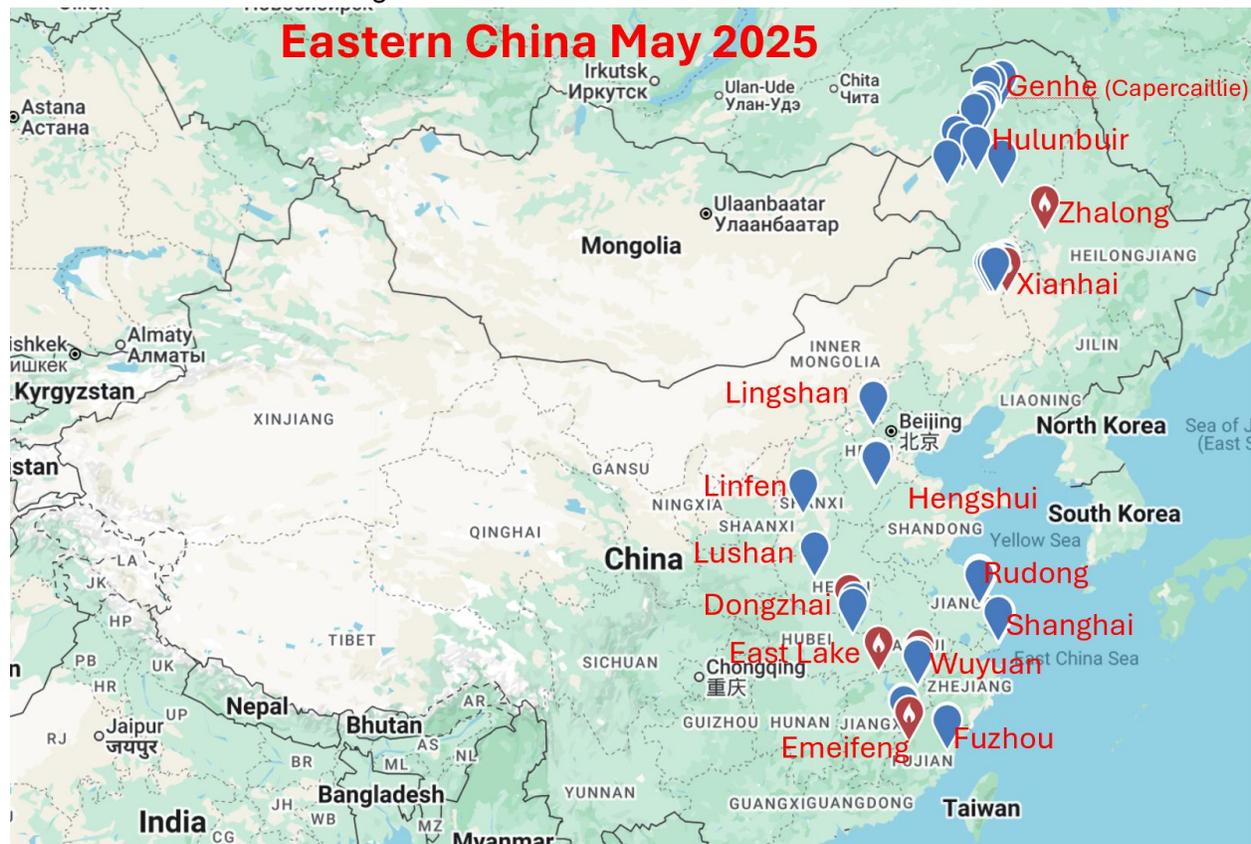


Trip Report East China 2025

Matt Hale (Text) Li Li (Photo)

Participants: Linda Hargrove, Jim Hargrove, Lisa Li, Li Li, Matt Hale, and Michael Retter

Guide: Steven An and local guides



8th May

Li and Lisa, Linda and Jim arrived at Shanghai Pudong airport from different flights, where Steven was waiting for them at the exit. Night at the airport hotel for much needed rest.

9th May

A bonus day of birding since our itinerary officially started in the evening. Steven arranged a relaxed birding day nearby, driving south to Nanhui area. The day started with rain but it didn't last that long. The wind, however, stayed and made it hard to track and hear the birds. Nevertheless, we were able to squeeze in a few stops and saw quite a few interesting birds, Reed Parrotbill, Vinous-throated Parrotbill, Manchurian Bush Warbler, Marsh Grassbird (Heard only), Brown-rumped Minivet, Masked Laughingthrush, Yellow-billed Grosbeak, Red-billed Starling, White-cheeked Starling. There were also a few thrushes in the patches of woods, Japanese Thrush, Gray-backed Thrush, Eye-browed Thrush, Chinese blackbird. A Siberian Rubythroat showed well, feeding on worms that were left by some Chinese birders. Other birds

included Tristram's Bunting, Yellow-browed Bunting, Asian brown and Gray-streaked Flycatchers, Pale-legged Leaf Warbler, Eastern-crowned Warbler.



Siberian Rubythroat



Reed Parrotbill

10th May

The group went north of Shanghai to Rudong and Tiaozini area. The planted trees along the roadside turned out to be quite birdy with lots of residents and migrants, Silver-throated Bushtit, Blue-and-White Flycatcher, Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Brown Shrike, Arctic Warbler, Eurasian Hobby, Black-naped Oriole, Yellow-browed Warbler. On the mud flats, we found Eurasian Oystercatcher, Sunder's Gull, Black-bellied Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Whimbrel, Common Sandpiper, Terek Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Little Tern, Siberian and Greater Sand-Plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Great Knot, Red Knot, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint, Sanderling, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Black-faced Spoonbill. With waders tucked their heads in, it was really difficult to find the Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The local guide was able to find one by zooming in his random photos, so it was there, we just couldn't pick up any with a

positive ID.

11th May

Before heading back to the airport, the group had a few hours early in the morning for roadside birding, which yielded Siberian Blue Robin, Green-backed Flycatcher, Mugimaki Flycatcher, Sakhalin Leaf Warbler, Gray treepie, etc.

The group then drove back to Shanghai and met Michael and Matt at the airport. The flight to



Fuzhou was smooth, but everyone was tired. We packed up the van, and headed to our hotel for some much-needed rest.

12th May

We were up at dawn and spent the morning exploring Fuzhou National Forest Park. First up was a Gray-sided Scimitar-Babbler that (after much encouragement) gave excellent views as did some Red-whiskered Bulbuls and Swinhoe's White-eyes. A three hour walk on the boardwalk produced lots of singing birds, but few were seen well. However, we did see multiple Fork-tailed Sunbirds and several roving flocks of Greater Necklaced-Laughingthrushes. Despite hearing multiple birds, we could not get a glimpse of any White-necklaced Partridges and the same was true for two groups of Black-throated Laughingthrushes. Other excellent birds included a pair of feeding Orange-breasted Leafbirds, a family group of Rufous Woodpeckers (with young birds being fed), and a pair of Scarlet Minivets.



Rufous Woodpecker



Gray-sided Scimitar-Babbler

After that, we grabbed a quick dumpling lunch and then started to head north to Emifeng, pausing for a few hours birding at Jiangle Longqi Mountain, where the highlights were a gorgeous male Silver Pheasant, a family group of Slaty-backed Forktails, and a couple of flyby passes by a Blyth's Kingfisher. One pass was so close the rushing air moved Michael's pant leg!

13th May

We had the entire day to bird Emei Peak. A post-dawn drive down the mountain yielded an incredibly close Cabot's Tragopan not 90 seconds after we got in the van! We then saw several more silver Pheasants and had a frustratingly brief view of a male Elliot's Pheasant. We stopped and birded the road in a few places; the undeniable highlight was a superbly co-operative spotted elachura that gave us walkaway views as it sang mere meters away. Other excellent birds included Yellow-cheeked Tit, Black-throated Bushtit, Indochinese Yuhina, and Rufous-faced Warbler. After lunch at the hotel, we spent the afternoon birding the higher elevations of Emei Peak. Birding was slower in the heat of the afternoon, but the camellia and azalea understory was amazing and must look stunning earlier in the spring. Birding highlights included a very cooperative pair of White-browed Shrike-babblers, a Hartert's Leaf-Warbler, and lots of close Chestnut Bulbuls. After a quick coffee break, we decided again to take the bus downslope to try our luck with pheasants. This was an excellent idea, as not only did we see more Cabot's Tragopans, but we got marvelous looks at what was probably the same male Elliot's Pheasant as in the morning. However, the biggest surprise was a pair of Koklass Pheasants that posed well, although briefly. We returned to the lodge for a well-deserved dinner and an early night.



14th May

We were up and out at dawn for a leisurely walk around the higher parts of Emei Peak. There was much more activity than the previous afternoon, and we saw no fewer than five Cabot's Tragopans. Other highlights were a frustratingly uncooperative small niltava and, after much maneuvering, a pair of Mustached Laughingthrushes that eventually showed well. We continued to have no luck with seeing white-necklaced partridge, although we heard at least four.

After that, we grabbed breakfast, packed the van, and headed north. Our destination was the sleepy town of Caomen near Wuyuan in Jiangxi province. This town has become famous amongst birders as the center of the breeding range of the critically endangered Blue-crowned Laughingthrush. We pulled into what turned out to be someone's driveway, jumped out the van, and ascended several flights of stairs. The balcony has been turned into a feeding station for the laughingthrushes, and the surrounding huge banyan trees had at least four pairs building nests or sitting on eggs. We didn't have to wait long for the first of several birds to come down for a late afternoon snack of wild raspberries. We spent about 40 minutes with the laughingthrushes as they fed, sang, and interacted. There are thought to be fewer than 200 pairs of these beautiful birds in the world and most (all?) of them breed in banyan trees around Wuyuan. Allowing birders and bird photographers from around the world access to people's homes to view this bird is a fantastic example of the power of ecotourism to not only preserve species but also to provide some much-needed income to local economies. After getting our fill of the laughingthrushes, it was back in the van and off to the hotel—but not before a quick roadside birding stop which produced a pair of Mandarin Ducks, Silver Pheasants, lots of Chinese Pond-Herons, and some very noisy Gray-headed Lapwings.



Moustached Laughingthrush



Blue-crowned Laughingthrush

15th May

After another early start, it was a 90-minute drive to a different person's house for another close experience of a very charismatic bird! This time our target was Pied Falconet, a pair of which have set up their nest opposite the rooftop viewing area. They made us wait a bit, but eventually the birds appeared and perched for a good 20 minutes in their favorite tree, giving outstanding



Pied Falconet



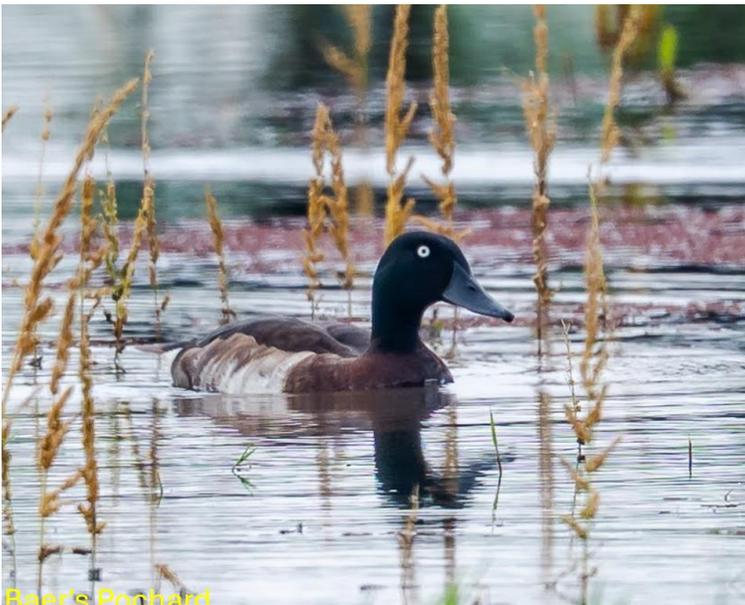
Scaly-sided Merganser

views to the delight of both us and the horde of photographers. Before the falconets made their appearance, we distracted ourselves with a close singing Chinese Hwamei, a few Red-billed Blue-Magpies, and some Eurasian Jays.

After we'd had our fill of the falconets, we headed west for more birding around Shijian village. Birders who've been to the Wuyuan area in winter will know this as one of the areas where scaly-sided merganser winters. As our visit was in mid-May, this bird wasn't on my radar. However, a female had decided not to join the rest of the flock when they flew north, and she appeared to be content with staying for the summer. It didn't take long for us to find her, and we watched her rest, preen, and engage in a bit of fishing. Other birds we saw along the river included multiple groups of Collared Finchbill, Chestnut Bulbul, and Greater Necklaced-Laughingthrush. We had an excellent home-cooked lunch in the village and then spent a very humid afternoon birding along a side road to the north. Again, birding was slow, but we did have great looks at one Gray-headed Parrotbill, Gray Treepies, and a group of relatively low flying White-throated Needletails. A couple people had very brief looks at a Short-tailed Parrotbill. On the drive back to the hotel we saw a group of six Crested Kingfishers and a very cooperative Asian Barred-Owlet.

16th May

We were up early and headed north, but some last-minute information had us take a detour to check out a site that we'd heard had a few breeding pairs of the critically engaged Baer's Pochard. We arrived at the site, got out of the van, and right in front of us was a male! We watched him for a good five minutes before he flew off and dropped out of sight into the lotus. We ended up finding three more pochards, as well as many Great Crested Grebes (including some doing their amazing, head shaking and bowing display), a couple distant Lesser Coucals, and many Whiskered Terns. On the way out we found a pair of the impossibly cute Cotton Pygmy-geese, more Whiskered Terns, and a pair of Pheasant-tailed Jaçanas. What an incredible bird, especially in its breeding regalia!



Baer's Pochard



Pheasant-tailed Jacana

After a quick bite we were back on the road and headed to the famous Dongzhai NNR in Henan province. We stopped at a couple of flooded fields and had wonderful looks at three crested ibis,

a group of Masked Laughingthrushes, some Vinous-throated Parrotbills, and a handful of Oriental Greenfinches. Steven then got news that the main star of Dongzhai was putting on a show at one of the feeders! We booked it to the hide but missed them by minutes. Dongzhai NNR has become famous for Reeves's Pheasant—a spectacular member of a spectacular family and one of the star birds of any eastern China birding trip. We missed them that evening but had some compensation in the form of a pair of Mandarin Ducks that landed in a small pond in front of the hide.



17th May

You can guess what we did today, right? It was back in the van at dawn to get to the Reeves's hide as soon as possible. We got comfortable, started to munch on breakfast, and waited. And waited. And waited. Until around 9:30 am, when we gave up! The activity at the hide was quite slow, but we did see more Oriental Greenfinches and a few Hair-crested drongos. A group of Oriental Turtle-Doves kept us entertained. Just how many Oriental Turtle-Doves can you fit on a platform feeder? Five seemed to be the magic number. Anyway, no Reeves's, and we decided to cut our losses (with plans on returning in the afternoon) to explore the rest of the forest. Activity was slow, but Steven got news that a fairy pitta was found singing, so off we went! We could hear the pitta far up in a large tree, so we waited, waited, and waited, until somehow, Lisa found it perched! No sooner had she done so than it decided "okay, now these birders know I'm here, I'm off", and it flew a short distance but out of sight. What followed was about 15 minutes of cat and mouse, as the pitta would change its position, and then seemingly melt in the vegetation. Frustrating! It was time for some much-needed lunch, a cup of coffee (for me at least), and rest, with a plan to meet up again at 3 pm and head back to the Reeves's hide. So, 3:15 found us back in the hide and staring at the same view, i.e., nothing bar a couple of Oriental Turtle-Doves and then, Steven gave a hushed shout, and a female Reeves's gingerly approached the feeder—accompanied by a half-grown chick! Success! Well, kind of. We were all very happy to see her, but look online or in a field guide at male versus female Reeves's Pheasants and tell me which you'd rather see? So, more waiting. Then I heard some noise in

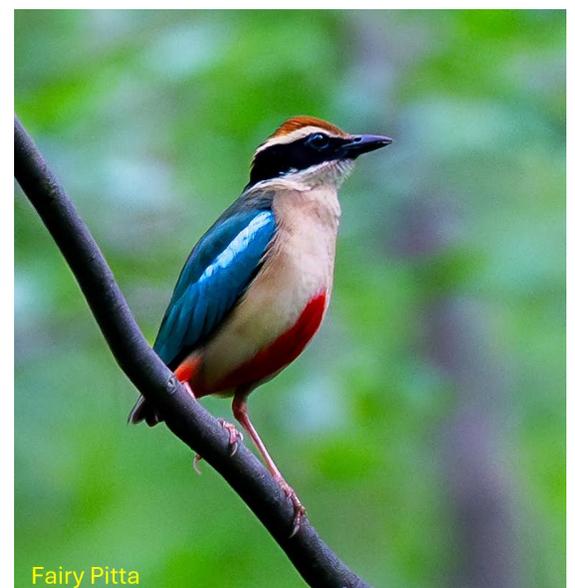
the undergrowth to the left of the hide. I began scanning with my bins, and there he was! Now, the problem was he was obscured, and some of the group couldn't see him. But there was no need to worry, as after about 90 seconds two male Reeves's pheasants strutted out of the vegetation and made a beeline for the feeder. Magic! And if you need any incentives to visit east China, check out those photos below! We returned to the hotel for an early dinner and a celebratory beer or three. A bit of night birding yielded good views of Japanese Scops-Owl, and we heard several Northern Boobooks and Oriental Scops-Owls.



18th May

Given our success with the Reeves's from the previous afternoon, Steven put his magic cap on and came up with a last minute addition to the itinerary. But first there was the small matter of a certain pitta... We decided to try a different location (and individual), and that in combination with an earlier start meant it didn't take us long to detect another singing male fairy pitta. This bird performed wonderfully, and we ended up with walk-away views.

Then, it was back to the road! Everyone has been lamenting earlier in the trip that they hadn't seen Golden Pheasant. So,



Steven led us on a detour to a new site. We arrived at Quanshuiwan around 2pm, had lunch, and then headed uphill to a blind. It took about ten minutes for one, then two, then three male Golden Pheasants to come into the food and water provided for them! Other birds we saw at the hide over the next two hours or so included a pair of Amur paradise-flycatchers, Swinhoe's minivets, Black-streaked and Streak-breasted scimitar-babblers, and a family group of Chinese Hwamei that kept us entertained with its antics.



19th May

Our quick change of plans required us to alter our train tickets to get to the next destination, so it was another early start before taking the first of two bullet trains to Linfeng in Shanxi province. This site has become famous for a group (herd?) of Brown Eared-Pheasants that have become accustomed to feeding in the grounds of a hotel. It didn't take us long before we found one which, let's just say, performed "well". We then decided to take a short walk to explore the pine-larch forest slopes before dinner. Birding was slow, but there were Chinese Leaf-Warblers everywhere, as well "Songar" Willow Tit, Silver-throated Bushtits, and many Daurian Redstarts. As we were enjoying dinner four more pheasants came down to check us out, and we had yet more incredible views.



Brown Eared-Pheasant



Gray-sided Thrush

20th May

Today we started by going higher to explore the alpine environments above the hotel at Linfeng; there was lots of singing, with Chinese and Hume's leaf-warblers being especially common. We also saw together a couple Chinese Beautiful-Rosefinches, Southern Nutcrackers, one talkative Elliot's Laughingthrush, more Daurian Redstarts, and a frustrating Gray-sided Thrush that eventually gave decent views. We returned to the train station and took two high-speed trains to Hongshui Lake in Hebei province, where we stayed for two nights.

21st May

Today's plan was to bird around Hongshui Lake, a fabulous spot for waterbirds in the winter. Its extensive reedbeds also attract a host of breeding birds that are tough to see elsewhere. The main target here was originally Baer's Pochard, but given our success a few days prior, we decided to focus on reedbed birds. The number of Oriental Reed-Warblers was quite staggering, and at any point during the day we could easily have heard at least five at once, and often many more. Interspersed were smaller numbers of Black-browed Reed-Warblers, but, despite much effort, we could not locate any Blunt-winged Warblers. Other birds in the reedbeds included Eurasian Bittern, lots of Purple Herons, Chinese Pond-Herons, and several Reed Parrotbills (a personal favorite). The insistent (and I do mean that) singing of Common Cuckoo got a bit annoying at times, so much so that I was still "hearing" them when I went to bed! We also got quick looks at Black-naped Oriole and a couple of migrating Arctic Warblers. The open water held lots of Great Crested Grebes, smaller numbers of Little Grebes and Eastern Spot-billed Ducks, and four Falcated Ducks (presumably late wintering birds). In the afternoon we checked out a few other parts of this large lake and saw plenty of Whiskered Terns, more of the reedbed birds listed above, and lots of close Ferruginous Ducks.

22nd May

This was another travel by train day, but not before we checked out a third part of Hongshui Lake. We saw many of the reedbed birds from the previous day, but with a couple of additional highlights: close flybys of at least three Yellow Bitterns and a Black-capped kingfisher. Then it was back in the van and another high speed train to Beijing. Once we arrived, we grabbed a quick lunch and headed northwest for two nights at Lingshan. This was the first (and only) time on the trip I felt cold! Temperatures were in the upper 40s F with constant English-like rain. (If you've been to the U.K., you know what I mean). It was coming down pretty heavily, so we decided to cancel evening birding and decided to start off early the following day.

23rd May

I'm glad I brought some layers, gloves, and a scarf! We started early at a promising bit of habitat about 1 km above the hotel. A singing Thick-billed Warbler made us scratch our heads until it sat up for a quick belt of its weird half-*Acrocephalus*/half-*Hippolais* song. A walk in some beautiful birch woods produced a singing yellow-rumped flycatcher, a frustratingly elusive Siberian Blue Robin, lots of Chinese Leaf-Warblers, and several pairs of cooperative brown shrikes. We then drove up a little higher to start a 1km walk that wound its way through the beautiful birch open habitat. In the mist, it was sometimes difficult to get a good look at the birds, but there were lots of singing Raddes's Warblers, a Yellow-throated Bunting, a pair of "Chinese" Long-tailed Rosefinches, lots of Chinese Leaf-Warblers, and Beijing Babbler that toyed with us for a while before eventually showing well. Near the top of the trail, we found some Meadow Buntings and a Little Bunting that annoyingly disappeared just as soon as I got glass on it. However, excellent compensation came in the form of several well-behaved Chinese Beautiful-Rosefinches. We then returned to the village for lunch. While others rested, Matt and Michael walked above town and found a pair of Bull-headed Shrikes. Birding below the village in the afternoon yielded a pair of yellow-rumped flycatchers, more Chinese Leaf-Warblers, Eastern Crowned-Warblers, a first-year male Green-backed Flycatcher, and a ridiculously cooperative Asian Stubtail.



Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch



Long-tailed Rosefinch (Chinese)

24th May

We were up early and decided to hike to the upper parts of Lingshan. We started our hike at the top of the road and were soon enjoying a very close male Chinese Beautiful-Rosefinch and more meadow Buntings. The hike up was pretty quiet except for the songs of Large Hawk-Cuckoo and what seemed like a couple hundred Chinese Leaf-Warblers. Once we got to the higher birch forests that had just started leafing out, before Michael heard our target, we dashed (as best we could) uphill. It took a bit of searching but we eventually saw a first-year male of the range-restricted Qilian Bluetail (a recent split from Red-flanked), as well as more Yellow-rumped Flycatchers and plenty of Hume's Leaf-Warblers. Satisfied with our looks at the bluetail, we started our walk back down the mountain. On the way, we briefly saw a Siberian Blue Robin (do they ever show themselves?), another pair of Yellow-rumped Flycatchers, Claudia's Leaf-Warblers, and a frustratingly elusive Chinese Thrush that eventually showed itself briefly. A White-bellied "Redstart" sang vociferously but never showed. The walk back down to the hotel was uneventful and, being a Saturday, quite busy with day-trippers from Beijing, but we did see some lovely pasqueflowers. We then had lunch, packed the van, and made our way back to Beijing in time for a delicious traditional Peking duck dinner and an early night.

25th May

We were up early for our internal flight to Ulanholt in Inner Mongolia. Northeast China was the last leg of our three week trip. We packed up the van and headed south to spend a night at Horqin. After we dropped our bags, we got out into the field to bird some apricot thickets about 10 km from town. As it was mid-afternoon, there wasn't a lot of bird activity, but it didn't take long for us to locate a signing male Rufous-backed (AKA, Jankovski's) Bunting. The bird put on a great show for a good fifteen minutes. Satisfied with our looks at this range-restricted and beautiful bunting, we walked further into the scrub to see what we could find. There were lots of Meadow Buntings and a co-operative Beijing babbler, but little else, so we returned to the van for dinner and an early night. As we loaded the van, we were treated to Common Swifts and Eastern Red-rumped Swallows overhead before a close pass by a male Amur Falcon.



Beijing Babbler



Rufous-backed Bunting

26th May

We started the morning by birding some short-grass fields north of town. The day started well, with a close Eurasian Hoopoe, plenty of both Isabelline and Pied wheatears, and many Oriental Skylarks showing well. We stayed around the fields for a couple of hours and saw a pair of little owls, more Amur Falcons, and many Daurian Jackdaws. However, the biggest surprise of the morning was a migrating Pallas's Leaf-Warbler that stopped off in a cornfield—Not a location I'd expected to see my lifer, but a great way to end an excellent morning! We then started our drive east to spend the night at Xianghai National Wetland Center, just over the border in Jilin province. We made some quick and productive stops along the way, one of which was especially memorable for the incredible number of White-winged Terns. Well over a thousand were hawking insects close to the road and perching on power lines. They were an unforgettable sight in their smart breeding plumage. We also saw multiple Eurasian Bitterns, a male Yellow-breasted Bunting, Oriental Pratincoles, and several Oriental Storks. We arrived at Xianghai with enough time for an hour's birding. We found more storks, a cooperative pair of Chinese Penduline-tits, and a flock of about 40 Swan Geese. Yet more White-winged terns, Whiskered terns, Purple herons, singing Eurasian Bitterns, Amur Falcons, and a large mixed flock of Falcated Ducks and Gadwall made for a fantastic end to a long day of driving.



Oriental Pratincole

Rufous-backed Bunting

Oriental Stork

27th May

There's something special about waking up, making coffee (even if it's freeze dried), and listening to bitterns boom and watching Eurasian Spoonbills, Little Egrets, and Great Cormorants fly over your hotel. Anyway, that was my morning! Once the rest of the gang had joined me we birded in a different location near Xianghai and had distant looks at two pairs of Red-crowned Cranes, more Swan Geese, another pair of Oriental Storks that were making use of a telegraph pole for nesting (very reminiscent of the related White Storks in Europe!), plenty of Amur Falcons, some Ferruginous Ducks, and a cooperative Eurasian hoopoe. We then pushed on, heading to Zhalong Nature Reserve in neighboring Heilongjiang province. We made

a couple of stops around the lake and quickly detected a pair of Red-crowned Cranes, several Purple Herons, more Amur Falcons, White-winged Terns, a quick fly-by pair of greenshanks, and several “Manchurian” eastern yellow wagtails (without white on the head). We hadn’t been back on the bus long before I screamed “STOP! WHITE-NAPED CRANE!” at full volume. The bus screeched to a halt and out we all piled to get fabulous looks at this gorgeously elegant crane. (But is there a crane species that’s not gorgeously elegant?). It was a much-wanted bird for Linda and me. We continued around the lake, finding more Red-crowned Cranes, including a pair with a young colt, more White-winged Terns, a couple distant Ochre-rumped Buntings, a stunning male Pied Harrier, and a very close Reed Parrotbill.

28th May

We, yet again, decided to alter the itinerary today to take advantage of another of Steven’s leads, and we headed north earlier than expected for one very special grouse. So, we got up early, packed up the van and began the eleven-hour drive to Jinhezhen. We stopped in Hailer along the way to get lunch and change our van for two 4 x 4s. Some bathroom stops along the way yielded the newly split Siberian House-Martin, some nest-building Eastern Red-rumped Swallows, and a Siberian Rubythroat singing away at the top of a conifer. The last bird was a



reminder that, although it was 80 F outside, we’d changed habitats and had entered the taiga.

29th May

On every birding trip there’s a day when the leader’s announcement that “We’re leaving at ___ o’clock tomorrow” is met with a series of wide eyes and groans. Well, today was that day for us, and the 4x4s left at 1:30 am. Ouch! Steven had heard about a Black-billed Capercaillie lek. A local couple had set up three blinds at different positions around the lek for people to enjoy breathtaking views of these charismatic grouse. As it was late May, the lekking had ended, but several males were still coming to the arena in the early morning. We got into one of the blinds

and waited. Three males soon started clicking; they sound to me like a rapidly tongue-popping drag queen! But we couldn't see anything. As we waited, several White's Thrushes were singing, as were Bramblings, Olive-backed Pipits, and Mugimaki Flycatchers, but after two hours there was still no sign of any cappers, and they'd stopped singing. DAMN! Then one started to click, and Steven made the call to leave the blind to try and track down the vocalizing bird. We walked forward—both looking down to make sure we didn't trip on the boggy vegetation and looking ahead to see the bird before it spotted us. After about a minute, the local guide started talking excitedly, and I didn't have to understand Chinese to realize he had spotted the bird! It took a bit of repositioning, but all of us got outstanding looks at a male Black-billed Capercaillie for several minutes as it sat in a pine tree vocalizing away!



Black-billed Capercaillie

Elated, we went back to the 4x4s for breakfast. We then spent a few hours birding the taiga, where we saw the aptly named Taiga Flycatcher, Two-barred Warbler, Pine Bunting, Siberian House-Martin, Raddes's Warbler, and olive-backed pipit. We headed back to town to get an early lunch and a much-needed nap before heading out again in the relative cool of the

afternoon. Birding the birch/pine forests was excellent, and we saw several Siberian Rubythroats, more Raddes's Warblers, Amur Stonechats, several Citrine Wagtails, and a very cooperative reeling Lanceolated Warbler.

30th May

We left early (but not relative to the previous day) and headed south back to Hailar, but first we birded some taiga forest north of Juyan. The birding was great! We quickly found some singing Common Rosefinches, plenty of



Forest at 4AM

Willow Tits, singing Rufous-tailed Robins, and Dusky Warblers. We then heard one of the main targets, Siberian Jay! It only called once, but Steven started playing tape. We waited about 90 seconds, and suddenly there was a pair right above us. They behaved wonderfully, and we all had excellent views as they sat atop the pines calling and interacting. We then continued south,

stopping at another stretch of taiga which, again, was very birdy. The best of the birds here were more Siberian Rubythroats, Raddes's and Dusky warblers, "Siberian" Long-tailed Rosefinch, and lots of Black-faced Buntings. However, the biggest surprise was the great grey owl that sat out in the open for a few minutes. Back on the road, we found another patch of forest that looked good. Much of the same birds we had at previous stops were seen with the addition of Pale-legged Leaf-Warbler and several White-throated Rock-thrushes. We then continued south to Hailar, stopping briefly along the road to admire some Falcated Ducks. Finally, we stopped just north of Hailar to check out the steppe. This was an excellent decision, as we soon found several Mongolian Larks amongst the hordes of parachuting Eurasian Skylarks and singing Northern Wheatears.



Great Gray Owl



Long-tailed Rosefinch (Siberian)



Siberian Jay

31st of May

For our final full day of birding, we decided to head southwest towards Mongolia for two very special steppe birds. The drive was uneventful, although we did see several Hill Pigeons, many of which were associating with Rock Pigeons in towns. We got to the site, and our 4x4s started to drive across the steppes. We saw plenty of Ruddy Shelducks and lots of Eurasian Skylarks, and then we spotted one of our targets: a female Great Bustard. She showed well (albeit a bit distant) and soon we were back in the 4x4s; not long after, I spotted a group of three bustards strutting their way across the grassland, then one of the males began turning itself inside out to give its spectacular "bubble bath" display—a fantastic sight! Whilst watching the bustards, the call went out: "Cranes!" I got the scope on a distant pair of our second target, Demoiselle Crane! We spent a good while watching the cranes and bustards, and three more cranes flew in much closer, giving us fantastic views. Soon, we were driving back to Hailar but not before a quick shout by Michael had us scanning a group of curlews that contained one Far Eastern and one "Siberian" Whimbrel amongst the Eurasian curlews. A great pickup! The afternoon was spent in some mixed pine/birch forest. It was beautiful, but there were few birds, although a showy Pine

Bunting was much appreciated, and there were plenty of blooming pasqueflowers and irises, as well as some lovely Iceland poppies.

1st of June

This was our last morning, and we decided to visit a wetland site about an hour west of Hailar. This proved to be a great idea, as it was incredibly birdy. Highlights were many, but for me personally, I really enjoyed the summer plumaged Red-necked Grebes and large numbers of Swan Geese, Eurasian Spoonbills, and yet more White-winged Terns. There were plenty of cranes around, with at least three pairs of Common Crane and one pair each of Red-crowned and White-naped cranes. Passerines were not obvious (apart from the continuous song of Oriental Reed-Warbler), although we did manage to find a Common Rosefinch, a Yellow-browed Warbler, and several (Common) Reed Buntings that, despite much effort, all refused to have gray shoulders. A close singing Pallas's Grasshopper-Warbler annoyingly refused to show apart from a couple of quick fly-bys, but a pair of Reed Parrotbills was much more obliging, as was a small group of Bearded Reedlings. A quick stop by a nearby wetland yielded a pair of close flying white-necked cranes and, after much speculation, what we think was a Paddyfield Warbler either a bit out of range at the edge of its poorly understood breeding range. It was a good reminder that this part of China is under-birded, and there must be plenty of other surprises out there! Before long, it was time to point the 4x4s east and begin to head back to Hailar and the first of our homebound flights. We did make one final stop that produced several close demoiselle cranes, a flyby Eurasian Hoopoe, and a pair of gorgeous summer-plumaged garganey trying to hide amongst the Tufted Ducks and Common Pochards. Then we enjoyed the last of 23 delicious dinners.

I offer many thanks to Lisa for putting together this fabulous itinerary and to Steven for organizing the logistics and being willing to switch plans on a dime. The amount of ground we covered in 24 days was quite remarkable and made possible by China's excellent infrastructure, including roads in great condition, a large offering of flights, and a new bullet train system. I should also take a moment to mention the many local guides and drivers we utilized on this trip. All of them helped make this an incredibly well organized and fun trip. Lastly, I cannot end this report without giving a mention to the incredible food we were fortunate to enjoy, thanks in large part to Lisa and Steven's selections. It's wonderfully fresh, bursting with flavor, and varied from region to region. I'm already missing steamed dumplings, fried tofu, and sautéed eggplant!

Our top five birds of the trip were as follows.

- 1) Reeves's Pheasant (I mean, how could it not be?)
- 2) Golden Pheasant
- 3) Fairy Pitta
- 4) A 2-way tie between Spotted Elachura and Blue-crowned Laughingthrush

Other species that received votes include White-winged Tern (our eBird total for the trip was in excess of 2,000), White-naped crane, Crested Ibis, and Reed Parrotbill.