

CHINA, 9<sup>th</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> MAY 2015

BEIDAIHE & HAPPY ISLAND MIGRATION  
Glamorgan Bird Club members with BirdFinders

Participants:

Glamorgan Bird Club - John Wilson, Alan Rosney, David Bush, Huw Thomas, Gareth Jenkins, Mike Wheeler, Chris Hodgson, Matthew Evans

BirdFinders guide - Bill Blake

Chinese 'crew' - Kevin Ren [ground agent], 'Anna' [interpreter], and 'Mr. B' [driver].

This was a trip put together for us by BirdFinders in response to an enquiry as to the possibility of a trip for just 8 members of our club. We were very pleased and thankful that this could be done, and for the possibility of flying from Cardiff. The extra costs involved were well worth it. Our guide was Bill Blake from Bristol, who has visited the area many times, and we were accompanied by the Chinese ground agent Kevin, and our delightful Chinese interpreter Anna, both of whom looked after us very well - the occasional treats of Snickers bars and various biscuits were most welcome during the long days in the field!

We flew from Cardiff on 9<sup>th</sup>, with KLM on the 10:30 a.m. flight to Schiphol, where we connected with a China Southern airlines flight direct to Beijing, arriving at 06:30 a.m. on 10<sup>th</sup>.

**10<sup>th</sup> May** - after being picked up at the airport and transferred to our hotel we had a chance to sort ourselves out and have breakfast. We then did our cultural bit with a visit to Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. Unfortunately it rained continuously but nevertheless we were able to take in the enormous size of the square and its military guards standing rigid and unblinking like Mme Tussaud's dummies, for hours on end. We marvelled at the vast expanse of the various pagodas in the Forbidden City. Being a Sunday it was very busy everywhere and the whole place was a sea of 100's and 100's of multi-coloured umbrellas. We eventually retired to the hotel for an evening meal and a well-earned rest.

**11<sup>th</sup> May** - there was a small park and lake by the hotel so an early walk there started the ball rolling with **Mandarin** and **Eastern Spot-billed Ducks**, **Black-crowned Night-heron**, **Yellow-browed Warbler**, **Gt Spotted Woodpecker**, and overhead the *pekinensis* race of **Common Swift**. The destination for today was the very large Miyun Reservoir, which is about 80km NE of Beijing and supplies its water. A fuel stop en route here gave us our first **Daurian Redstart**, and 4 **Oriental Greenfinch**. After negotiating various dirt roads we arrived at an area overlooking the northern, shallower end of the reservoir. We met up with Terry Townshend, a UK birder and ecologist who lives and works in Beijing. He has an excellent informative blog [www.birdingbeijing.com](http://www.birdingbeijing.com). The expanses of shallows here produced a feast of water birds - **Eastern Cattle Egret**, **Great Egret**, **Little Egret**, **100 Grey Herons**, **1 Black Stork**, **18 Eurasian Spoonbill**, **1 Greater White-fronted**

Goose, 3 Bar-headed Geese, 2 Shelduck, 30 Ruddy Shelduck, 4 Red-breasted Merganser. An excellent selection of waders comprised 30 Black-winged Stilt, 60 Oriental Pratincole, 40 Greater Sand Plover, 5 Lapwing, 50 Pacific Golden Plover, 1 Red-necked Stint, 12 Long-toed Stint, 7 Curlew Sandpiper, 2 Common Snipe, 18 Bar-tailed Godwit, 6 Redshank, 1 Marsh Sandpiper, 4 Greenshank, 2 Green Sandpiper, 1 Terek Sandpiper, an amazing 200 Wood Sandpiper, and 10 Common Sandpiper. Raptors seen comprised Oriental Honey-buzzard, 5 Eastern Marsh-harriers, 4 Pied Harriers [3f, 1m], 1 Japanese Sparrowhawk, 1 Grey-faced Buzzard, a Greater Spotted Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, 1 Common Kestrel, up to 20 of the delightful Amur Falcons, a Saker, and a Peregrine. Diminutive Japanese Quails flushed almost from under our feet. Terns were represented by 10 Common, 4 Little and 6 White-winged. Oriental Reed Warblers sang nearby and Terry found us a couple of Bluethroats. A few Hill Pigeons with their distinctive black terminal tail bands were seen and many Red-rumped Swallows flew overhead. Other stars on the passerine front were Siberian Stonechat, 3 Blyth's Pipits, around 80 eastern Yellow Wagtails of the race *simillima* and 8 Citrine Wagtails including a couple of absolutely stunning males, a few Vinous-throated Parrotbills [closely related to our Beaded Tit], and a Long-tailed Shrike. The area was also heaving with Little Buntings of which we saw around 100, plus a couple of Meadow Buntings. Another important target bird here was the skulking Chinese Hill Warbler [aka Beijing Babbler] and we had good views of one in the scrub beside one of the tracks. The session ended with an excellent picnic lunch.

After this amazing first session we moved to a nearby scenic gorge with a road bridge over a river, where the diligent Kevin eventually found us a Crested Kingfisher, just before we were about to give up. We also found a couple of Godlewski's Buntings in a small side ravine, and plenty of Eurasian Tree Sparrows, the latter being the most common bird wherever we went. I also found a Rock Thrush sp on a telephone wire which Bill identified as a Blue Rock Thrush of the subspecies *philippensis* in which the belly and vent are orange. A quick glance and it could be passed off as a Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, but the orange underparts are limited to the belly and vent, whereas on Rufous-tailed they extend up to the bottom of the throat. After a long day we eventually made our way back to the hotel in Beijing.

12<sup>th</sup> May - today was a long transfer day eastwards to the coast at Beidaihe, apparently much easier these days due to an expressway for the whole journey. Driving eastwards out of Beijing and the time it took to clear the city's extremities, made us realize just how huge a city it is. A fuel stop at a service area on the way, gave us our only sighting of White-cheeked Starling and also Chinese Pond Heron, Oriental Turtle Dove and Light-vented [Chinese] Bulbul. The latter proved to be as common as Tree Sparrow throughout. We eventually arrived at the Jinshan Hotel, which has a series of accommodation blocks dotted around pleasant gardens. My notes are not clear as to the order in which we did things after lunch but we visited the grounds of a nearby hotel, the Friendship Hotel, which has very extensive grounds, which prove attractive to migrating birds. We also made a first of

several visits to what are known as the Sand Flats, a very large expanse of sand at the mouth of a small river in Beidaihe, which flows out of a reservoir located behind the coast road. This area is viewed either from a busy road bridge or a boardwalk. The hotel grounds produced **Eurasian Hobby**, **Spotted Dove**, **Common Cuckoo**, **Eurasian Hoopoe** [a pair had a nest in a tree there], **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, a stunning male **White-throated Rock-thrush**, **Eyebrowed Thrush**, **Yellow-browed** and **Dusky Warblers**, **Grey-streaked Flycatcher**, **Taiga Flycatcher**, **Japanese Tit** [split from Eastern Great Tit], **Chestnut-flanked White-eye**, **Brown Shrike** [another very common bird throughout], the stunning **Red-billed Blue Magpie**, 3 **Red-billed Starlings**, and **Tristram's Bunting**, and other common birds. I should also mention the stunning male **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** [aka **Korean Flycatcher**] which was in a tree beside our accommodation block, before we set out for the afternoon.

At the Sand flats we saw the usual Egrets, and new waders were 4 **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**, 2 **Ruff**, **Whimbrel**, **Eurasian Curlew**, and **Spotted Redshank**. There were many **Black-tailed Gulls** out towards the seaward side, mostly immature birds but obvious with their broad black tail band when in flight. From the inland side of the road ridge by the stream, we had **Common Kingfisher** and a male **Siberian Blue Robin**.

We spent the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> at the Jinshan Hotel and departed on 16<sup>th</sup>. Each morning before breakfast involved a 5:30 a.m. start to explore various hotel grounds and a location called Lighthouse Point, checking for migrants. I must admit I had formed a mental image of Lighthouse Point as something resembling Portland Bill, so in that respect it was a bit of a disappointment! ☺ In fact it was just a small jutting out area with trees and scrub, which acted as a migrant 'trap'. It produced one of only two sightings of **Great Crested Grebe**, **Hobby**, **Japanese Quail** coming in off the sea, **Oriental Reed Warbler**, **Japanese Tit**, and a few other species. The rest of the day would be spent visiting other main areas including the Sand Flats, and a coastal area north of the neighbouring city of Qinghuangdao [pronounced chinghwangdow] called Stone River, and we also had a visit to a section of the Great Wall. Rather than detail each early morning, here are the highlights from visits to the Friendship Hotel, the Dongshan Hotel, Jinshan Hotel, Lighthouse Point and a weedy field near the Jinshan: **Japanese Sparrowhawk**, **Hobby**, **Amur Falcon**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Spotted Dove**, **Collared Dove**, **Cuckoo**, **Pacific Swift**, **Common Swift** [*pekinensis*], **Grey Nightjar**, **Hoopoe**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Bluethroat**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Red-throated Thrush** [an imm bird], **Thick-billed Warbler**, **Eastern Crowned Warbler**, **Pallas's Warbler**, **Yellow-browed Warbler**, **Two-barred Warbler**, **Radde's Warbler**, **Dusky Warbler**, **Songar Tit**, and **Hair-crested Drongo**. Kevin & I were lucky enough to have a brief views of a **White's Thrush** and also **Siberian Thrush**, whilst exploring behind one of the buildings at Dongshan. I should say at this point that it was during one of our early morning forays into hotel grounds [it was probably the second day], that Bill unfortunately badly sprained his ankle when stepping down off a low banking via a rock which wasn't very stable. His ankle swelled up very badly and the poor guy was in a lot of pain. Kevin eventually came to the

rescue and purchased a walking pole whilst we were lunching in Qinghangdao, which helped to an extent, and then the following day appeared with a wheelchair! Hence poor Bill was wheeled around in that whenever possible, or rather should I say that poor Kevin pushed Bill around – some of the slopes were a little steep! Fortunately with Ibuprofen gel and pain killers, Bill was able to carry on and the thankfully the swelling did start to subside.

**13<sup>th</sup> May -**

**Sand Flats** - we had a wader fest here and many other birds – the area was literally heaving with birds. All the Egrets seen already were present, plus a new bird in the form of a **Chinese Egret**. Waders not already seen comprised 4 **Avocet**, **Kentish Plover**, 3 **Temminck's Stint**, and **Black-tailed Godwit** [eastern subsp]. Amongst those already logged, there were around 20 **Red-necked Stint**, 50 **Wood Sandpiper**, and good numbers of **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** and **Long-toed Stint**. Overall there were over 20 species of wader present. Another excellent target bird was a **Relict Gull**, out amongst the **Black-headed Gulls** and **Black-tailed Gulls**. New terns for the list comprised 4 **Gull-billed** and 4 **Whiskered**.

**Stone River** – this was an interesting and very large area just north of the city of Qinghuangdao, comprising a river with rocky islands, many reedy and marshy pools created by sand or gravel extraction, dunes, conifer plantations and scrub, and a beach. On arrival here the first bird was a new addition to the wader list in the form of a **Grey-tailed Tattler**, a good bird to get, and at the same time 4 **Grey-headed Lapwing** were seen flying over. A few **Grey Plover** were also a new addition. More or less all the other waders already listed, were present too. In addition, a large **Snipe** sp was found by the other Birdfinders group who were visiting the same day [they were on a tour that started a day before us]. This was ultimately photographed by one of that group and its ID remains unsolved as I write – it was suspected at the time to be one of the larger snipes – **Swinhoe's** or **Solitary**. It was seen in flight by all as it flushed. A **Grey Nightjar** was flushed in one of the conifer plantations and most people had views of a **Dollarbird**. Many of the pools had areas of reed, which had singing **Oriental Reed Warblers**, and eventually **Black-browed Reed Warblers** gave good views. Our first **Eastern Crowned Warbler** was in fact here, as was **Hume's Leaf Warbler** and many flycatchers. A couple of **Chinese Penduline Tits** were called by our leader Bill, and seen briefly in flight. A good number of **Pallas's Reed Buntings** were around the pools.

**Great Wall at Jiaoshan** – we spent the remainder of the day driving to this part of the Great Wall, NW of Qinghuangdao and visiting the site. What an awesome spectacle, with the huge wall stretching away up the steep hillside to a watchtower above. In addition to the wall there was an important species to be found here – **Pere David's Laughingthrush** [rather boringly also know as **Plain Laughingthrush**]. A quiet walk in the gardens at the bottom of the wall soon had us watching a bird behaving like most Laughingthrushes, skulking around on the ground in amongst the leaf litter and undergrowth. We also had good views of **Amur Falcon** here, and **Large-billed Crow**, and a species of squirrel. Four of us, plus Kevin and Anna, managed to make it all

the way up to the watch tower. It was a very strenuous climb, negotiating steep sloped sections, then sections of steps which were uneven in height and staggered from side to side - a deliberate design intended to make it difficult for any invading army to negotiate at speed. I was pretty much staggering from side to side when I reached the top, but it was well worth it for the view down. The 6 of us then made our way down and at the bottom, as we walked towards the others waiting by the main gate, I was alerted by someone loudly calling my name. I soon found the source - Gareth Jenkins had somehow managed to get locked in the loos!! It was around 5 p.m. and closing time and an official had put a padlock and chain on the doors, which although they could be opened slightly, the gap was not big enough for poor Gareth to squeeze through with his optics. Having passed them to one of the group he did manage to squeeze through eventually! We then drove back to Beidaihe for a well-earned evening meal. All our meals at the Jinshan were excellent.

**14<sup>th</sup> May** - today we visited Lighthouse Point, the Friendship Hotel grounds, Dongshan Hotel grounds, Jinshan Hotel grounds, and also had another excursion to the Sand Flats. However this time at the latter we decided to access the viewing area via the boardwalk rather than stand on the busy road bridge. This afforded a slightly closer view and also took us past some areas not viewable from the road. The first new bird was a **Brown-cheeked Rail** [a split from Water Rail], which showed well by the boardwalk. Also in the same area were 3 **Vinous-throated Parrotbills**, which showed well, and a **Black Drongo** was noted in a treetop together with a **Black-naped Oriole**, many of which were seen subsequently elsewhere. All the usual waders were present, with **Greenshank** now numbering 40, and we added **Turnstone** to the list, and 2 **Terek Sandpipers** were noted. On the Gull front we added **Mongolian Gull** [considered by some to be a ssp of Vega Gull] but a separate species in the field guide, and also **Heuglin's Gull**, 4 **Gull-billed Tern** and 8 **Whiskered Terns**. *Simillima* **Eastern Yellow Wagtails** were also present together with **White Wagtails** of both *ocularis* [Siberian] and *leucopsis* [Amur] subspecies.

**15<sup>th</sup> May** - today we visited the Friendship Hotel grounds again before breakfast, then Stone River, and we called in at the Sand Flats on the way home. New birds included 8 **Dunlin** of the *sakhalina* subspecies, on the beach at Stone River, and a larger **Snipe** was flushed there, possibly Pin-tailed. The Sand Flats had 2 **Green Sandpiper** added to its extensive wader list. Whilst at the Stone River we had good views of a **Rufous-tailed Robin** [aka **Swinhoe's Robin**], a couple of **Blyth's Pipits**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Siberian Thrush**, **Thick-billed Warbler**, and our first **Black-faced Bunting**. The star of the day though, came at our homeward stop at the Sand Flats when Alan & Bill found the much wanted **Saunders's Gull** out with the Black-headed Gulls. This is a small gull, reminiscent of Little Gull but with a very distinct wing pattern and in summer plumage, as this one was, a black hood with bright white 'lozenges' above & below the eye, rather like Franklin's Gull. Indeed it recalls Franklin's except the mantle is pale grey. A great end to another great day.

**16<sup>th</sup> May** - today was our transfer day to Tangshan, a few hours south from Beidaihe but still on the coast, and the jump off point for access to so-called Happy Island, a small [around 2km x 4km] island just offshore, and nowadays accessible via a drivable causeway. The Friendship Hotel grounds were again the pre-breakfast jaunt. We stopped at various coastal sites en route. The first stop was called Xili Hai lagoon and here we had inter alia, **Kentish Plover**, our first **Lesser Sand Plovers**, **Grey Plover**, 2 **Grey-tailed Tattlers**, **Black-tailed Gull**, **Mongolian Gull**, a possible *tamyrensis* type **Heuglin's Gull**, and **White-winged Tern**.

Farther on down the coast we stopped at **Luanhe Kou**, which comprised a large open sandy area with a tidal estuary, accessed through a small village where fishing was the only occupation [the smell was pretty strong!]. We watched with interest at the small 'port' where numerous junks were moored, and where one was being manoeuvred on its moorings. We had our picnic lunch here, and birds included **Oystercatcher**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Kentish Plover**, **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Grey Plover**, **Bar-tailed Godwit**, **Eurasian Curlew** and for comparison a new species in the form of 3 **Far Eastern Curlews** with their incredibly long bills and clinching dark rumps in flight. **Redshank**, **Marsh Sandpiper** and **Greenshank** were all present, plus 3 **Terek Sandpipers**.

Next stop was **Laoyujian**, a small sandy cove, and here we added 6 **Great Knot** to the ever-expanding wader list. **Curlew Sandpiper** were also present and around 100 of the *sakhalina* **Dunlins**, plus other waders seen at the previous site.

The final approach to Tangshan was quite interesting. This is a rapidly developing area, and it became rather disconcerting as the dual carriageway on which we were heading towards the main town, came to an abrupt end, with no warning whatsoever - no diversion signs - nothing - just a pile of earth blocking the way. After driving round in circles a few times we ended up driving through a few km of road works where the road was non-existent. We bumped along over dirt and ruts, negotiating obstacles comprising road-working machinery and workmen, and somehow found ourselves back on 'terra firma' again, or at least on tarmac firma! It was decided we would call in at 'Big Wood', a largish copse of trees located amongst all the development that was going on, and across a canal from a very large factory. Being an isolated clump of trees in a desert of development it's a trap for migrants. There was an adjacent heronry which held many **Chinese Pond Herons** and **Great and Little Egrets**, and the canal had **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**. The wood gave us excellent views of two **Oriental Cuckoos**, which were picking moths from crevices in the trunks of the trees. This species looks very much like Common Cuckoo but the breast banding is broader, and they tend to have a buffy vent. The call is also different. The inevitable **Light-vented Bulbuls** were also present, plus a **White-throated Rock-thrush**, **Zitting Cisticola**, and **Pallas's Warbler**. Five species of flycatcher was impressive - **Dark-sided Flycatcher** was new, as was a stunning male **Mugimaki**, plus **Grey-streaked**, **Asian Brown** and **Taiga**.

**17<sup>th</sup> May** - we had a pre-breakfast visit to the Big Wood, which produced the usual herons and egrets, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Rufous-tailed Robin**,

the flycatchers again except with Mugimaki replaced by **Yellow-rumped, Black-naped Oriole**, and a few leaf warblers but nothing new. It was surprisingly quiet.

We returned to the town for breakfast at a favourite restaurant used by birding groups [evidenced by the many group photos on the wall inside]. Its amusing English name was "Best Western Restaurant". The breakfast they laid on each day was delicious.

The main visit of the day was Happy Island. After passing through the main entrance we were then transferred by electric road train, to the start of a series of boardwalks through a damp, wooded area, which we explored at length. Many of the species already seen were logged. Warblers recorded were **Thick-billed Warbler, Eastern Crowned Warbler, Arctic Warbler, Pallas's Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, and Dusky Warbler**. Flycatchers were represented by the same five seen at Big Wood in the morning. A female **Blue and White Flycatcher** had been seen but despite grilling the trees by the stretch of boardwalk where it had been reported we couldn't find it. A small gully which runs through the wood produced another new bird in the form of a **Chestnut-eared Bunting**. After an excellent lunch in a restaurant on the island we explored an open, scrubby area. The other BirdFinders group was also on the island and had seen Asiatic Dowitcher so in the afternoon we headed for the shoreline of the undeveloped half of the island which faced a tidal lagoon. Here we had a good selection of waders - **Black-winged Stilt, Avocet, Kentish Plover, 20 Lesser Sand Plover, Grey Plover, Red-necked Stint, Dunlin, 50 Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew, an amazing 50 Far Eastern Curlew, Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper, Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper, 4 Turnstone**, and right at the end, after we had almost given up, 3 **Asiatic Dowitchers!** The second jewel in the crown comprised 2 **Saunders's Gulls**, which flew up and down in front of us and settled on the mud to feed.

We called in at the smaller 'Magic Wood' on the way back and saw a number of familiar species, and sharp-eyed Anna found us a **Grey Nightjar** at rest on a branch, affording close views. The hotel in Tangshan was rather a stark building, but the rooms were comfortable enough, but there was no restaurant so we had an excellent meal at the "Best Western Restaurant".

**18th May** - basically today we had further visits to the Big Wood and Happy Island. Big Wood was initially a pre breakfast visit, where the only new species comprised 2 **Olive-backed Pipits**. Other than that there were the usual collection of flycatchers and warblers. Highlights on Happy Island were **Pale-legged Leaf-warbler** [a new one for the list], **Rufous-tailed Robin, 2 Siberian Thrushes, 1 Eyebrowed Thrush, Black-browed Reed Warbler, Arctic Warbler, Pallas's Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler and Radde's Warbler**, plus the usual flycatchers. Another surprise find was a **Brambling**, and two other new birds comprised **Yellow-browed Bunting**, and a **Chestnut Bunting** that Alan & I were lucky enough to find by the boardwalk. The tide this time was not suitable for waders.

Thus we decided to make another visit to the Big Wood where the now familiar species were seen and nothing new added.

**19<sup>th</sup> May** – today was a transfer day back to our original hotel in Beidaihe, but we still packed in a pre-breakfast walk in the Big Wood, as the other group had seen a female Tiger Shrike there the previous day. On arrival some of the group went off into an adjacent field in search of a better view of **Japanese Quail** [and succeeded] whilst the rest of us slowly walked down a track where the shrike had been seen. There were plenty of **Brown Shrikes** as usual, and we were almost at the end of the track when I spotted a Shrike sitting up in a tree. At first glance it looked like a Red-backed but then I got it ‘scoped up and eureka, it was a cracking **male Tiger Shrike!** The chestnut upper parts had fine transverse black scalloping which is presumably the reason for the name. The head was pale grey with a black bandit mask as in Red-backed Shrike. Having looked at some images since getting home, it appears that the black scalloping is the only obvious difference between the two species [Red-backed having plain chestnut upper parts]. The bird was quite active, moving from tree to tree and fortunately stayed long enough for the quail-chasers, whom we urgently called forward when they appeared at the far end of the track, to get good views. Whilst there we drew the attention of a rather large German Shepherd dog which was in the yard of a smallholding there. It followed us all the way back along the track, seemingly seeing us off the premises. It neither barked nor looked aggressive, and looked quite relaxed but we didn’t want to test its ‘strokability’! Other species seen included **Spotted Dove, Common Pheasant, Common Cuckoo, Hoopoe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Thick-billed Warbler**, the usual flycatchers, **Chestnut-flanked White-eye, Black Drongo, Oriental Greenfinch, Eyebrowed Thrush, Two-barred Warbler, Black-naped Oriole**, and **Crested Mynah**. The heronry was still very active. After another excellent breakfast at the “Best Western Restaniant”, we set off northwards, again encountering the ‘disappearing road’ and bumping along through a road construction site until we finally hit tarmac. On the way back we decided to call in again at Luanhe Kou where we had a picnic lunch and saw a good selection of waders, and also found a new bird – an **Asian Short-toed Lark**, which gave excellent views as it scuttled around on the sandy ground around 50m from the bus. A **Chestnut-eared Bunting** was also present. On our arrival back at Beidaihe we found ourselves negotiating a ‘wedding jam’, as our driver “Mr. B” threaded his way through what we reckoned were about 18 wedding groups and their photographers, preparing for a photo session on the beach. After checking in to the Jinshan Hotel again, we set off and re-checked the grounds of the Dongshan Hotel. The highlights comprised a pair of **Hobbies** sitting in a tree, affording nice views, a number of **Pacific Swifts** flying overhead, **Great Spotted** and **Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Rufous-tailed Robin, Siberian Thrush, Pallas’s** and **Two-barred Warblers** and the by now familiar flycatchers.

**20<sup>th</sup> May** – based in Beidaihe today, we did the usual pre-breakfast Friendship Hotel visit which produced familiar species but nothing new. The main visit of the day was to the so-called Agnggho Reservoir [not sure if that’s spelt correctly, but most tour groups seem to refer to it simply as the Beidaihe Reservoir]. This lies immediately inland of the Sand Flats and is relatively small with well-wooded surrounds with damp areas, and at the extreme inland end, extensive reeds. We collected new species here in the form of 3

**Yellow Bitterns**, and a **Purple Heron** together with other egrets and herons already seen, a **Black-capped Kingfisher**, and briefly, a **Grey-capped Pygmy-woodpecker**. **Mandarin Ducks** were our first since first arriving in Beijing. The reeds held the expected **Oriental Reed Warblers** and **Black-browed Reed Warblers**, a **Chestnut Bunting** was seen well, and the pleasant paths and boardwalks through the woods provided familiar common species, and some had good views of a group of **Vinous-throated Parrotbills**. As it was nearby, we also checked the Sand Flats again, from the road bridge. The waders had clearly mostly moved on, but we did have **Whimbrel**, **Eurasian Curlew**, **Redshank**, and **Common Sandpiper**. A few **Mongolian Gulls** were present plus the usual **Black-headed**s, and also another **Saunders's Gull** - so we did very well for this species with 4 individuals in total. Finally we had another go at the Friendship Hotel grounds in the afternoon but turned up nothing new.

**21<sup>st</sup> May** - I opted out of the pre-breakfast jaunt this morning but the highlight for the others was 2 **Lanceolated Warblers**, at the Jinshan Fields, a grassy area near our hotel, and **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** at Lighthouse Pt. I did eventually arise a little while before breakfast and had great views of a **Two-barred Warbler** near our room block. The rest of the day was spent at the Stone River area that we visited on 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>. The first good find at Stone River was a **Striated Heron** which flew around a couple of times. We had a fly-over **Oriental Honey-buzzard** whilst at the beach area, which also had **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Grey Plover**, 6 **Red-necked Stints** and an impressive flock of 98 **Terek Sandpipers**! We had a fly-over **Grey-headed Lapwing**, and the only other raptors were **Amur Falcon** and **Hobby**. **Little Terns** and **Gull-billed Terns** flew around all day and **Black-winged Stilts** were numerous. We worked the area pretty thoroughly and checked out all areas. Our hard work was rewarded with further fly-over views of **Dollarbird**, an excellent close **Lanceolated Warbler**, an unblocker for me having missed the early morning one due to my lie-in, 2 **Blyth's Pipits**, 2 very confiding **Radde's Warblers**, **Pallas's Reed Buntings** and many other 'common' species. An excellent find by Bill was a **Yellow-legged Buttonquail** creeping through the grass and allowing superb views. Its behaviour was something that even Bill had not seen before - it crept along slowly, rocking fore and aft like a Jack Snipe when feeding. Another stake out was for **Baillon's Crake** which the other group had seen earlier in the week. We had been checking every marshy pool with no luck. Chris had a possible during one of his wanderings, and he told us where. It was the sharp-eyed Anna who spotted a movement, whereupon we had tantalizing views of the back of an immature bird as it crept through the waterside vegetation. Eventually, birded out, we made our way back through the traffic of Quinghangdao, for a short rest and to start packing for tomorrow's move up to the mountains. The day was rounded off with yet another excellent evening meal, followed by the usual end-of-the-day checklist, and Prof Bush's roundup of the best grammatical errors of the day, of which he kept a meticulous mental note.!

**22<sup>nd</sup> May** - no pre-breakfast jaunt today but an early departure for the journey NW via Quinghangdao to the nearest mountain area which is known

in birding circles as Old Peak, and is located in the Zushan Scenic Area. On the map this does not seem too far away but access was via a series of winding dirt roads, passing through tiny remote villages. I was amazed at how the Sat Nav in our minibus seemed to know every single track and dirt road, and although its constant beeping and pinging could be a little irritating, it did us proud. A target bird for this section of the trip was the iconic **Ibisbill**. One location for this species has apparently already been spoiled by 'tidying up' of the stream which they used to frequent, so none was seen on last year's trip. There was new 'gen' this year so we were trying to get to Old Peak via the new location. In one village, the road was very narrow so we had to stop to let a small van pass from the opposite direction. As it drew level it stopped and a conversation ensued between the driver and our driver and Kevin. The van promptly turned around and we followed it - unaware of what was going on. As it turned out, the van driver took us to the exact spot by the river [the Qinglong] where two **Ibisbill** were feeding. He must have realized we were European birders and was keen to show us the spot. What a guy! We also had good views of a **Striated Heron**, and **Black Stork**, and an **Amur Falcon** perched on telephone wires. After having our fill of the Ibises feeding in the rocky stream and flying, another chat ensued and the van driver then directed us to another stream where, after a false alarm in the form of a **Little Ringed Plover**, we found the next target bird, the **Long-billed Plover**, an upland stream breeder. What a good start, thanks to our Chinese friend with an obvious interest in wildlife. After many xièxie ["thank you", pronounced very approximately "shieyshe" with the last 'e' being open as in 'bet'], we continued on our bumpy way and after many hairpins we arrived at the ornate entry gate to the Zushan Scenic Area. We met with the other BirdFinders group who were on their way out, so after Kevin had obtained our permit, we birded near the entrance. We soon had **Silver-throated Bushtit** [split from Long-tailed Tit], **Yellow-bellied Tit**, **Hair-crested Drongo**, and a brief flight view of 2 **White's Thrush**. In addition, after much patience, we had reasonable views of a **Blunt-winged Warbler** which was singing in roadside trees, plus **Eastern Crowned Warbler**. Nearby scrub had quite a number of calling **Manchurian Bush Warblers** but none would play ball and come in to view. Bush Warblers are notoriously skulky. This little session near the gate also gave us our only record of **Eurasian Jay**. **Godlewski's** and **Meadow Buntings** were also evident. We then continued on uphill towards the hotel. En route we had a picnic lunch halfway up the mountain road, and [with a slight hiccup of 'losing Matt and Mike for a short while] we eventually all arrived at the hotel.

A quick freshen up and we were out walking in the cool mountain air. **Grey-faced Buzzard** was the first raptor, and in trees by the hotel we had **Oriental Greenfinch**, and **Daurian Redstart**, and also **Great Spotted Woodpecker** and a few other 'common species. The day was rounded off with another excellent evening meal, this time in the separate restaurant in the 'resort' which was a collection of small hotels.

23<sup>rd</sup> May - a very early start today. We set off in the minibus at 5 a.m. with a picnic breakfast [mainly because we had just the morning, and after lunch we would begin the long drive back to Beijing]. So, I might as well round off with

everything we saw on this our last day, in more or less systematic order. **Oriental Turtle Doves** were common, then a new species in **Northern Hawk Cuckoo** which was just a fly-over, although we heard several call and had frustrating glimpses in the trees. We also heard the distinctive call of **Indian Cuckoo**. Then **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Barn** and **Red-rumped Swallows**, **Amur White Wagtail** [*leucopsis*], **Chinese Bulbul**, **Wren**, **Rufous-tailed Robin**, **Daurian Redstart**, **White-throated Rock-thrush**, and **Eurasian Blackbird**. We heard many **Grey-sided Thrushes** but only Huw got what I think was some brief video. Next up another new species, the easy-to-ID **Claudia's Leaf-warbler**, with its unique alternate left-right-left-right wing lifting as it moves through the canopy. Two other good warblers to get were **Chinese Leaf Warbler** observed singing on top of a conifer [characteristic prominent song perch apparently] and a **Yellow-streaked Warbler** heard only doing its scratchy song, and looking at the field guide, not really streaked at all - these two were near the entrance gate just before we left. **Silver-throated Bushtit** were seen again as were many **Yellow-bellied Tit**, and **Japanese Tit**. We then finally connected with another new bird, the **Snowy-browed Nuthatch**, or **Chinese Nuthatch** as it is sometimes known. We eventually saw 3 of these, but they were much less numerous than usual according to Bill. **Black-naped Orioles** were fairly frequent in the trees plus **Red-billed Blue Magpie** and **Common Magpie**, **Large-billed Crow**, **Tree Sparrow**, **Oriental Greenfinch**, and **Godlewski's Bunting**. That about rounded it off. We had a good lunch at the restaurant and made our presentations and offered huge thanks to Kevin, Anna and Mr B for being such good companions and looking after us so well. We then had time for a very rapid pack before setting off for Beijing.

After a long drive we eventually arrived at the airport at around 5:30 p.m. and after driving around in circles for a while, found the hotel where a couple of rooms had been reserved for those who wanted to, to freshen up and change. Anna and Kevin also had a flight to catch to return to their home town of Chengdu, 2 hours' flight to the west, but despite their limited time and our long wait [our flight wasn't until 00:50 on 24<sup>th</sup>], they treated us to a KFC evening meal in the airport - so thoughtful. Finally we bade our sad farewells before we went through security. Eventually after we had cleared security and check-in, and found somewhere to settle down until boarding time, we were able to make our presentation to Bill and thank him for his leadership and excellent knowledge of the area and its birds, and for struggling along, in some discomfort at times, after his unfortunate mishap at the beginning. We eventually said our farewells and thanks again at Schiphol with strict instructions to have his ankle checked out when he got home.

So all-in-all a fantastic trip, so thanks BirdFinders! Overall group list was 220, including about 5-6 species that only Kevin saw on his wanderings. My own personal list was 206 species according to my database [which uses the IOC world checklist], and I had 73 lifers. The impressive list of waders comprised 40 species!! Warblers numbered 19 species. I could go on but those two were notable. Full list on the following pages.

It is worth noting that there is some confusion over the various large gulls species. For example on our checklist we have Vega [Herring] Gull and Mongolian [Caspian] Gull. Re Mongolian, Clements lumps it in with Caspian Gull as a subsp of that and that is what our checklist follows, but my database follows the IOC checklist where it is a subsp of Vega Gull. Other sources also have it as a subsp of Vega Gull. The possible Tamyrensis gull we saw is apparently considered to be a subsp of Heuglin's Gull. The taxonomy of all these large gulls is currently in a state of flux so whether they all counted as separate species for us is a matter of conjecture.

John Wilson

The species in red are the ones I didn't see and in some cases I don't have a record of where they were seen or the date. If anyone can fill in these details let me know. Also feel free to alert me to any typos, grammatical errors [prof Bush plse note] then also let me know. I've made a start on the web site - it's at [www.birdingchina2015.weebly.com](http://www.birdingchina2015.weebly.com) . Basically the various pages will have the text of this report, but I will obviously be adding photos. If anyone has photos they'd like to include then do send them either via e-mail or on a disc if there's lots.