

Birding NE Tibet with Oriental Bird Club: Koko Nor, deserts, Roof of the World & SE Qinghai, 27 July – 17 Aug 2014.

[This draft 30 June 2013]

*By Jesper Hornskov * ALL RIGHTS RESERVED ®*

Situated in western China, rugged Qinghai province is the ideal place to see a mix of Central Asian specialities, Chinese / Tibetan endemics, and isolated populations of otherwise mostly Siberian species. In zoogeographic terms we will be visiting the Tibetan Plateau and the deep valleys of its eastern fringes, with the latter showing particularly strong affinities with the least accessible parts of neighbouring Sichuan, known for its avifaunally rich Panda reserves.

Unlike China's 'Tibet Autonomous Region' (which could remain trapped in the current unrest-and-clampdown cycle for years to come), Qinghai – with scenery fully on par with the very best in parts of 'geographical Tibet' now administered by neighbouring provinces – offers excellent, reliable & (with comparatively less developed tourism) affordable access to Tibet's array of unique birds, mammals & flora.

Drawing on unequalled birding experience in Qinghai (>45 comprehensive tours during 1995-2013 in addition to six years' residence in the province) the following itinerary incorporates several sites pioneered by your *leader Jesper Hornskov* as recently as in summer 2013. The present itinerary has been carefully planned and updated to take in as wide a range of habitats as possible, thus maximizing our chances of connecting with all target species. Improved infrastructure – mainly better roads, but also more frequent domestic flights – now allows us to incorporate into a three week tour the very best this part of Asia has to offer without compromising on the field hours: we have sufficient time to ensure that all specialities can be properly searched for, at a realistic pace. We shall be expecting to see around 220 species in Qinghai, with additional ones possible as we pass through Beijing.

Your leader is an **Oriental Bird Club Founder Member** – originally from Denmark he has lived in China since 1987 & has spent more time in the field in the country than any other birder.

for details on how to join, or for further information, please contact Jesper at

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Or Michael Edgecombe (Oriental Bird Club Promotions Officer) [mail\(at\)orientalbirdclub.org](mailto:mail(at)orientalbirdclub.org)

Itinerary:

Sunday 27 July / DAY zero: arrival at hotel near Beijing airport. *The cost of this overnight (but not e.g. dinner) IS INCLUDED in tour price. Tour participants will need to inform JH of their arrival date & time, flight # and airport of origin of flight into Beijing (e.g. 'Tokyo' if you have changed plane there) well in advance.*

We will assemble at 20:00 in the hotel lobby for a briefing.

Anyone wishing to arrive early in order to do some sightseeing / local birding should enquire about the possibilities.

28 July / DAY 01: we will catch an AM flight to Xining, capital of Qinghai Province, c1,600 kms west of Beijing for an initial two nights' stay.

We will have time to visit the eroded hills on the outskirts of Xining after checking-in & getting-organised at our comfortable hotel. Our chief target will be the local race of Sinai Rosefinch, distinctively different-looking from the Middle East form and with a different call. The attractive Meadow Bunting is more widespread generally but we are unlikely to come across it anywhere else on our journey. The Chukar-lookalike, endemic Przevalski's Partridge also occurs, but as a somewhat misguided planting scheme is in the process of rendering the site unsuitable we may have to continue our search elsewhere.

29 July / DAY 02: Starting early we'll devote the day to forest north of Xining, working an attractive area of spruce, birch & buckthorn with adjoining terraced fields. Daurian Partridge is sometimes seen, but it is the warblers and redstarts which are the main attractions: with a bit of luck we should see Hodgson's, White-throated & White-bellied Redstarts, and Yellow-streaked, Hume's and Gansu Leaf Warblers. The last has only fairly recently been reaccepted as a valid species, and its winter quarters remain to be discovered.

Less demanding than the warblers is a fine set of other birds: Common Pheasant, Blue Hill Pigeon, Salim Ali's Swift (the most recent of a steady trickle of newly elevated Tibet / W China taxa!), Olive-backed Pipit, Grey-backed Shrike, Rufous-browed Accentor, Pere David's and Elliot's Laughing-thrushes, and *affinis* Songar Tit. Also-possibles include Rufous Turtle Dove, Chinese Nuthatch, Oriental Greenfinch, and Grey-headed Bullfinch.

The retiring, outrageously beautiful Crested Tit-warbler and the little-known Przevalski's Nuthatch (now with authority confirmed as a fully valid species) are nowhere in the world more reliably seen than where we are today, and a special effort to find these real star birds is likely to bear fruit.

30-31 July / DAY 03-04: We'll devote a day-and-a-half to extensive forest & alpine scrub near Xining, habitat which is home to a healthy population of the magnificent Blue Eared Pheasant as well as the harder-to-find Severtzov's Hazel Grouse & Verreaux's Monal Partridge. We have a reasonable chance of encountering the particularly fine *beicki* race of Blood Pheasant.

More widespread species such as Grey Crested Tit, White-browed Tit-warbler, Southern Spotted Bush, Buff-barred & Large-billed Leaf Warblers, and Chestnut & Chinese Song

Thrushes are added attractions, and we'll try our best to get close looks at Siberian Rubythroat and Chinese White-browed Rosefinch.

In the afternoon of Day 4 we'll begin our journey south to spend the night at relatively low altitude, hoping en route for first encounters with Plateau specialities such as the entertaining Hume's Groundpecker, Mongolian Lark & Pere David's Snowfinch.

1-3 Aug / DAYS 05-07: In order to minimize the risk of any of us suffering altitude-induced discomfort (we are yet to quite acclimatize) we'll take our time to reach Yushu, crossing this spectacular part of NE Tibet in stages: this is the main leg of the journey towards another target area: the valleys, ridges, and passes in the vicinity of remote Nangqian.

Spotted Great and Eastern Great Rosefinches are frequently both present in a barren-looking gully and we're likely to see good numbers of Upland Buzzards & several Sakers where cute-looking Black-lipped Pikas - a cornerstone species in the intricate plateau ecology - are abundant. Stops at major wetlands along the road over the high plateau should yield several pairs of endemic Black-necked Cranes, and summering Pallas's Fish & Steppe Eagles are occasionally present. We'll scan the tarn-dotted expanses for Kiang & the stately Tibetan Wild Ass, and wolves are encountered on most trips, frequently at relatively close range. On one OBC trip we were even privileged to witness four particularly mean-looking individuals undertake a successful hunt, killing and ripping apart a Tibetan Gazelle!

We will explore the vicinity of the forbidding Er La pass where Roborovski's Rosefinch is usually seen. Although the species occurs in rather low density we have managed to find it on all visits since 1995, prior to which this Qinghai endemic had gone unseen by Westerners for four decades.

Other species present here at this time of year are Tibetan Snowcock, Alpine Accentor, Guldenstadt's Redstart, Henri's Snowfinch (recently confirmed by DNA studies to be not very closely related to Eurasian Snowfinch after all), and Brandt's & Plain Mountain Finches. Most importantly we would not want to pass up a chance to see the enigmatic, never guaranteed Tibetan Sandgrouse!

Blue Sheep are seen on most visits, occasionally in good numbers, while Snow Leopard, the superbly camouflaged top carnivore of these bleak uplands, is one to dream about. Mind you, dreams come true occasionally: we did see a Snow Leopard in this area in 1995!

Pushing on over the rather grim Bayankala pass (at nearly 5,000 m we're here on one of the highest roads in the world) we will eventually descend to the Yangtze and, a short way up a tributary, the town of Yushu. A combination of relatively oxygen-rich air and a general sense of satisfaction deriving from encounters amid grand scenery en route with new birds and mammals ensure that most teams arrive at colourful Yushu in high spirits...

4-9 Aug / DAYS 08-13: Before returning to Yushu we will have some five-and-a-half days in which to thoroughly comb this scenically superb corner of Tibet. Searching scrub, juniper thickets, spruce forest, alpine grassland, and wind-blown rocky summits we should see a range of very special birds: Szechenyi's Monal Partridge, Tibetan Snowcock, Tibetan Partridge, the

stunning White Eared Pheasant, Snow Pigeon, the weird, extremely retiring, and highly localized Kozlov's Babax, Giant Laughingthrush, Chinese Fulvetta, the distinctive Tibetan Magpie, Yellow-billed Chough, Tibetan Snowfinch, Pink-rumped, Eastern Great, Red-fronted & Przevalski's Rosefinches, and the startlingly pretty Kozlov's Bunting are all expected species.

Add a bit of luck and we should see the impressive Tibetan Grey Shrike, too.

Among the less localised species occurring here are Golden Eagle, Blue Hill Pigeon, Grey-headed & Black Woodpeckers, Salim Ali's Swift, Red-rumped Swallow, Asian House Martin, Olive-backed Pipit, White-throated Dipper (we'll be looking out for the all-brown morph in addition to 'normal' ones!), Rufous-browed & Brown Accentors, the superb Himalayan Rubythroat, Himalayan Red-flanked Bluetail, Hodgson's, White-throated and White-bellied Redstarts, Greenish, Buff-barred, 'Eastern' Lemon-rumped & *mandellii* Hume's Leaf Warblers, Slaty-backed Flycatcher, Elliot's Laughingthrush, Grey Crested, Rufous-vented & isolated *weigoldicus* Songar Tits, the recently split Hodgson's Treecreeper, the butterfly-ish red-grey-and-white Wallcreeper, Grey-backed Shrike, Red Crossbill, Daurian Jackdaw, White-winged Grosbeak, and Godlewski's Rock Bunting.

With luck we might also encounter one or more of the scarcer inhabitants of these secretive forests, incl. Severtzov's Grouse, Blood Pheasant, the isolated, certain-to-be-split *funnebris* Three-toed Woodpecker, Long-tailed Minivet, Maroon-backed Accentor, Long-tailed Thrush, Sooty Flycatcher (the distinctiveness of local race *rothschildi* strongly suggests that 'further research is needed'!), the erratic Tibetan Siskin, Three-banded Rosefinch, and the impressive, Pine Grosbeak-like Crimson-browed Finch.

The supremely beautiful Grandala, in summer a bird of the highest summits, may be only a scarce breeder but we'll scan at likely spots knowing that our efforts could well be rewarded with a sighting of one of the most striking birds of the Himalayan realm.

The presence of an apparently healthy population of Blue Sheep (we have seen as many as 150 in a day) suggests that eventually we'll come across their main predator, Snow Leopard. On one trip we were encouraged – as well as amused – by the reply given by a Tibetan herb gatherer when asked if he'd 'ever seen Snow Leopard here?' ... 'No. But I saw one over there once!', he said, indicating a spot at most 300m from where we were standing!

Ibisbills are usually present along the upper Mekong at Nangqian, and we have a fair chance of getting close enough to photograph one. Dense thickets of well-developed buckthorn exist along the river, and these can hold quite a few migrants in season; barring strays we may, however, have to be content with Kessler's Thrush coming in to feed, Rock Sparrow and Citrine Wagtails on the flats, Common Terns over the river, and Himalayan Griffons and Lammergeiers high above - few birds favour the buckthorn for breeding.

By the time we move on we will be in the privileged position of being familiar with most of the birds of this grand, truly 'end of the road' region.

10-11 Aug / DAYS 14-15: We'll take our time heading back to the Koko Nor region, traversing the remote 'Roof of the World' high plateau. Reaping the rewards of our disciplined acclimatization we have an excellent chance of enjoying an encounter with Tibetan Sandgrouse, endemic to Tibet and on the Hardest Bird in the World shortlist along with Emperor Penguin.

In this part of Asia the sought-after Saker remains hard to miss, and the highly variable Upland Buzzard, the heftiest of the Asian *Buteo*, is common.

As we approach Koko Nor we'll be on the lookout for the emblematic Chiru (= Tibetan Antelope) and the grey-flanked, well adapted Tibetan Fox.

12 Aug / DAY 16: A 'secret valley' above the desert W of Koko Nor offers comparatively easy access to the breeding habitat of the little-known Przevalski's Redstart – another Tibetan speciality, and arguably the loveliest of all the redstarts. Przevalski's Partridge, the taxonomically challenged Przevalski's Rosefinch, nowadays considered to represent a monotypic family (is it Rosefinch? is a Bunting? – good question, seeing that in the field it does not appear obviously close to either, with its graduated, blindingly pink tail, absurdly thin lower mandible, and a summertime habit of doing 'parachute' type songflights!), and *przevalskii* "Siberian" Stonechat are strong possibilities in the same area.

Most days birds of prey put on a good show – it is not too unusual to have up to 3-4 stately Lammergeiers around, and as many as 20-25 Himalayan Griffons gliding back and forth encouraging scrutiny of the full range of plumages: photographers take note!

We even have a sporting chance of locating Przevalski's Gazelle, one of the rarest mammals in the world!

Having completed our scenic walk we'll 'do' the desert in search of the localized Henderson's Ground-jay. It is prone to initially give visitors the run-around treatment but will often then perch up nicely on a tussock for prolonged views. Asian Short-toed Lark, Desert Wheatear, Mongolian Trumpeter Finch & *tsaidamensis* Isabelline Shrike are additional species to look for, and we may even find the pretty Desert Finch, here at the very limit of its range.

13 Aug / DAY 17: Today we will try for the sought-after Pallas's Sandgrouse (essentially a bird of the steppes of Central Asia east to Mongolia, its occasional irruptions – during which it may reach and breed in e.g. the British Isles – adds considerably to its charisma, making it a real Dreambird) is usually also reliable, despite its nomadic inclinations. We will be watching for any drink-flying groups, or it may be possible to find birds feeding warily amongst the scattered, wind-burnt clumps of grass. The burrowing Blanford's Snowfinches share this habitat – tiny birds in a vast landscape, but with a distinctive call which in the pure Tibetan air carries a surprising distance.

14-15 Aug / DAY 18-19: It is frequently possible to obtain outstanding views of birds on the scrub- & grass-covered slopes of the South Koko Nor Range, and during a full morning here we'll make a point of hanging out near a drinking spot – Chinese Beautiful & Eastern Great Rosefinches can be very obliging! The densest scrub is home to Tibetan Partridge, and its distinctive finger-along-a-comb call may give us a clue to where, exactly, to start searching.

Approximate tour price: *please enquire*

Tour costs are based on a group of ten people at summer 2013 levels and should be accurate to within 5%. A reasonable surcharge *may* apply if there are less than ten people in the group. Important cost factors include air fares, gas price, fees for permits & ‘official paperwork’, and rate of inflation.

The tour price is inclusive, covering internal flights (Beijing - Xining, Xining - Beijing), land transport, all meals w/ tea, all accommodation, necessary permits for Restricted Area sites and other paperwork, services of tour leader and drivers, and a contribution of @US\$200.- to Oriental Bird Club’s Conservation Fund.

Not included are international flights, any Beijing sightseeing expenses, travel insurance, drinks, any meals not taken with the group, and anything strictly personal (e g visa fees, laundry, phone calls, any excess luggage charges, snacks).

Single room is available throughout: a surcharge of *please enquire* will apply for anyone not sharing.

Group size: 6-10 participants (+JH)

Tour Start: Day zero will be Sunday 27 July 2014 / Day 21 will be Sunday 17 Aug 2014.

Transport: Internal flights will be economy class. Landcruiser or similar good 4WD vehicles will be used in Qinghai except around Xining.

Accommodation: ...considerably improved! We'll stay in comfortable hotels with private bath/toilet facilities on 19 nights. In addition we'll have a couple of nights in back-to-basics hostels (shared ‘facilities’ in the yard; ‘shower’ = water supplied w/ wash basin).

Food: All meals and tea are provided, during the day generally from roadside eating places or from our stock of provisions as appropriate to maximize time spent in the field, with the main meal of the day being in the evening at a restaurant attached to our hotel/hostel or very close by. We will make the most of what is available – and will make a point of eating well wherever possible: most people come away feeling ‘it’s not for nothing Chinese cuisine is so famous’ - but expect some meals away from Beijing and Xining to be on the simple side, if both tasty and nourishing.

The trip is suitable for vegetarians.

Weather: Often changeable, with blue skies alternating with overcast conditions. Some rain is likely, and we could even meet snow at the highest altitudes. Expect temperatures in the 0-25C range in Qinghai, and c30C (or maybe a bit more!) in Beijing - a windchill factor must be taken into account at high altitude.

Photography: We'll spend our time trying to *see* birds, but the keen photographer will find plenty of opportunity to make use of the often excellent light. Many birds rarely or never encounter human beings and can be remarkably approachable.

Note, however, that on some walks at high altitude participants are strongly discouraged from carrying "excess weight" in the form of tripod, 2nd camera, or spotting scope.

Health: *as much time will be spent above 3,000 m, with stops at passes at nearly 5,000 m and general birdwatching at altitudes up to c4,800 m it is of paramount importance that anyone with heart or respiratory ailment - or any other condition likely to be aggravated by altitude - seek medical advice before deciding to participate.*

Check e g http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/travel/diseases/altitude_sickness.htm for more information about health at altitude. Many tour participants have found the prescription drug Diamox helpful at altitude, and the benefits of *Rhodiola rosea* extract – available inexpensively in capsule form in China – are widely accepted: check e g http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodiola_rosea

Further, note that only the most basic medical facilities exist away from Xining and Beijing: all participants must accept the full implications of this.

However, anyone in general good health and reasonably fit should find that acclimatization is achieved within a few days of arrival, ensuring full enjoyment of this exciting journey.

Essential equipment: Rainproof jacket & ditto overtrousers; longjohns; waterproof hiking boots; woolen hat; gloves; sun hat; sun glasses; sunscreen lotion & ditto lip balm (protection factor 15-30 is necessary at high altitude); plenty of socks (dry socks are important when hiking, and there will be few opportunities to do any washing); plenty of chocolate & other favourite snacks/ energy food; lozenges; large water bottle (100C resistant); size >500ml drinking mug; small torch; ear plugs (possible sources of noise @ Chinese hotels include other guests, barking dogs, roosters, snoring room mates...); spoon & pocket knife.

Recommended: Sandals (doubles as bath slippers); wellingtons; towel; bar of soap; sleeping bag (quite useful as rooms can be chilly and the blankets/quilts while adequate can be uncomfortably heavy).

Dress code: please note that outer layers (including your headwear: no white or very pale sun hats!) must be in muted colours to reduce the risk of spooking e g those shy gamebirds.

Visa: in your visa application do not mention Tibet as this very likely will lead to wholly unnecessary entanglement in red tape: you need your visa only for entering the People's Republic of China – special permits relating to our itinerary are secured for us locally prior to our arrival.

Please note that your China visa will normally be valid for entry only within 90 days of issue date.

General note: Though all reasonable efforts will be made to stick to the itinerary this may not always be possible (or indeed desirable) due to circumstances beyond our control: a degree of flexibility is thus required, and participants must be adventurous and willing to put up with the rigours and discomforts inherent in travel in remote & culturally alien areas.

There will be no tented camps, and "trekking" is restricted to day hikes: emphasis will be on seeing birds, **not** on covering as many miles as possible on foot - however, the terrain is steep in places, and this, in combination with altitude, means that determination will on some occasions be required to reach the habitat we aim for.

Suggested reading:

Chang, Jung & Jon Halliday *Mao: the unknown story* ISBN 0-679-42271-4

French, Patrick *Tibet, Tibet*. ISBN 0 00 257109 9

French, Patrick *Younghusband. The Last Great Imperial Adventurer*. ISBN 0 00 637601 0

Grey-Wilson, Christopher & P Cribb *Guide to the Flowers of Western China* ISBN 978-1-84246-169-3

Hopkirk, Peter *The Great Game*. ISBN 0 19 282799 5

Hopkirk, Peter *Trespassers on the Roof of the World*. ISBN 0 19 285132 2

Rawicz, Slavomir *The Long Walk. The true story of a trek to freedom*. ISBN 1 84119 240 6 **BUT see***

Shakya, Tsering *The Dragon in the Lands of Snow*. ISBN 0 1401.9615 3

*) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/6098218.stm

Species list

P = possible, for harder-to-find / regularly missed species (+ vagrants recorded on previous trips in July/August). We normally see at least some of these. Please bear in mind that few species are absolutely unmissable!

For *potential* species please refer to text.

Severtzov's Hazel Grouse *Tetrastes sewerzowi* *P*

Verreaux's Monal Partridge *Tetraophasis obscurus* *P*

Szechenyi's Monal Partridge *Tetraophasis szechenyi*

?**Himalayan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus himalayensis*

Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

Przevalski's Partridge *Alectoris magna*

Daurian Partridge *Perdix dauurica*

Tibetan Partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae*

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* *P*

Japanese Quail *Coturnix japonica* *P*

Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

Blue Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon auritum* *P*

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* P

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* P

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* P

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Chinese Spotbill *Anas zonorhyncha* P

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Garganey *Anas querquedula* P

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* P

Smew *Mergellus albellus* P

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* P

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* P

Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* P

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* P

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* P

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* P

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* P

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* P

Great Egret *Ardea alba* P

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* P

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* P

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

Saker *Falco cherrug*

Peregrine *Falco peregrinus* P

Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides* P

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* P

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* P

Black Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* P

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*

Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus* P

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* P

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* P

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles* P

'Eastern' Common Buzzard *Buteo (buteo) japonicus* P

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*

?Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* P

Eastern Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* P

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* P

European Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* P

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* P

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* P

Common Coot *Fulica atra*

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* P

Common Crane *Grus grus* P

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Pied Avocet *Recurvirosta avosetta* P

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus* P

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* P

?**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

'**Spot-fronted**' **Sand Plover** *Charadrius atrifrons*

?**Lesser Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus*

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* P

?**Solitary Snipe** *Gallinago solitaria* P

Western Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* P

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* P

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* P

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* P

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* P

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* P

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*

Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*

Common Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* P

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* P

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* P

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* P

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* P

Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes thibetana* P
Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

Blue Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*
Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica* P
Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* P

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* P

?**Chinese Tawny Owl** *Strix nivicola*
Pere David's Owl *Strix davidi* P

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* P
Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* P

Common Swift *Apus apus*
?**Fork-tailed Swift** *Apus pacificus*
Salim Ali's Swift *Apus salimali*

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* P

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Northern Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* P

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus* P

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* P

Tiger Shrike *Lanius tigrinus* P
Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* P
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*
Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*
Chinese Grey Shrike *Lanius sphenocercus* P
Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius (s.) giganteus* P

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* P

'Eastern' Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus*

Common Magpie *Pica pica*

Tibetan Magpie *Pica (pica) bottanensis*

Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*

Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax*

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhonorax graculus*

Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus*

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* P

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

'Eastern' Great Tit *Parus minor*

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris*

Songar Tit *Parus songarus*

White-browed Tit *Parus superciliosus*

Grey Crested Tit *Parus dichrous*

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* P

Pale Sand Martin *Riparia diluta*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* P

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

Long-tailed (= 'Silver-throated') Tit *Aegithalos caudatus vinaceus* P

White-browed Tit-Warbler *Leptopoeile sophiae*

Crested Tit-Warbler *Leptopoeile elegans*

Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica*

Long-billed Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha maxima*

Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris*

Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis*

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* P

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula*

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

Spotted Bush Warbler *Bradypterus thoracicus* P

Chinese Bush Warbler *Bradypterus tacsanowskii* P

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

'Chinese' Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus (affinis) occisinensis*

Yellow-streaked Warbler *Phylloscopus armandii*

Buff-barred Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher*

Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

Chinese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus yunnanensis* P

'Eastern' Lemon-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus 'forresti'*

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

?Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* P

'Margelanian' Whitethroat *Sylvia 'margelanica'* P

Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis* P

Kozlov's Babax *Babax koslowi*

Pere David's Laughingthrush *Garrulax davidi*

Giant Laughingthrush *Garrulax maximus*

Elliot's Laughingthrush *Garrulax elliotii*

Chinese Fulvetta *Alcippe striaticollis* P

Bearded Tit *Panurus biarmicus* P

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Chinese Nuthatch *Sitta villosa*

Przevalski's Nuthatch *Sitta przewalskii*

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Hodgson's Treecreeper *Certhia hodgsoni*

Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus* P

White-cheeked Starling *Sturnus cineraceus* P

Long-tailed Thrush *Zoothera dixonii* P

?Chinese Blackbird *Turdus mandarinus*
?Tibetan Blackbird *Turdus maximus*
Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus*
Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri*
Chinese Song Thrush *Turdus mupinensis* P

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*
Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis*

Himalayan Red-flanked Blotail *Tarsiger rufilatus*
Northern Red-flanked Blotail *Tarsiger cyanurus*

Przevalski's Redstart *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*
White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps*
Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus auroreus* P
Guldenstadt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*
Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*

White-bellied Redstart *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides* P

Plumbeous Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosa* P

River Chat *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

Grandala *Grandala coelicolor* P

'Siberian' Stonechat *Saxicola 'torquatus'*

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* P
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* P
Eastern Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola philippensis* P

Sooty Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* P

?Yellow-rumped Flycatcher *Ficedula zanthopygia* P
Slaty-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula hodgsonii*

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans* P
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

Henri's Snowfinch *Montifringilla henrici*
Himalayan Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi*

White-rumped Snowfinch *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*

Pere David's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda davidiana*
Rufous-necked Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda ruficollis*
Blanford's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*
Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides*
Rufous-browed Accentor *Prunella strophiiata*
Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*
Maroon-backed Accentor *Prunella immaculata* P

Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* P

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* P
Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis* P
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* P
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*
?Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*
Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseus*
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* P

Tibetan Siskin *Serinus thibetanus* P

Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*
Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus* P
Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*

Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*
Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti*

Mongolian Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*

?Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*

Przevalski's Rosefinch *Urocynchramus pylzowi*
Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*
Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus davidianus*
Pink-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus eos*
Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus*
Three-banded Rosefinch *Carpodacus trifasciatus* P
Chinese White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus dubius*
Eastern Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilloides*
Spotted Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus severtzovi*

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Appendix:

2003 Trip summary

The just-finished OBC fundraising trip to NE Tibet brought together enthusiastic birders representing six countries, living on four continents.

We recorded a total of 204 species, a very respectable total given that we only spent a day and a half birding below 3,000m. It was in fact a trip of so many highlights that everyone was reluctant to name favourite birds at the end of the trip. The scenery, the mammals (incl. a couple of wolves, 200+ Blue Sheep, herds of up to 48 Kiang (= Tibetan Wild Ass), and a Mainland Serow), wildflowers of overwhelming beauty and diversity & an intriguing mix of local cultures combined with the avian wonders to produce a trip the memories of which will burn brightly for a long, long time.

Encounters which for me were particularly memorable were:

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

One adult right overhead in a deep gorge being hotly pursued by an adult Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, presumably the rightful owner of the smallish prey item dangling from the Lammergeier's talons. We saw about 25 Lammergeiers in total.

Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

Prolonged views of several adults with chicks included one parked up on a rock in good light for close to half an hour.

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

One of several encounters involved a covey of eight adults. Initially some distance above us, the birds helpfully glided down closer to us and started walking across the hillside directly in front of us, with one bird ending up perched in a juniper, preening as we enjoyed unobscured 'scope views in soft afternoon light. In total, we recorded nine species of gamebird on the trip.

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

Pairs with thriving, typically half-grown chicks were seen well in a number of places.

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

Of the 20+ birds recorded, two which allowed us to approach to <20m (our experienced drivers inching the cars-turned-hides forward so that everyone with a camera or digital video recorder got his/her chance) stood out. Also at the time, as they were feeding in a green meadow among yellow flowers exactly the shade of the head of the male Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* feeding less than a meter away, well away from the shingly river where Ibisbill's camouflage hues work so well.

Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes tibetanus*

A pair with a couple of still-downy chicks were seen and photographed at close range, upstaging several Pallas's Sandgrouse *S. paradoxus* seen equally well in rather different habitat a few days before.

Pere David's Owl *Strix (uralensis) davidi*

One found in the daytime near Nangqian was a real privilege.

White-bellied Redstart *Hodgsonius phoenicuroides*

Though widespread and fairly common, this species' retiring habits makes it a hard one to see (particularly in its wintering range), and everyone was pleased to eventually obtain superb views of a male perched up in the open.

Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

To some perhaps just one of nine *Phylloscopus* species recorded on the trip (the others being Greenish, Buff-barred, Lemon-rumped, Chinese, Hume's, Yellow-streaked, Dusky & Tickell's), but special in that it isn't recorded away from the areas covered on this trip: its wintering grounds remains undiscovered.

Crested Tit-warbler *Leptopoecile elegans*

Seeing this tiny gem feed quietly in late-afternoon sunlight produced many a quiet sigh of ornithological satisfaction...

Przevalski's Nuthatch *Sitta przewalskii*

An elusive species, but familiarity with its call helped, and we in the end enjoyed superb views of a pair feeding at eye level in medium-sized spruce trees.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus tsaidamensis*

Less common than previously in the areas covered (possibly through competition from Grey-backed Shrike *L. tephronotus*) so we were happy to see one adult attending a full-grown juvenile.

Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*

A charismatic species, and one which not surprisingly constituted a genus tick for almost everyone on the trip. One offered prolonged views, feeding (digging for lizzards, flipping-over a dry cowpad) whilst keeping a reasonable distance between us and it.

Hume's Ground-pecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*

A provider of endless fun and an overall favourite trip bird for several group members. Let's stick with the well-established and apt name for this species, shall we! – rather than something as flavour-less as Tibetan Ground Tit, or whatever the name-dreamers may be tempted to come up with in the light of DNA tests pointing to a relationship with *Paridae*...

Pere David's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda davidiana*

Post-breeding family parties coming in to drink, offering nice 'scope views, were more cooperative than a pair seen early in the trip, and more appreciated now that longer sessions with the other five species possible in this part of the world were "in the bag".

Spotted Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus severtzovi*

Repeated close-ups – a real beauty!

Red-fronted Rosefinch *C. puniceus*

Memorable close-ups – with some below eye level; otherwise typically a crag-loving species responsible for many a pain in the neck.

Roborovski's Rosefinch *Kozlowia roborowskii*

We had to work a bit harder for this enigmatic species – but in the end even our discerning team photographers were happy with the encounters.

Kozlov's Bunting *Emberiza kozłowi*

Half a dozen birds seen. An isolated and hard-to-get-to Restricted Range species, well worth the efforts, and arguably the Most Special Bird of the Trip.

Good birds also seen include **Severtzov's Grouse** *Bonasia sewerzowi*, **Szechenyi's Monal Partridge** *Tetraophasis szechenyii*, **Przevalski's Partridge** *Alectoris magna*, **Tibetan Partridge** *Perdix hodgsoniae*, **Blood Pheasant** *Ithaginis cruentus*, **Snow Pigeon** *Columba leuconota*, **Eagle Owl** *Bubo bubo*, **Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus*, **Long-billed Calandra & Mongolian Larks** *Melanocorypha maxima* & *M. mongolica*, **Maroon-backed Accentor** *Prunella immaculata*, **Himalayan & Siberian Rubythroats** *Luscinia calliope* & *L. pectoralis*, **Przevalski's Redstart** *Phoenicurus alashanicus*, **Kessler's Thrush** *Turdus kessleri*, **Southern Spotted Bush Warbler** *Bradypterus thoracicus*, **Desert Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia minula margelanica*, **Stoliczka's Tit-warbler** *Leptopoeile sophiae*, **Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis*, **Kozlov's Babax** *Babax kosłowi*, **Chinese Fulvetta** *Alcippe striaticollis*, **White-browed Tit** *Parus superciliosus*, **Chinese Nuthatch** *Sitta villosa*, **Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*, **Tibetan Grey Shrike** *Lanius (sphenocercus) giganteus*, **Brandt's Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte brandti*, **Mongolian Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes mongolicus*, **Pink-rumped, Sinai, Three-banded, White-browed & Eastern Great Rosefinches** *Carpodacus eos*, *C. synoicus*, *C. trifasciatus*, *C. thura* & *C. rubicilloides*, **Crimson-browed Finch** *Pinicola subhimachalus*, **Przevalski's Rosefinch** *Urocynchramus pylzowi*, **Grey-headed Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula erythaca*, **White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas carnipes* & **Meadow Bunting** *Emberiza cioides*.

2005 Trip summary :

The just-finished OBC fundraising trip to NE Tibet brought together enthusiastic birders representing three countries, living on two continents (three countries and two continents down from the 2003 team!).

We recorded a total of 222 species, a very respectable total given that we only spent a couple of days birding below 3,000m. It was a trip of so many highlights that everyone was hesitant to name favourite birds at the end of the trip. The scenery, the mammals (incl. a posse of four of wolves with ease hunting down a Tibetan Gazelle, plenty of Blue Sheep, 110 Kiang (= Tibetan Wild Ass), AND a superb Lynx), wildflowers of overwhelming beauty and diversity & an intriguing mix of local cultures combined with the avian wonders to produce a trip the memories of which will burn brightly for a long, long time.

Encounters which for me were particularly memorable were:

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

An adult causing a stir – among the group members as well as among the 100s of geese, duck & gulls present at a great, undoubtedly Ramsar class wetland which we visited twice.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

A synchronised flying display performed by an adult and a juvenile at about 200m distance. We logged 31 bird-days in total, with many individuals seen very well indeed.

Szechenyi's Monal Partridge *Tetraophasis szechenyii*

One bird came in in response to play-back, doing exaggerated, pumping head-bobs as it called back, ending up at <10m from one of us.

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

One of several encounters involved a covey of 15 adults and five chicks. Initially close but largely hidden in deep scrub, the birds helpfully started making their way across the hillside directly in front of us, intermittently calling. In total, we recorded nine species of gamebird on the trip.

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Always a good one to see. We enjoyed 20 spp of waders in a morning at Koko Nor.

Grey-headed Parakeet *Psittacula finschii*

A juvenile at Nangqian represented a 1st for Qinghai Province.

Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis*

After a number of false starts we finally all saw a male well. Even those of us who had seen the species previously considered it a serious contender for Bird of the Trip. As often happens, once the spell was broken we saw more – a drizzly morning even had a couple come off the side of the main road in front of Car 1!

Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

To some perhaps just one of nine *Phylloscopus* species recorded on the trip (the others being Greenish, Buff-barred, Lemon-rumped, Chinese, Hume's, Yellow-streaked, Dusky & Tickell's), but special in that it isn't recorded away from the areas covered on this trip: its wintering grounds remain undiscovered.

Przevalski's Nuthatch *Sitta przewalskii*

An elusive species, but familiarity with its call helped, and we repeatedly enjoyed superb scope views. 11 in a day must be a world record?

Hume's Ground-pecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*

A provider of endless fun and an overall favourite trip bird for several group members. Let's stick with the well-established and apt name for this species, shall we! – rather than something as flavour-less as Tibetan Ground Tit, or whatever the name-dreamers may be tempted to come up with in the light of DNA tests pointing to a relationship with *Paridae*...

We recorded no less than c370 bird-days.

Przevalski's Rosefinch *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

One that some of us were getting a bit worried about... but we found a nesting pair directly we entered the target area. Standing well back from the nest we all enjoyed great scope views of both birds. While the female continued to come and go, delivering food to the nest, the male remained on his perch for long minutes trying, we initially thought, to figure us out. More likely he was concerned about alarming Tickell's Leaf Warblers further down the hill; soon, in answer to our 'wonder what's up?', a Tibetan Grey Shrike (the third of the trip but the 1st ever on an often-worked hillside) treated us to a fly-by.

Kozlov's Bunting *Emberiza koslowi*

21 birds seen. An isolated and hard-to-get-to Restricted Range species, well worth the efforts, and arguably the Most Special Bird of the Trip.

Good birds also seen include **Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*, **Saker** *Falco cherrug*, **Severtzov's Grouse** *Bonasia sewerzowi*, **Tibetan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus tibetanus*, **Przevalski's Partridge** *Alectoris magna*, **Daurian & Tibetan Partridges** *Perdix dauurica* & *P. hodgsoniae*, **Blood Pheasant** *Ithaginis cruentus*, **Black-necked Crane** *Grus nigricollis*, **Ibisbill** *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* (looking so

much more at home in Tibet than on the last couple of acceptable stretches of river near Beijing!), **Mongolian & Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* & *C. leschenaultii*, **Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta*, **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *C. acuminata*, **Pintail Snipe** *Gallinago stenura*, **Terek Sandpiper** *Xenus cinereus*, **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*, **Pallas's Sandgrouse** *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, **Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus*, **Long-billed Calandra & Mongolian Lark** *Melanocorypha maxima* & *M. mongolica*, **Pale Sand Martin** *Riparia diluta*, **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii*, **Maroon-backed Accentor** *Prunella immaculate*, **Przevalski's Redstart** *Phoenicurus alashanicus*, **Chestnut, Kessler's & Chinese Song Thrushes** *Turdus rubrocanus*, *T. kessleri* & *T. mupinensis*, **Desert Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia (minula) margelanica* **Stoliczka's & Crested Tit-warblers** *Leptopoeile sophiae* & *L. elegans*, **Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis*, **Kozlov's Babax** *Babax koslowi*, **Giant Laughingthrush** *Garrulax maximus*, **Chinese Fulvetta** *Alcippe striaticollis*, **White-browed Tit** *Parus superciliosus*, **Chinese Nuthatch** *Sitta villosa*, **Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*, **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus*, **Tibetan Magpie** *Pica bottanensis*, **Henderson's Ground Jay** *Podoces hendersoni*, six species of **Snowfinch**, **Tibetan Siskin** *Carduelis thibetana*, **Plain & Brandt's Mountain Finches** *Leucosticte nemoricola* & *L. brandti*, **Mongolian Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes mongolicus*, **Sinai, Three-banded** *Carpodacus synoicus* & *C. trifasciatus* & **Roborovski's Rosefinches** *Kozlowia roborowskii*, **Crimson-browed Finch** *Pinicola subhimachalus*, **Grey-headed Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula erythaca*, **White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas carinceps*, and **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos*.

2006 Trip summary

The OBC fundraising trip to NE Tibet ended on 27 August. It brought together enthusiastic birders representing three countries living on as many continents.

Including a few picked up before breakfast on the last morning in Beijing we recorded a total of 203 species, a very respectable total given that we only spent two days and a half birding below 3,000m. It was in fact a trip of so many highlights that everyone was reluctant to name favourite birds at the end of the trip. The scenery, the mammals (incl. a couple of wolves, 250+ Blue Sheep, herds of Kiang (= Tibetan Wild Ass), four Goitred Gazelle, and several cute Stoliczka's Mountain Voles), abundant wildflowers of bewildering beauty and diversity, and an intriguing mix of local cultures combined with the avian wonders to produce a trip the memories of which will burn brightly for a long, long time.

Encounters which for me were particularly memorable were:

Szechenyi's Monal Partridge *Tetraophasis szechenyi*

7+ bird-days. On 19th we spent time trying to see three vocal groups of this at times uncooperative species before flushing three birds – “nice tail-band!”, and that, we thought, was that: not ideal, but better, a lot better, than no views at all... THEN one bird was relocated up in the tree we'd concluded it had flown through, and with a bit of care the scope was placed so that we could all enjoy extended, unobscured views, feather-by-feather.

Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

10+ bird-days. Noted on two dates. On 14th repeated calls helped us localize one bird fairly easily but somehow it evaporated from the 'scope field-of-view and it then took us an agonizingly long time, and several moves, before everyone had finally seen one properly.

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

36+ bird-days. Noted on four dates. 16+ (= two groups of four adults w/ 3+ & 5+ chicks, respectively, in close proximity) on 17th was exactly what we'd hoped for, and their timely appearance allowed us to change the day's 'battle plan' slightly, which in turn produced a group of Blood Pheasants. Later, rounding off our visit to the Mekong watershed nicely, up to 18 adults were seen repeatedly in the course of the morning of 22nd.

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

A superb adult perched on a fence post S of Maduo on 24th. Tingaling!

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

26 bird-days. Noted on 11 dates. A top Dreambird for several group members, this emblematic species was not devalued by several superb encounters... one landed on the ground <100m from our vehicle on 21st.

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

31 bird-days. Noted on four dates. Superb views on several occasions, but to our dismay just one juvenile was seen (near of Maduo on 24th).

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

A superb encounter with a pair W of Koko Nor – 'scoped at c80m. Such camouflage! Such charisma!

Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo*

One frame-filler under a rock overhang near the Yangtze on 15th. Another long-wished-for life bird for several group members – tingaling!

Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius (sphenocercus) giganteus*

One put on a good show near Nangqian on 22nd. A low-density species, wide-ranging and often inconspicuous even when present (and thus easily missed), we were fortunate to see this individual so well and enjoyed it all the more for having drawn blanks at two other sites.

Crested Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile elegans*

20 bird-days. Noted on four dates. Two males at Nangqian forest reserve sat out at <10m trying to figure us out, allowing team photographers to 'shoot' away. This is not often one gets a chance to check the iris colour of this species! – I leafed through the dictionary and two Birdquest brochures in search of a superlative which fully does this jewel justice, in vain...

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*

Eight bird-days. Noted on four dates. Prolonged views of one at <10m next to the vehicles at the Ibisbill spot on 23rd was a trip highlight... flying below us in perfect sunlight, then feeding on lichen-blotched boulders in the stream, popping in and out of view.

Przevalski's Redstart *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*

12 birds (= three family parties) in mountains W of Koko Nor – we'd barely caught our breath before the 1st superb male appeared, and throughout a memorable morning we were treated to close-up encounters with this sought-after, very pretty species.

Sooty Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica rothschildi* & *M. s. sibirica*

19 bird-days. 1-10 noted daily at Nangqian forest reserve, where obliging members of family parties time and again lured the team photographers away from the group... At Beijing, a juvenile ssp *sibirica* sat out nicely on a dead branch.

***Work on vocalizations may well lead to suggestions that the distinctive *rothschildi* be elevated to full species status...

Henri's Snowfinch *Montifringilla henrici*

c391 bird-days. Except for two on 24th seen only at Er La, where 355 on 25th was a surprise – of these, 298 flew S (14 flocks / groups of 2-41 birds, all but three birds passed before 08h00) on what appeared to be straightforward migration. As we were not ideally positioned the whole time it is likely that we missed a number of flocks: as many as twice the number we recorded may have passed.

Maroon-backed Accentor *Prunella immaculata*

20 bird-days. Noted daily at Nangqian forest reserve with a daily max of 16. Often a tough bird to see well, but this year we were astonished to find a post-breeding gathering of more than a dozen associating with good numbers of other passerines (including a furtive Crimson-browed Finch) near a rare trickle of water.

Three-banded Rosefinch *Carpodacus trifasciatus*

12 bird-days. 2-5 daily at Nangqian forest reserve. A retiring species, but we found it well worth the trouble to track down calling birds...

Other good birds seen include **Saker** *Falco cherrug*, **Severtzov's Grouse** *Bonasia sewerzowi*, **Przevalski's Partridge** *Alectoris magna*, **Tibetan Partridge** *Perdix hodgsoniae*, **Blood Pheasant** *Ithaginis cruentus*, **Ibisbill** *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* (looking so much more at home in Tibet than on the last couple of acceptable stretches of river near Beijing!), **Mongolian Plover** *Charadrius mongolus*, **Pintail Snipe** *Gallinago stenura*, **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*, **Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus*, **Long-billed Calandra & Mongolian Lark** *Melanocorypha maxima* & *M. mongolica*, **Pale Sand Martin** *Riparia diluta*, **Blyth's Pipit** *Anthus godlewskii*, **Chestnut & Kessler's Thrushes** *Turdus rubrocanus* & *T. kessleri*, **Himalayan Red-flanked Bluntail** *Tarsiger rufilatus*, **Guldenstadt's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*, **Gansu Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus kansuensis* (as well as eight other *Phylloscopus* warblers) **'Margelanic' Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia (minula) margelanica*, **Stoliczka's Tit-warbler** *Leptopoeile sophiae*, **Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis*, **Kozlov's Babax** *Babax koslowi*, **Giant Laughingthrush** *Garrulax maximus*, **Chinese Fulvetta** *Alcippe striaticollis*, **White-browed Tit** *Parus superciliosus*, **Chinese & Przevalski's Nuthatches** *Sitta villosa* & *S. przewalskii*, **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus*, **Tibetan Magpie** *Pica bottanensis*, **Henderson's Ground Jay** *Podoces hendersoni*, **Hume's Groundpecker** *Pseudopodoces humilis*, five additional species of **Snowfinch**, **Plain & Brandt's Mountain Finches** *Leucosticte nemoricola* & *L. brandti*, **Desert Finch** *Rhodospiza obsoleta*, **Sinai** *Carpodacus synoicus* & **Roborovski's Rosefinches** *Kozlowia roborowskii*, **Crimson-browed Finch** *Pinicola subhimachalus*, **Grey-headed Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula erythaca*, **White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas carniceps*, and **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos*.

2008 trip summary:

The 2008 OBC Fundraiser to NE Tibet ended on 15 June. It brought together enthusiastic birders representing five countries: J Adamson, N Birch, R Birch, P French, A Kelly, J Newman, D O'Mahony, J Penhallurick, A Short, B short & myself - a good time was had by all.

We recorded 230 species of birds (counting a few picked up in the Beijing hotel gardens on the mornings of 25 May & 15 June would bring the total to c240) and 22 species of mammals. Given that we only spent a couple of days birding below 3,000m this is approximately as many as we could have hoped for. It was a trip of so many highlights that everyone was hesitant to name favourite birds at the end of the trip. The scenery, the weather, the mammals (incl. three Wolves, a number of Tibetan Foxes, 2-3 enigmatic Pallas' Cats, two Otters, 244 Kiang (= Tibetan Wild Ass), White-lipped Deer, Goitred Gazelles, up to 100+ Blue Sheep in a day, AND a superb Brown Bear with three cubs), wildflowers of overwhelming beauty and diversity & an intriguing mix of local cultures combined with the avian wonders to produce a trip the memories of which will burn brightly for a long, long time.

Encounters which for me were particularly memorable were:

Szechenyi's Monal Partridge *Tetraophasis szechenyi*

24+ bird-days. Extended views of two at close range (<15m) on 8th was about as much as we could cope with - a well-earned reward for putting in the mileage in pursuit of this attractive species.

Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

13-15+ bird-days. Noted on three dates... nothing like arriving at a high pass on a fine morning to find the pure air resounding with the in turns clucking and curlew-ey calls of this snowline specialist.

Przevalski's Partridge *Alectoris magna*

A bit of motivation was needed to get them this year but we did, and what views! TINGALING...

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

30 bird-days. Noted on four dates - we'd been out of the vehicles at the designated spot for barely 15 seconds before the first calls were heard, and then it was mostly a matter of scanning diligently.

Saker *Falco cherrug*

17 bird-days.

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

36 bird-days. A top Dreambird for several group members, this emblematic species was not devalued by several superb encounters...

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*

10-11 bird-days. Formerly considered a race of COMMON BUZZARD B. buteo but genetically closer to UPLAND BUZZARD B. hemilasius (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005) from which it is ecologically separated & easily - well, fairly easily! - distinguished... Superb views on several occasions!

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

A flock of ten at a well-timed stop at Koko Nor on 28th - the birds did a bit of standing around and a bit of dancing before flying past us at <50m: very much a bonus bird as this time of the year!

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

41 bird-days.

Ibisbill *Ibidorhycha struthersii*

Ten bird-days. Looking so much more at home in Tibet than on the last couple of acceptable stretches of river near Beijing the species posed for the cameras more than once...

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

An adult at Koko Nor on 28th.

***Possibly only the 2nd modern record for Tibet: three adults at the Golmud reservoirs on 5 June 1992 (JH pers obs) was the 1st.

Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes thibetana*

Four birds near Er La pass. The first two flew past us even before we'd reached the main target area, calling repeatedly and showing the diagnostic nearly all-black underwing 'under the sun' before dropping to become nearly impossibly to get on against a snow-flecked hillside... thus a couple of hours of agony for our top lister, but soon enough we were all watching another bird. WOW!

Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius (sphenocercus) giganteus*

One put on a good show W of Koko Nor on 29th. A low-density species, wide-ranging and often inconspicuous even when present (and thus easily missed), we were fortunate to see this individual so well.

Crested Tit-warbler *Leptopoecile elegans*

Eight bird-days. Noted on four dates. To say that this species does not draw attention to itself is hardly an exaggeration... our patience was, however, amply rewarded: I've leafed through the dictionary and two Birdquest brochures in search of a superlative which fully does this jewel justice, in vain...

Chinese Bush Warbler *Bradypterus tacsanowskii*

Two singing at edge of cultivation N of Xining on 27th was a bonus - we were able to 'scope one of them as it sat in the open giving its 'faulty high-voltage insulator' buzz.

Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

To some perhaps just one of ten *Phylloscopus* species recorded on the trip (the others being Dusky, Tickell's, Yellow-streaked, Buff-barred, Chinese, Lemon-rumped, Hume's, Arctic & Greenish), but special in that it isn't recorded away from the areas covered on this trip: its wintering grounds remains undiscovered.

Kozlov's Babax *Babax koslowi*

Noted on four dates. Occupying a restricted range this was one of our main targets. Often a rather tricky one to dig out but this time the species could hardly have surrendered itself more easily: everyone got memorable views as two birds fed in the open.

Giant Laughingthrush *Garrulax maximus*

62 bird-days. Noted on five dates, the resounding calls of this often excitable species dominate the morning chorus in the forests of SE Qinghai and throughout the day pairs will announce their presence across the slopes by bursts of calling.

Przevalski's Nuthatch *Sitta przewalskii*

Noted on three dates. A pair near Xining on 26th allowed our team photographers to go to work as the rest of us stood back a couple of paces, enjoying prolonged 'scope views.

Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis*

Although very much an expected species we initially struggled to get satisfactory views of a satisfactory individual but with the trip barely begun it was too soon to panic, and sure enough we managed no less than 26-27 singing males in a morning later on, several of which sat out to the delight of camera-wielding team members.

Przevalski's Redstart *Phoenicurus alashanicus*

Five males & three females. We'd barely caught our breath before the 1st superb male appeared, and throughout a fine morning we were treated to close-up encounters with this sought-after, very pretty species.

Grandala *Grandala coelicolor*

A nest-building pair close to the N edge of the species' known range very early in the trip. 'Grandala Blue' may not be in your dictionary but it should be - no named shade captures the glowing colour of the male of this sought-after species.

Przevalski's Rosefinch *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

Three bird-days. Excellent views of a couple of males... Increasingly considered to represent a monotypic family!

Roborovski's Rosefinch *Kozlowia roborowskii*

20 bird-days. Noted on no less than four dates.

Kozlov's Bunting *Emberiza koslowi*

Two pairs S of Yushu on 9th - TINGALING!

Good birds also seen include **Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*, **Severtzov's Grouse** *Bonasia sewerzowi*, **Daurian & Tibetan Partridges** *Perdix dauurica* & *P. hodgsoniae*, **Blood Pheasant** *Ithaginis cruentus*, **Mongolian Sand Plover** *Charadrius mongolus*, **Great Black-headed Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*, **Pallas' Sandgrouse** *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, **Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picooides tridactylus* (of the possibly to-be-split *funnebris* 'race'), **Long-billed Calandra & Mongolian Larks** *Melanocorypha maxima* & *M. mongolica*, **Pale Sand Martin** *Riparia diluta*, **Maroon-backed Accentor** *Prunella immaculate*, **Chestnut & Kessler's Thrushes** *Turdus rubrocanus* & *T. kessleri*, **'Margelanic' Desert Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia (minula) margelanica*, **Stoliczka's Tit-Warbler** *Leptopoecile sophiae*, **Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis dedekeni*, **Chinese Fulvetta** *Alcippe striaticollis*, **White-browed Tit** *Parus superciliosus*, **Chinese Nuthatch** *Sitta villosa*, **Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*, **Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus*, **Tibetan Magpie** *Pica bottanensis*, **Henderson's Ground Jay** *Podoces hendersoni*, six species of **Snowfinch**, **Plain & Brandt's Mountain Finches** *Leucosticte nemoricola* & *L. brandti*, **Mongolian Trumpeter Finch** *Bucanetes mongolicus*, **Sinai & Three-banded Rosefinches** *Carpodacus synoicus* & *C. trifasciatus*, **Crimson-browed Finch** *Pinicola subhimachalus*, **Grey-headed Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula erythaca*, **White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas carniceps*, and **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos*.

2009 trip summary:

The just-finished 2009 OBC Fundraiser trip to NE Tibet brought together enthusiastic birders from three continents, representing six countries: B Beers, R Hoff, K Kjellberg, P Los, D Melville, V Melville, D Myers, P Rostron, D Sargeant, G Tebb & myself. A good time was had by all!

This posting will be of particular interest to [OB] readers and Oriental Bird Club members who are considering the 2010 OBC Fundraiser trip to the same area, scheduled for the same three-week slot.

We recorded 225 species of birds in Qinghai, and mammals such as **ASSAM MACAQUE** *Macaca assamensis*, **GLOVER'S PIKA** *Ochotona gloveri*, **PALLAS' CAT** *Felis manul*, **WOLF** *Canis lupus*, **TIBETAN FOX** *Vulpes ferrilata*, **KIANG** *Equus kiang*, **GOITERED GAZELLE** *Gazella subgutturosa* & **BLUE SHEEP** *Pseudois nayaur*.

The birds, the mammals, the butterflies & dragonflies, the scenery (at this time of the year in many places blanketed in wildflowers), a stimulating mix of local cultures, enjoyable food & comfortable - from 'OK' to 'surprisingly good' - accommodations all came together to produce a trip the more memorable for the region - though in many ways an indisputable 'must' destination for anyone hooked on Palearctic and/or Asian birds - being under-visited by birdwatchers.

Among the highlights / my personal favourites / most interesting records were:

SEVERTZOV'S GROUSE *Tetrastes sewerzowi*

A male absolutely performed for the group at Nangqian forest reserve!

TIBETAN SNOWCOCK *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

No less than 22 in a day - an in many way classic encounter: we were positioned (holding the proverbial cup of coffee!) well before the birds came out of roost and started calling, then watched them fly off down the hill where they were soon refound and watched for a long while as they squabbled, herded-in their chicks, and kept up constant calling.

COMMON QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix*

The first record - as far as I am aware - for NE Tibet for five years.

WHITE EARED PHEASANT *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

Noted on three dates - main event eight on 28th: 'we were positioned (holding the proverbial cup of coffee!) well before the birds came out of roost and started calling'... maybe due to the dawn chill many birds in Tibet are not very early risers so being in place before they appear frequently does not preclude keeping quite reasonable hours!

YELLOW BITTERN *Ixobrychus sinensis*

A bonus bird on any Tibet trip - we saw five when we turned a Force Majeure change of plan to our advantage. One of them was a 1st c-y, presumably hatched locally.

AMUR FALCON *Falco amurensis*

A 2nd c-y female on a wire - seen well, and considered a great bonus not least by some of our high-listing group members.

SAKER *Falco cherrug*

14 bird-days.

LAMMERGEIER *Gypaetus barbatus*

18 bird-days. Noted on no less than nine dates & frequently seen at close range.

BLACK-NECKED CRANE *Grus nigricollis*

26 bird-days. Noted on four days... WOW!

PINTAIL SNIPE *Gallinago stenura*

One flying over at Koko Nor on 22nd was early indeed - in previous years returning migrants have been recorded no earlier than 1 Aug.

LONG-TOED STINT *Calidris subminuta*

Two adults put on a good show at Koko Nor on 22nd.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER *Calidris acuminata*

One adult at Koko Nor on 7th - not seen particularly well but nonetheless a pleasing find.

GREAT BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ichthyæetus*

Noted on five dates - c50 approachable ('anyone got a spare memory card?') adults on a stream was a trip highlight.

CASPIAN TERN *Sterna caspia*

One adult at Koko Nor on 7th - possibly the 1st record for Tibet.

PERE DAVID'S OWL *Strix davidi*

Noted on two dates at Nangqian forest reserve - persistence paid off on 31st when a roosting bird was located towards the end of the day.

TIBETAN GREY SHRIKE *Lanius giganteus*

Three bird-days - noted on two dates.

WHITE-BROWED TIT *Parus superciliosus*

13+ bird-days. This attractive endemic was noted on five dates - on 22nd gentle pishing attracted a family party, allowing KK to obtain photos at <2m!

LONG-TAILED TIT *Aegithalos caudatus*

35+ in a day!

***ssp *vinaceus* has been floated as a possible split but this idea was firmly booh'd by group members.

CRESTED TIT-WARBLER *Leptopocile elegans*

36+ bird-days. Noted on five dates - on 2nd a group of at least six birds 'delayed' us in the most memorable way: a couple of males sitting out in perfect light at <10m, females feeding in nuthatchey fashion... TINGALING!

***Typically not a species that draws attention to itself - however, patience and persistence can be amply rewarded... I've leafed through the dictionary and two Birdquest brochures in search of a superlative which fully does justice to this jewel, but in vain.

CHINESE HILL WARBLER *Rhopophilus pekinensis*

This enigmatic species made a rare appearance on a NE Tibet trip list with an active and comparatively showy group of 3+ seen.

SPOTTED BUSH WARBLER *Bradypterus thoracicus*

No less than six singing (incl two seen well) N of Xining on 20th was a bit of a bonus.

GANSU LEAF WARBLER *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

16 bird-days. This localised breeder (with as yet undiscovered wintering grounds) was seen well.
***An additional eight *Phylloscopus* spp were recorded...

'MARGELANIC' LESSER WHITETHROAT *Sylvia (minula) margelanica*

One was seen well on 24th (where two were present in early June) - a somewhat obscure taxon...

KOZLOV'S BABAX *Babax kozłowi*

13 bird-days. Noted on four dates - we got superb views of the localised endemic on more than one occasion.

CHINESE FULVETTA *Alcippe striaticollis*

3+ seen well at Nangqian forest reserve - a pleasant surprise as we'd been unable to find any on our visits earlier in the season...

PRZEVALSKI'S NUTHATCH *Sitta przewalskii*

10 bird-days - on the hypothetical Bird of the Trip shortlist!

KESSLER'S THRUSH *Turdus kessleri*

79+ bird-days. This emblematic species was noted on nine dates.

PRZEVALSKI'S REDSTART *Phoenicurus alashanicus*

Eight bird-days W of Koko Nor... Noone argued against my only-half-in-jest assertion that this is the prettiest member of the genus: WOW!

GULDENSTADT'S REDSTART *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

23 bird-days. Noted on five dates this extremely attractive high-mountain specialist put on a good show for us.

GRANDALA *Grandala coelicolor*

A pair led us on on the 1st longish stroll of the trip, eventually rewarding us with nice views. Later on the trip a group of six birds disappeared around a corner, disappointingly not to reappear...

RUFOUS-NECKED SNOWFINCH *Pyrgilauda ruficollis*

130+ bird-days. This pretty bird was noted on the High Plateau on six dates.
***An additional five species of Snowfinch, all those possible, were seen well on the trip...

MAROON-BACKED ACCENTOR *Prunella immaculate*

26 bird-days. Noted on three dates - this retiring species was seen well in above-average numbers...

MONGOLIAN TRUMPETER FINCH *Bucanetes mongolicus*

Eight W of Koko Nor on 24th - a rather unpredictable species but this time found without undue effort.

PRZEVALSKI'S ROSEFINCH *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

Four birds were found near Koko Nor - seen extremely well & even noted doing its famed parachute display flight... Now considered to represent a monotypic family this pretty bird can prove hard to find.

RED-FRONTED ROSEFINCH *Pyrrhospiza punicea*

15+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.

ROBOROVSKI'S ROSEFINCH *Kozlowia roborowskii*

8-9 bird-days. Noted on three dates...

***A total of ten species of Rosefinch was recorded on the trip!

KOZLOV'S BUNTING *Emberiza koslowi*

14 bird-days. Only when this highly localised endemic is 'in the bag' does anyone allow themselves a sigh of relief and a pleasant 1st taste of 'we've done it!'. And did we do it!! Superb views and ditto photo opportunities of adult males, adult females & fledged juveniles.

Other good birds seen include **SZECHENYI'S MONAL PARTRIDGE** *Tetraophasis szechenyi*, **PRZEVALSKI'S PARTRIDGE** *Alectoris magna*, **DAURIAN & TIBETAN PARTRIDGES** *Perdix dauurica* & *P. hodgsoniae*, **BLOOD PHEASANT** *Ithaginis cruentus*, **HIMALAYAN GRIFFON** *Gyps himalayensis*, **BLACK VULTURE** *Aegypius monachus*, **HIMALAYAN & UPLAND BUZZARDS** *Buteo burmanicus* & *B. hemilasius*, **IBISBILL** *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*, **PALLAS' SANDGROUSE** *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, **SNOW PIGEON** *Columba leuconota*, **RED TURTLE DOVE** *Streptopelia decaocto*, **EURASIAN EAGLE OWL** *Bubo bubo*, **TIBETAN MAGPIE** *Pica bottanensis*, **HENDERSON'S GROUND JAY** *Podoces hendersoni*, **HUME'S GROUNDPECKER** *Pseudopodoces humilis*, **PALE SAND MARTIN** *Riparia diluta*, **'WHITE-BROWED' TIT-WARBLER** *Leptopoeile sophiae*, **MONGOLIAN & LONG-BILLED CALANDRA LARKS** *Melanocorypha mongolica* & *M. maxima*, **HUME'S SHORT-TOED LARK** *Calendrella acutirostris*, **CHINESE LEAF WARBLER** *Phylloscopus yunnanensis*, **SPOT-BREASTED SCIMITAR-BABBLER** *Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis*, **GIANT LAUGHINGTHRUSH** *Garrulax maximus*, **CHINESE NUTHATCH** *Sitta villosa*, **HODGSON'S TREECREEPER** *Certhia (familiaris) hodgsoni*, **LONG-TAILED THRUSH** *Zoothera dixonii*, **CHINESE SONG THRUSH** *Turdus mupinensis*, **HIMALAYAN RUBYTHROAT** *Luscinia pectoralis*, **WHITE-BELLIED REDSTART** *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides*, **SOOTY FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa sibirica rothschildi*, **ROBIN & RUFOUS-BROWED ACCENTORS** *Prunella rubeculoides* & *P. strophiiata*, black-backed **CITRINE WAGTAIL** *Motacilla citreola calcarata*, **ROSY PIPIT** *Anthus roseus*, **PLAIN & BRANDT'S MOUNTAIN FINCHES** *Leucosticte nemoricola* & *L. brandti*, **CRIMSON-BROWED FINCH** *Pinicola subhimachala*, **WHITE-WINGED GROSBEAK** *Mycerobas carinceps*, and **PINE & MEADOW BUNTINGS** *Emberiza leucocephalos* & *E. cioides*.

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2011 trip summary:

M Campbell, M Chalmers, T Ford, J Holmes, I Robinson, J Scott, G Sellappan, M Watelet, D White, K White & myself visited NE Tibet, China's Qinghai province, during 8-27 August 2011. It was the 6th Oriental Bird Club Fundraiser trip in this area (another three have targeted even more seriously under-visited Yunnan province, China's biologically richest). This year we followed an updated itinerary: as in the past we had allowed plenty of time to ensure that all specialities could be properly searched for – but this year, if all went well, we'd be seeing **TIBETAN SANDGROUSE** *Syrrhaptes tibetana* whilst having coffee (or tea!) next to the cars!

We recorded 224 species of birds & mammals such as **LYNX** *Lynx lynx*, **WOLF** *Canis lupus*, **TIBETAN FOX** *Vulpes ferrilata*, **TIBETAN WILD ASS (= KIANG)** *Equus kiang*, **WILD YAK** *Bos grunniens*, **PRZEVALSKI'S GAZELLE** *Procapra przewalskii* (world population <500 individuals!), a superbly weird **CHINESE SEROW** *Capricornis milneedwardsii*, the emblematic **TIBETAN ANTELOPE** *Pantholops hodgsonii*, and plenty of rock-loving **BLUE SHEEP** *Pseudois nayaur*.

The birds, the mammals, the butterflies & dragonflies, the unbeatable scenery (at this time of the year in many places blanketed in wildflowers), a stimulating mix of local cultures, wonderful food, comfortable - from 'OK' to 'surprisingly good' - accommodations & (not least) the companionship all came together to produce a trip the more memorable for the region region - though in many ways an indisputable 'must' destination for anyone hooked on Palearctic and/or Asian birds - being so under-visited by birdwatchers.

Among the highlights / my personal favourites / most interesting records were:

SZECHENYI'S MONAL PARTRIDGE *Tetraophasis szechenyi*

20+ bird-days. Noted on two dates – a family of five proved very cooperative on 19th, granting our team photographers plenty of chances to get it just right.

TIBETAN SNOWCOCK *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

21 bird-days. Noted on three dates – a pair with three half-grown chicks allowed prolonged 'scoping as they fed unconcerned below towering cliffs at c4,500m on 17th.

BLOOD PHEASANT *Ithaginis cruentus*

22 bird-days. Noted on three dates – a pair w/ three very small chicks on 17th were especially memorable.

WHITE EARED PHEASANT *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

56+ bird-days. Noted on four dates – seeing seven adults w/ six tiny, dark brown chicks on 15th was a treat.

SAKER *Falco cherrug*

33 bird-days. Noted on no less than six dates – outstanding views on several occasions: we'd been feeling a bit jinxed but then came across an adult on a telegraph post. It flew off, but returned to a post further along with a pika it had caught with so little effort that we hadn't even noticed – we approached it slowly, and were able to watch from <20m away as it proceeded to pluck its prey, fluffs of wool drifting slowly to the ground, as the team photographers made the most of the superb light enhanced by a backdrop of grey cloud.

LAMMERGEIER *Gypaetus barbatus*

34 bird-days. Noted on ten dates – there were plenty of chances to simply enjoy this charismatic species...on 17th we were first treated to views of a bone-dropping 1st/2nd c-y bird: it landed in view at reasonable range, and we were able to ‘scope it as it dealt with what anatomically competent team members judged to be a rib - then another bird appeared as if on cue just as someone uttered the word ‘Lammergeier’: a fine adult which proceeded to circle directly overhead to the delight of the team photographers: a BINGO!

HIMALAYAN BUZZARD *Buteo burmanicus*

Five bird-days. Noted on two dates.

***Formerly considered a race of COMMON BUZZARD *B. buteo* but genetically closer to UPLAND BUZZARD *B. hemilasius* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005) from which it is ecologically separated & easily - well, fairly easily! - distinguished...

BLACK-NECKED CRANE *Grus nigricollis*

72 bird-days. Noted on seven dates – this hardy yet vulnerable (and ‘Vulnerable’:

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/143783/0>) Tibetan Plateau endemic breeder was one of the most hoped-for species, and it was cheering to see several pairs accompanied by thriving chicks.

IBISBILL *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

13 bird-days. Noted on six dates... Somehow, Ibisbills seen in Tibet feeding on a flowered-over meadow or (as our 1st pair was) ‘frozen’ against a rushing, icy stream – with Red-billed Choughs cawing, Blue Hill Pigeons cooing, Pere David’s Laughingthrushes meowing & domestic yaks snorting in the background - are more REAL than the sad one or two which still attempt to cling on along the last stretch of barely acceptable water close to Beijing in competition with sickly-looking domestic ducks!

TIBETAN SANDGROUSE *Syrrhaptes tibetana*

A pair w/ three week-old chicks was seen and photographed on 21st.

SALIM ALI’S SWIFT *Apus salimali*

159+ bird-days. This ‘new’ species was identified on eight dates, incl W of Koko Nor on 25th.

COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis*

One at Koko Nor on 26th – Apparently there are <10 previous records from the Tibetan Plateau – the species is, however, regular along the Yellow River SSE of Xining (JH pers obs).

THREE-TOED WOODPECKER *Picoides tridactylus funebris*

Three bird-days. Noted on two dates – memorable ‘scope views of a pair on territory near the treeline...

***“Taxonomy: needs re-evaluation. Nearctic and Palearctic races recently split into two species, *P. dorsalis* and *P. tridactylus*, without discussion of status of the very distinct *funebris*.”: Rasmussen & Anderton (2005).

TIBETAN GREY SHRIKE *Lanius giganteus*

Single birds were noted on four dates – on 17th the additional time granted to photograph one approachable individual proved a sound investment as camera-less group members spotted a family of Tibetan Snowcocks during the interlude!

HUME'S GROUNDPECKER *Pseudopodoces humilis*

249+ bird-days. This charming high-altitude specialist was noted on 16 dates.

***Apparently most closely related to *Paridae* (Dickinson 2003) but please let us do our bit to avoid a newly concocted English name – which the risk of keyboard distress prevents me typing here _____ - ____ - from slipping into common usage!

WHITE-BROWED TIT *Parus superciliosus*

15 bird-days. Noted on five dates - Getting repeated 'scope views of this subtly patterned beauty was great!

GANSU LEAF WARBLER *Phylloscopus kansuensis*

38 bird-days. Noted only N of Xining - this attractive warbler has only recently been reaccepted as a valid species, and its winter quarters remain undiscovered...

'MARGELANIC' WHITETHROAT *Sylvia 'margelanica'*

Three on 22nd – as so often, putting in a bit of mileage was the key...

KOZLOV'S BABAX *Babax koslowi*

18+ bird-days. Noted on three dates. One of our main 'pretexts' for visiting an unbeatably pretty area on the remote Xizang border, this restricted-range species proved comparatively obliging.

GIANT LAUGHINGTHRUSH *Garrulax maximus*

28+ bird-days. Noted on three dates - this superb-looking species has an impressive range of calls, some subdued, some anything but, yet others direct or derived mimicry – duetting birds are often a striking component in the dawn chorus, and throughout the day groups travelling through the pristine forest will mark their progress with occasional sessions of loud calling.

CHINESE FULVETTA *Alcippe striaticollis*

16 bird-days. Noted on three dates. Knowing the call AND where to listen out for it is - even more so than in the case of the skulking Kozlov's Babax – the key to finding this subtly attractive endemic.

PRZEVALSKI'S NUTHATCH *Sitta przewalskii*

Ten bird-days. Noted on four dates – on 9th a busy group of four birds was seen well, with one or two birds allowing 'scope views in soft, morning light... one even did a bit of flycatching!

KESSLER'S THRUSH *Turdus kessleri*

128+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates – post-breeding gatherings of up to 70 birds were logged.

PRZEVALSKI'S REDSTART *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*

Five on 23rd – an adult male obliged our team photographers by sitting out in a patch of sunshine... 'arguably the prettiest in the genus'? Oh yes!!

WHITE-THROATED REDSTART *Phoenicurus schisticeps*

58 bird-days. Noted on seven dates – no less than 16 (incl a couple of lovely adult males) on the last morning was unexpected...

GRANDALA *Grandala coelicolor*

Two 1st c-y birds was photographed (& generally enjoyed!) at <10m along a ridge at c3,950m.

RED-THROATED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula albicilla*

One N of Xining on 27th - previously recorded no earlier in autumn than 30 Aug (JH pers obs).

BLANFORD'S SNOWFINCH *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*

36 bird-days. Noted on four dates – this high specialized species proved incredibly obliging.

CITRINE WAGTAIL *Motacilla citreola*

108 bird-days. Noted on 11 dates – of those seen well some were adult males: just one was ssp *calcarata* while four were ssp *citreola*.

BLYTH'S PIPIT *Anthus godlewskii*

Singletons on 25th & 26th – flight views only but instructive nonetheless as both birds called repeatedly and allowed us to appreciate the different jizz.

PRZEVALSKI'S ROSEFINCH *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

10+ bird-days. This enigmatic species was seen at two different sites – superb views!

***The taxonomically challenged Przevalski's Rosefinch is nowadays considered to represent a monotypic family - is it a "Rosefinch"? or is it a "Bunting"?... good question, seeing that in the field it does not appear obviously close to either, with its graduated, blindingly pink tail, absurdly thin lower mandible, and a summertime habit of doing 'parachute' type songflights.

SPOTTED GREAT ROSEFINCH *Carpodacus severtzovi*

Six bird-days. Noted on two dates – 'scope views of a male of this often hard-to-find species were just rewards for our efforts.

ROBOROVSKI'S ROSEFINCH *Kozlowia roborowskii*

15 bird-days. This scarce endemic was noted on three dates – our team photographers nearly got memory-carded out when a full adult male presented itself at <10m: TINGALING!!

KOZLOV'S BUNTING *Emberiza koslowi*

14 bird-days. Noted on two dates. Only when this highly localized and hard-to-get-to Restricted Range endemic species is 'in the bag' does anyone allow themselves a sigh of relief and a pleasant 1st taste of 'we've done it!'. And did we do it!? Superb views and ditto photo opportunities of adult males, adult females & fledged juveniles - well worth the efforts, and arguably the Most Special Bird of the Trip.

The supporting cast included **PRZEVALSKI'S PARTRIDGE** *Alectoris magna*, **DAURIAN & TIBETAN PARTRIDGES** *Perdix dauurica* & *P. hodgsoniae*, **BAR-HEADED GOOSE** *Anser indicus*, **FERRUGINOUS DUCK** *Aythya nyroca*, **LONG-LEGGED & UPLAND BUZZARDS** *Buteo rufinus* & *B. hemilasius*, **DEMOISELLE CRANE** *Anthropoides virgo*, **RED-NECKED STINT** *Calidris ruficollis*, **GREAT BLACK-HEADED & BROWN-HEADED GULLS** *Larus ichthyaetus* & *L. brunnicephalus*, **PALLAS' SANDGROUSE** *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*, **SNOW PIGEON** *Columba leuconota*, **NORTHERN WRYNECK** *Jynx torquilla*, **BLACK WOODPECKER** *Dryocopus martius*, **ISABELLINE SHRIKE** *Lanius isabellinus tsaidamensis*, **TIBETAN MAGPIE** *Pica bottanensis*, **HENDERSON'S GROUND JAY** *Podoces hendersoni*, **SONGAR TIT** *Parus songarus*, **MONGOLIAN & LONG-BILLED CALANDRA LARKS** *Melanocorypha mongolica* & *M. maxima*, **HUME'S SHORT-TOED LARK** *Calandrella acutirostris*, **DUSKY WARBLER** *Phylloscopus fuscatus weigoldicus*, **PERE DAVID'S & ELLIOT'S LAUGHINGTHRUSHES** *Garrulax davidi* & *G. elliotii*; **CHINESE NUTHATCH** *Sitta villosa*, **WALLCREEPER** *Tichodroma muraria*, **HODGSON'S TREECREEPER** *Certhia hodgsoni*, **SIBERIAN & HIMALAYAN RUBYTHROATS** *Luscinia calliope* & *L. pectoralis*, **HIMALAYAN RED-FLANKED BLUETAIL** *Tarsiger rufilatus*, **GULDENSTADT'S REDSTART** *Phoenicurus erythrogasterus*, **SOOTY FLYCATCHER** *Muscicapa sibirica rothschildi*, **HENRI'S, TIBETAN, WHITE-RUMPED, PERE DAVID'S & RUFOUS-**

NECKED SNOWFINCHES *Montifringilla henrici* & *M. adamsi*, *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*, and *Pyrgilauda davidiana* & *P. ruficollis*, **ROSY PIPIT** *Anthus roseus*, **BRANDT'S MOUNTAIN FINCH** *Leucosticte brandti*, **MONGOLIAN TRUMPETER FINCH** *Bucanetes mongolicus*, **CHINESE BEAUTIFUL ROSEFINCH** *Carpodacus davidianus* & **WHITE-WINGED GROSBEAK** *Mycerobas carniceps*.