the remoter areas of Nonggang NNR was so remote that the valley floor was the only flat ground we came across in Guangxi that lacked a town or sugarcane! Unfortunately the increasingly rare and difficult Francois's Langur remained just that and we had to make do with seeing some recent droppings on the trail! Fortunately in the afternoon we were treated to one of the best moments of this tour as we visited a small area of limestone karst's near to Chongzuo, home to one of the rarest langur's in the world – White-headed Langur – which perhaps number less than 400 individuals. As dusk approached 21, including several young, of these beautifully marked monkeys skilfully made their across the vertical rock face clinging only to small outcrops and using some amazing

jumping and running techniques, although amusingly the kids took it at a slightly slower, more trepid pace. Eventually they settled down in a huddle together as the sun set for the final time in 2008.

We shall be running scheduled tours to south-east China from 2010, including a visit to Nonggang as described in this report. Please visit the Birdtour Asia [website](#) for tour details or contact us via [email](#) or **telephone:** +44 1332 516254.

Systematic List

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

Swan Goose	<i>Anser cygnoides</i>
Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>
Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus bewickii</i>
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Falcated Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Chinese Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Baikal Teal	<i>Anas formosa</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Scaly-sided Merganser	<i>Mergus squamatus</i>

GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae

Chinese Bamboo Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus</i>
Reeve's Pheasant	<i>Syrnaticus reevesii</i>
Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>

PODICEPIDIFORMES: Podicipedidae

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>

PELECANIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
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CICONIIFORMES: Ardeidae

Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
'Eastern' Great Egret	<i>Ardea [alba] modesta</i>
Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea minor</i>

CICONIIFORMES: Ciconiidae

Oriental Stork	<i>Ciconia boyciana</i>
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FALCONIFORMES: Accipitridae

Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
Crested Serpent-Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Eastern Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus spilonotus</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>

Eurasian Sparrowhawk
Himalayan Buzzard
Imperial Eagle

Accipiter nisus
Buteo burmanicus
Aquila heliaca

FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae

Eurasian Kestrel
Peregrine Falcon

Falco tinnunculus
Falco peregrinus

GRUIFORMES: Rallidae

Brown Crake
White-breasted Waterhen
Common Moorhen
Eurasian Coot

Amaurornis akool
Amaurornis phoenicurus
Gallinula chloropus
Fulica atra

GRUIFORMES: Gruidae

Siberian Crane
White-naped Crane
Common Crane
Hooded Crane

Grus leucogeranus
Grus vipio
Grus grus
Grus monacha

CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing
Grey-headed Lapwing
Pacific Golden Plover
Little Ringed Plover

Vanellus vanellus
Vanellus cinereus
Pluvialis fulva
Charadrius dubius

CHARADRIIFORMES: Recurvirostridae

Pied Avocet

Recurvirostra avosetta

CHARADRIIFORMES: Jacanidae

Pheasant-tailed Jacana

Hydrophasianus chirurgus

CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae

Common Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper
Spotted Redshank
Common Greenshank
Marsh Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Common Redshank
Eurasian Curlew
Dunlin
Common Snipe

Actitis hypoleucos
Tringa ochropus
Tringa erythropus
Tringa nebularia
Tringa stagnatilis
Tringa glareola
Tringa totanus
Numerius arquata
Calidris alpina
Gallinago gallinago

CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae

Black-headed Gull
Mongolian Gull

Chroicocephalus ridibundus
Larus mongolicus

COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae

Rock Pigeon
Oriental Turtle Dove
Spotted Dove

Columba livia
Streptopelia orientalis
Streptopelia chinensis

STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae

Asian Barred Owlet

Glaucidium cuculoides

CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae

Greater Coucal

*Centropus sinensis***CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae**

Common Kingfisher

Alcedo atthis

White-throated Kingfisher

Halcyon smyrnensis

Crested Kingfisher

Megaceryle lugubris

Pied Kingfisher

*Ceryle rudis***PICIFORMES: Picidae**

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Dendrocopos major

Grey-capped Woodpecker

Dendrocopos canicapillus

Bay Woodpecker

Blythipicus pyrrhotis

Grey-faced Woodpecker

*Picus canus***PASSERIFORMES: Eurylaimidae**

Long-tailed Broadbill

*Psarisomus dalhousiae***PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae**

Bull-headed Shrike

Lanius bucephalus

Long-tailed Shrike

Lanius schach

Chinese Grey Shrike

*Lanius sphenocercus***PASSERIFORMES: Campephagidae**

Grey-chinned Minivet

Pericrocotus solaris

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike

*Hemipus picatus***PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae**

Eurasian Jay

Garrulus glandarius

Azure-winged Magpie

Cyanopica cyanus

White-winged Magpie

Urocissa whiteheadi

Green Magpie

Cissa chinensis

Gray Treepie

Dendrocitta formosae

Eurasian Magpie

Pica pica

Large-billed Crow

Corvus macrorhynchos

Collared Crow

*Corvus torquatus***PASSERIFORMES: Monarchidae**

Black-naped Monarch

*Hypothymis azurea***PASSERIFORMES: Alaudidae**

Eurasian Skylark

Alauda arvensis

Oriental Skylark

*Alauda gulgula***PASSERIFORMES: Paridae**

Yellow-bellied Tit

Pardaliparus venustulus

Green-backed Tit

Parus monticolus

Japanese Tit

Parus minor

Yellow-cheeked Tit

Parus spilonotus

Sultan Tit

*Melanochloa sultanea***PASSERIFORMES: Aegithalidae**

Black-throated Tit

*Aegithalos concinnus***PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae**

Chestnut-vented Nuthatch

Sitta nagaensis

PASSERIFORMES: Cinclidae

Brown Dipper

*Cinclus pallasii***PASSERIFORMES: Pycnonotidae**

Collared Finchbill

Spizixos semitorques

Black-crested Bulbul

Pycnonotus melanicterus

Red-whiskered Bulbul

Pycnonotus jocosus

Chinese Bulbul

Pycnonotus sinensis

Sooty-headed Bulbul

Pycnonotus aurigaster

Puff-throated Bulbul

Alophoixus pallidus

Chestnut Bulbul

*Hemixos castanonotus***PASSERIFORMES: Cisticolidae**

Zitting Cisticola

Cisticola juncidis

Yellow-bellied Prinia

Prinia flaviventris

Plain Prinia

*Prinia inornata***PASSERIFORMES: Sylviidae**

Bownish-flanked Bush Warbler

Cettia fortipes

Japanese Swamp Warbler

Megalurus pryrei sinensis

Common Tailorbird

Orthotomus sutorius

Pallas's Leaf Warbler

Phylloscopus chloronotus

Yellow-browed Warbler

Phylloscopus inornatus

White-tailed Leaf Warbler

Phylloscopus davisoni

Sulphur-breasted Warbler

Phylloscopus ricketti

Rufous-faced Warbler

Abroscopus albogularis

Bianchi's Warbler

Seicercus valentini

Chestnut-crowned Warbler

*Seicercus castaniceps***PASSERIFORMES: Muscicapidae**

Fujian Niltava

Niltava davidi

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher

Culicicapa ceylonensis

Siberian Bluetail

Tarsiger cyanurus

Oriental Magpie-Robin

Copsychus saularis

White-capped Redstart

Chaimarrornis leucocephalos

Plumbeous Redstart

Rhyacornis fuliginosus

Daurian Redstart

Phoenicurus aureus

Little Forktail

Enicurus scouleri

White-crowned Forktail

*Enicurus leschenaulti***PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae**

Grey-backed Thrush

Turdus hortulorum

Chinese Blackbird

Turdus mandarinus

Naumann's Thrush

Turdus naumanni naumanni

Dusky Thrush

Turdus [naumanni] eunomus

Blue Whistling Thrush

*Myophonus caeruleus***PASSERIFORMES: Timaliidae**

Masked Laughingthrush

Garrulax perspicillatus

Hwamei

Garrulax canorus

Buff-breasted Babbler

Pellorneum tickelli

Large Scimitar Babbler

Pomatorhinus hypoleucos

Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler

Pomatorhinus ruficollis

Streaked Wren Babbler

Napothera brevicaudata

Rufous-capped Babbler

Stachyris ruficeps

Golden Babbler

Stachyris chrysaea

Grey-throated Babbler

Stachyris nigriceps

Pin-striped Tit Babbler

Macronous gularis

Chestnut-capped Babbler

Timalia pileata

Silver-eared Mesia

Leiothrix argentauris

Red-billed Leiothrix

*Leiothrix lutea*heard
only

Pere David's Fulvetta
Grey-cheeked Fulvetta
Indochinese Yuhina
White-bellied Erpornis

Alcippe hueti
Alcippe schaefferi
Yuhina torqueola
Erpornis zantholeuca

PASSERIFORMES: Zosteropidae

Chestnut-flanked White-eye
Japanese White-eye

Zosterops erythropleurus
Zosterops japonicus

PASSERIFORMES: Paradoxornithidae

Vinous-throated Parrotbill

Paradoxornis webbianus

PASSERIFORMES: Nectariniidae

Olive-backed Sunbird
Fork-tailed Sunbird
Little Spiderhunter

Cinnyris jugularis
Aethopyga christinae
Arachnothera longirostra

PASSERIFORMES: Dicaeidae

Fire-breasted Flowerpecker

Dicaeum ignipectum

PASSERIFORMES: Oriolidae

Black-naped Oriole

Oriolus chinensis

PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae

Crested Myna
Common Myna
Black-collared Starling
Red-billed Starling
White-cheeked Starling

Acridotheres cristatellus
Acridotheres tristis
Gracupica nigricollis
Sturnus sericeus
Sturnus cineraceus

PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae

Grey Wagtail
Amur [White] Wagtail
Olive-backed Pipit
Water Pipit
Red-throated Pipit
Buff-bellied Pipit

Motacilla cinerea
Motacilla [alba] leucopsis
Anthus hodgsoni
Anthus spinoletta blakistoni
Anthus cervinus
Anthus rubescens japonica

PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae

Crested Bunting
Meadow Bunting
Ochre-rumped Bunting
Chestnut-eared Bunting
Little Bunting
Yellow-browed Bunting
Rustic Bunting
Yellow-throated Bunting
Black-faced Bunting

Melophus lathamii
Emberiza cioides
Emberiza yessoensis
Emberiza fucata
Emberiza pusilla
Emberiza chrysophrys
Emberiza rustica
Emberiza elegans
Emberiza spodocephala

PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae

Brambling
Eurasian Siskin
Oriental Greenfinch
Chinese Grosbeak

Fringilla montifringilla
Carduelis spinus
Carduelis sinica
Eophona migratoria

PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae

House Sparrow
Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Passer domesticus
Passer montanus

PASSERIFORMES: Estrildidae

White-rumped Munia
Scaly-breasted Munia

Lonchura striata
Lonchura punctulata

A total of 195 species recorded

MAMMALS

Maritime Striped Squirrel
Pallas's Squirrel
Rhesus Macaque
White-headed Langur

Tamiops maritimus
Callosciurus erythraeus
Macaca mulatta
Trachypithecus poliocephalus



Poyang Hu

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