China

Bird Photo Tour



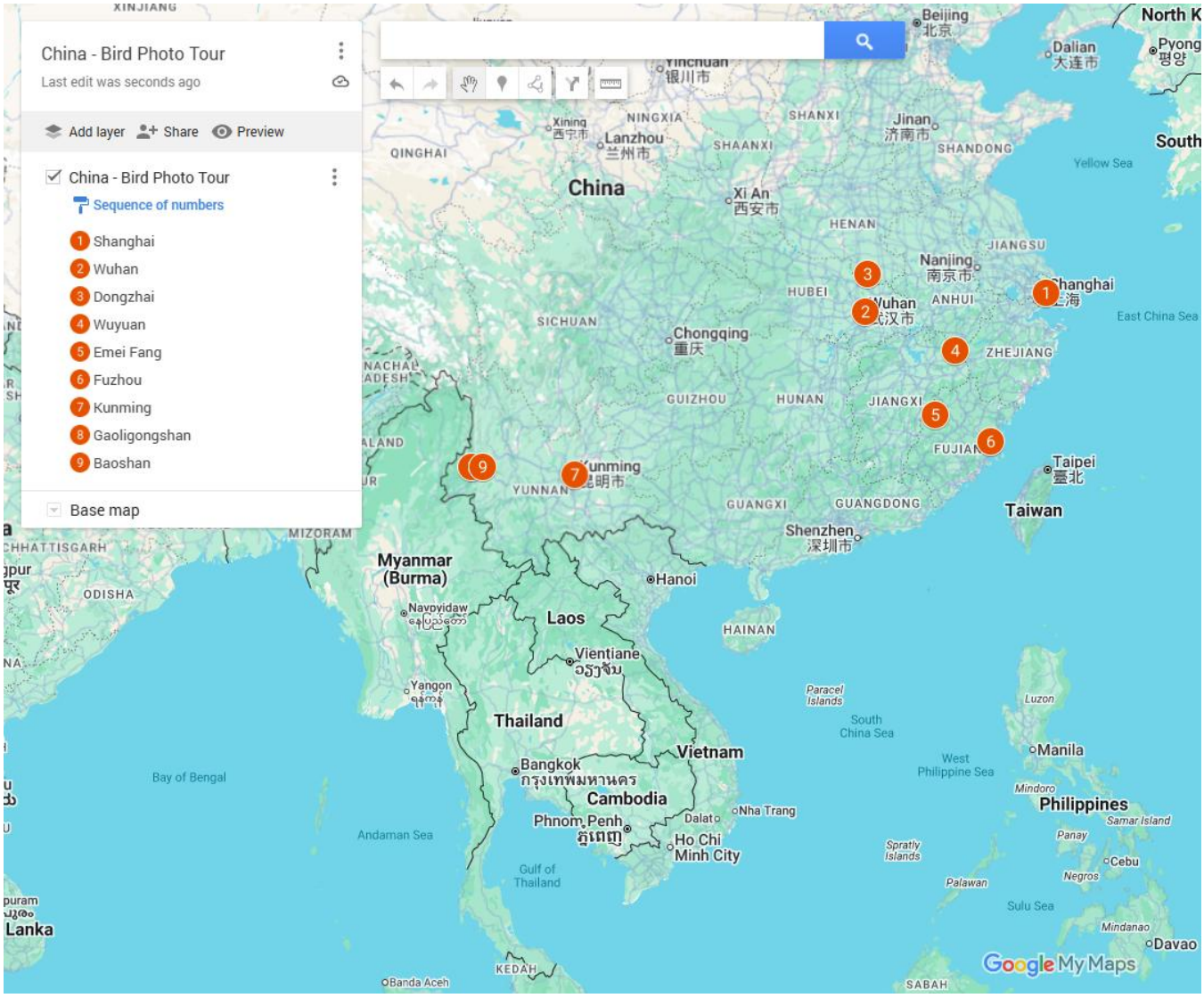
Cabot's Tragopan by Adam Riley

China is an expansive and diverse land, home to an extraordinary array of bird species. Our Bird Photography tour takes place during the late winter season, the optimal time to observe and capture images of the country's many stunning pheasants. During this time, these remarkable birds are drawn to winter feeding stations strategically positioned in front of well-appointed hides and blinds, providing unparalleled photographic opportunities.

Among the breathtaking pheasants we hope to photograph are the magnificent Cabot's Tragopan and the striking Reeves's, Elliot's, Koklass and Silver Pheasants as well as Rufous-throated, Chinese Bamboo and Mountain Bamboo Partridges. Additionally, a variety of other captivating Asian forest species frequent these feeding stations during the winter months, offering the chance to capture spectacular avian treasures such as the Black-breasted Thrush, Red-tailed and Blue-winged Laughingthrushes, Beautiful and Black-headed Sibia, Scarlet-faced Liocichla —all at incredibly close range!

Beyond these photogenic species, we will visit the world's only reliable sites for photographing the rare and striking Pied Falconet, Crested Ibis and the elusive Scaly-sided Merganser, ensuring an unforgettable experience. Complementing this extraordinary birding adventure are China's rich cultural heritage, dramatic landscapes, and breathtaking scenery, making this tour one of the most rewarding bird photography experiences in all of Asia!

Itinerary & Map



China Bird Photo Tour

Day 1	**Arrival in Shanghai**
Day 2	**Shanghai; flight to Wuhan, transfer to Dongzhai Nature Reserve**
Days 3 & 4	**Dongzhai Nature Reserve**
Day 5	**Dongzhai to Wuhan, bullet train to Wuyuan**
Day 6	**Wuyuan area**
Day 7	**Wuyuan to Emei Feng**
Days 8 & 9	**Emei Feng & surrounds**
Day 10	**Emei Feng to Fuzhou; flight to Kunming**
Day 11	**Kunming; flight to Baoshan, transfer to Gaoligongshan**
Days 12 to 14	**Gaoligongshan area**
Day 15	**Gaoligongshan to Baoshan; flight to Shanghai via Kunming**
Day 16	**Final departure**

Highlights

- ***Close Encounters with Reeve's Pheasant at Dongzhai***
- ***Iconic Pheasants and Tragopans at Emei Feng***
- ***Multiple shot options for Scaly-sided Merganser on the Le An River***
- ***Photographic bonanza at the Hides of Gaoligongshan***

Sites in detail

Dongzhai Nature Reserve. Dongzhai is famous among birders and bird photographers as one of the most reliable sites in China to see and photograph the truly spectacular and endemic Reeve's Pheasant. We will spend a fair amount of our time at a specially created hide/blind that both male and female Reeve's Pheasants regularly visit during the winter months. Our tour is perfectly timed to connect with this endemic beauty and we should be treated to amazing photographic opportunities of this stunning pheasant.

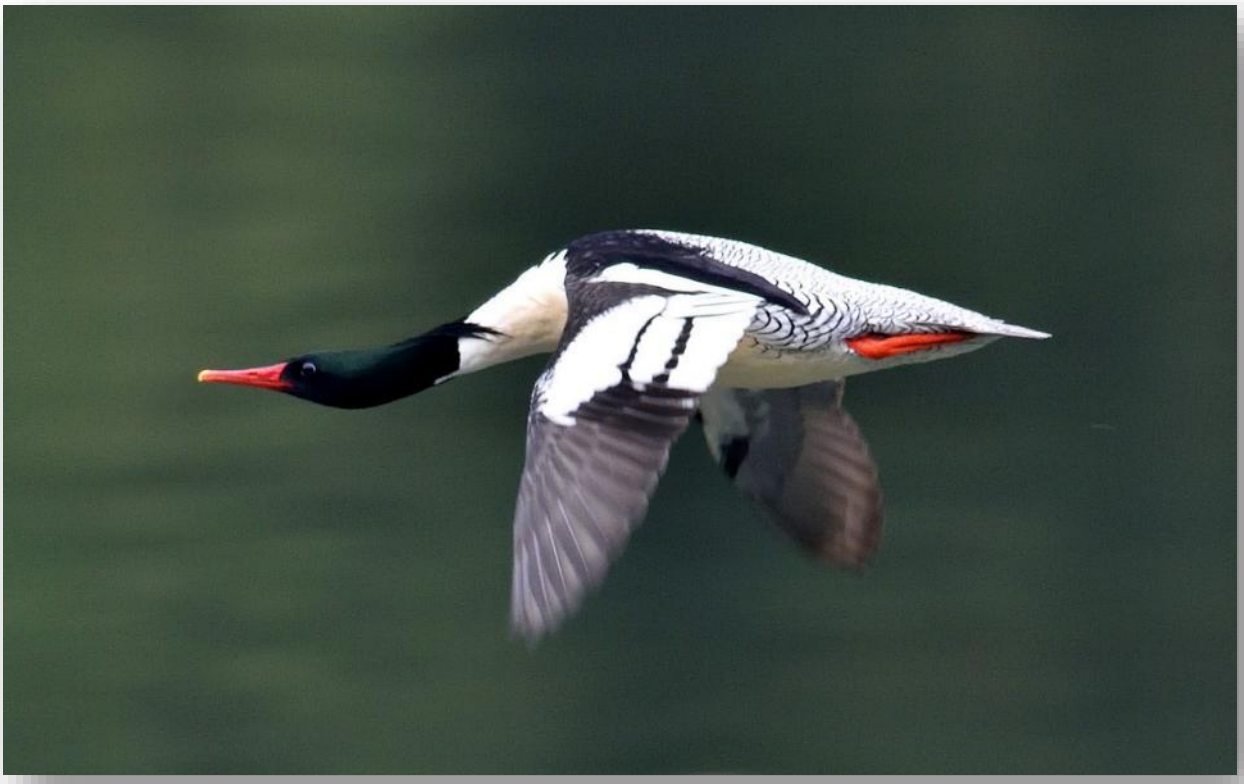


Reeves's Pheasant by Clayton Burne

Another target species that we should manage to find and of which we hope to obtain good photographs is the extremely handsome and endangered Crested Ibis. Once a widespread species that inhabited Japan, China, Korea and Russia, the species was thought to be extinct in the wild by the late 1970's. Extensive research lasting more than three years managed to find a tiny population of just 7 individuals in Shaanxi Province in central China. China enacted emergency regulations to protect the species, declaring all nesting trees as state property, forbidding logging and the use of agrochemicals in nearby rice paddies. While initial attempts at captive breeding failed in Japan, further attempts proved successful. Having more than flirted with extinction, the Crested Ibis has mounted a strong recovery with successful re-introductions in Japan and China. The population around Dongzhai has adapted very well to living side by side with humans, nesting and raising chicks around the town. This area is also a good location for the striking and range-restricted Collared Crow, and we have an

excellent chance of finding one of these pied corvids perched in nearby trees posing well for photographic opportunities.

We are likely to head out early on both of our mornings to acquire unbeatable shots of Reeves's Pheasant. Not only does the male sport an incredible scaled golden, white, black and red plumage, it is the tail - the monumentally long, barred tail that really stands out! The current holder of the world record for the longest natural tail feather (2.40m), watching and photographing a male Reeve's Pheasant in the wilds of central China is without a doubt one of the most mind-blowing and awe-inspiring birding and bird photography experiences imaginable.



Scaly-sided Merganser by Clayton Burne

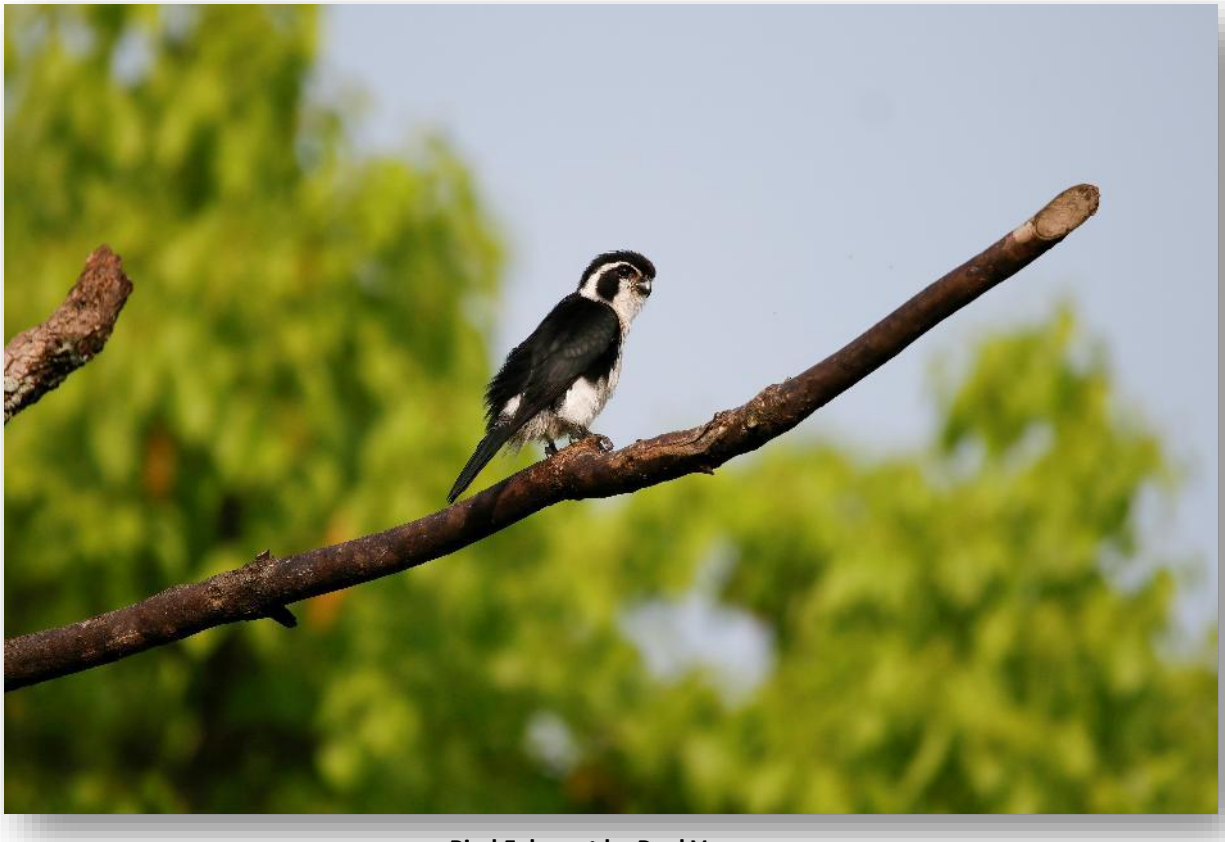
While enjoying unrivalled photographic opportunities of Reeve's Pheasant and while searching for Crested Ibis in the flooded rice paddies near Ling Shan, we should be well entertained by a number of other fabulous species in the Dongzhai area and these could include the furtive but vociferous Chinese Bamboo Partridge, Masked Laughingthrush, Chinese Hwamei, the impressive Crested Kingfisher, Grey-capped Pygmy and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, the beautiful and endemic Yellow-bellied Tit, the striking Collared Finchbill, Mountain Bulbul, the immaculate Rufous-faced Warbler, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Vinous-throated Parrotbill, White-crowned Forktail and the scarce Tristram's Bunting.

Wuyuan. This picturesque small town is situated in the north-eastern corner of Jiangxi Province. Here we will take some time staking out the tiny Pied Falconet, a localised but strikingly patterned raptor, before spending time birding for specialities that include the ornately patterned Mandarin Duck, Masked Laughingthrush, Red-billed Starling and migrant thrushes such as Dusky, Neumann's, Pale and Grey-backed. Several species of migratory buntings are possible in this area, including Yellow-throated, Yellow-browed, Meadow and the scarce Tristram's.

Following the serene Le An River through the forest-covered mountains of Wuyuan, our primary target will be to locate the critically endangered Scaly-sided Merganser. Up to sixty birds overwinter in this area, feeding in

the calm water areas along the gravel banks. Wintering populations of Long-billed Plover, White-crowned Forktail and confiding Brown Crakes will also be on the agenda. Additional birding through the dense bamboo and steep forested slopes dotted with local villages allow us chances for Dusky Fulvetta, Greater Necklaced and White-browed Laughingthrushes, the retiring Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Rufous-capped Babbler, Fork-tailed Sunbird, Crested Serpent Eagle, responsive Red-billed Leiothrix, and both Grey-headed and the elusive Short-tailed Parrotbill.

Migrant congregations of Yellow-billed Grosbeak are regular in this area, as are groups of Black-collared Starling, Hwamei, with their amazing melodic song, and with some luck on our side, perhaps a flock of Japanese Waxwings.



Pied Falconet by Paul Varney

Emei Feng & surrounds. Situated in the Wuyishan Mountain Range that straddle the Jiangxi and the Fujian border, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is well known for its high mountain peaks. Apart from being an area of outstanding natural beauty, it also contains probably the only remaining large tract of pristine forest in southern China.

Three of China's most spectacular pheasants occur in the beautiful, temperate forests that cloak the slopes of Emei Feng and the surrounding hills and mountains and these are Elliott's and Silver Pheasants and the wonderful Cabot's Tragopan. Several hides have been strategically built to see and photograph these unbelievable birds, along with several other superb species that are attracted to these hides during winter.

We will spend most of our time at these stakeouts where we will hopefully be rewarded with superb views and photographs of all three pheasants, as well as the very rarely seen and photographed White-necklaced Partridge and many other outstanding species. If time allows and we are entirely satiated with our shots of Cabot's

Tragopan and Elliott's Pheasant, we will take the opportunity to also explore other areas, habitats and altitudes in the area in search of the remainder of Emei Feng's avian beauties.

The surrounding hills are covered with pristine forest supporting a few impressive and photogenic species and we will attempt to acquire some great shots of these species during our time on the mountain. These include the impressive Crested Kingfisher, the entertaining Brown Dipper, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Barred Cuckoo-Dove, Fork-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo, the black-and-chestnut Crested Bunting in overgrown areas, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush and Collared Finchbill. An imitation of Asian Barred Owlet should attract this often-diurnal species, as well as mobbing flock species such as the Chinese endemic Yellow-bellied Tit, the more widespread Coal Tit, Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, Eurasian Jay and Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, all of which can sometimes be attracted to within a few metres of us. The delightful Little Forktail is also possible along the forest streams, and we can practice our aerial photography on soaring raptors such as Mountain Hawk-Eagle and the sleek Besra.



Red-tailed Laughingthrush by Daniel Danckwerts

We also hope to find several juicy mixed species flocks (bird parties) and these can be a bird photographer's dream as they attract species like Ferruginous Flycatcher, Green and Blyth's Shrike-Babblers, Yellow-browed and Yellow-cheeked Tits, Grey-chinned Minivet, Rufous-faced, Chestnut-crowned, Bianchi's, White-spectacled, Buff-throated and Blyth's Leaf Warblers, the hyper-active Streak-throated Fulvetta, Mountain and Chestnut Bulbuls, Small Niltava, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Black-chinned Yuhina, Rufus-capped Babbler, Grey Treepie, active groups of Vinous-throated Parrotbill and the vocal Brown Bullfinch.

Pygmy Cupwing and Spotted Elachura (now placed in its own unique, monotypic family) are two furtive but vocal species that will likely take some persistence to see and photograph. In the larger trees we may encounter the impressive and highly vocal Great Barbet and Bay Woodpecker, but it will take a great dose of luck to see and photograph the poorly known, White-necklaced Partridge.

If we are fortunate, we may be able to coax out a covey of the very attractive but secretive Chinese Bamboo Partridge from their dense bamboo habitat, while the endangered Stump-tailed Macaque and the agile Tufted Deer also reside in the area.

Gaoligongshan. This long chain of forested mountains run from north to south along the Burmese border and harbour an array of attractive specialities. We will spend much of our time at the various well-appointed and highly productive hides and blinds at the forest edge in the vicinity of the entrance to the Gaoligong Reserve. We will also spend some time along the track that winds its way through the lush, mid-altitude broad-leaved forest that cloaks the surrounding mountains as well as secondary forest. Both habitats are prolific for birds, and we can expect a very enjoyable and exciting time photographing from the hides and along the track.



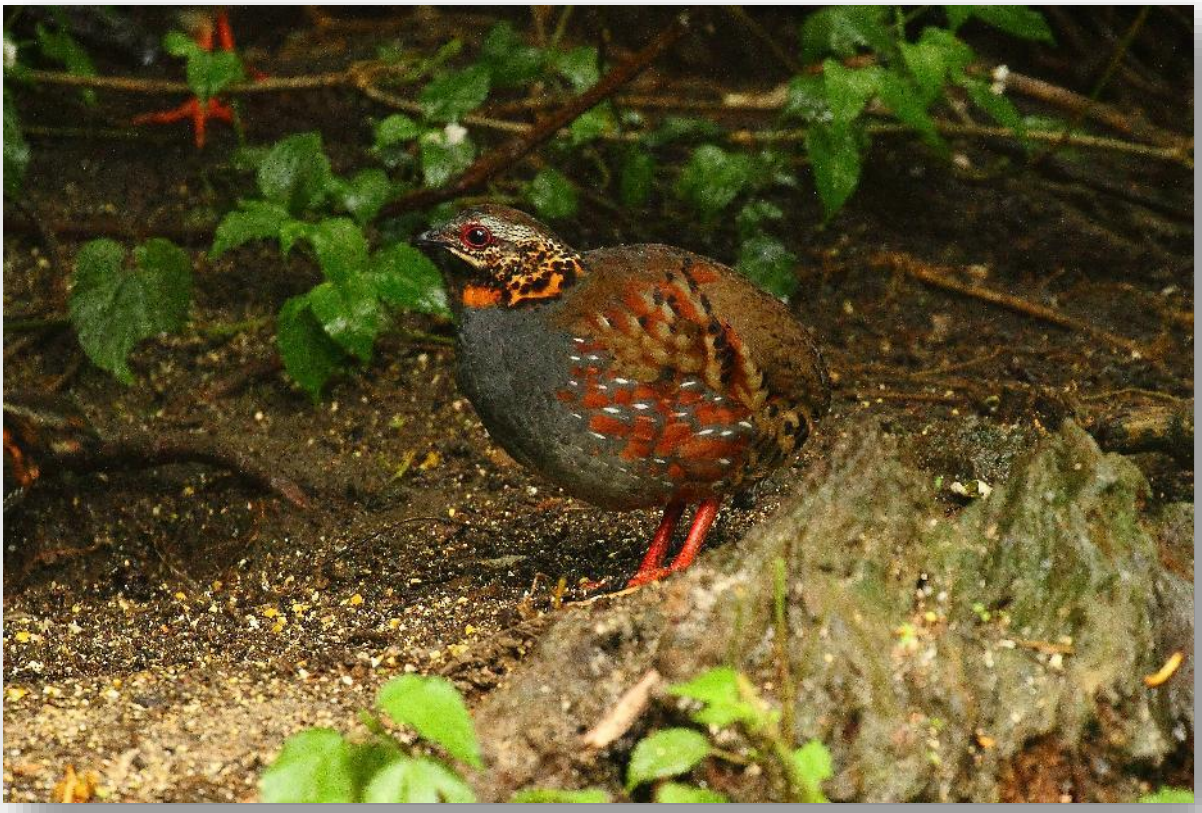
Silver Pheasant by Adam Riley

Basing ourselves in the series of hides that have been perfectly set up throughout the lower altitude secondary forest, we will afford ourselves a very enjoyable and unique opportunity to acquire amazing photographs of a number of eye-catching and rarely seen Asian specialties such as Rufous-throated, Hill and Mountain Bamboo Partridges, Silver Pheasant, Red-tailed, Blue-winged and Moustached Laughingthrushes, Blue-throated, Golden-throated and Great Barbets, Beautiful and Black-headed Sibia, the brilliant Scarlet-faced Liocichla, Large and Small Niltava, bands of Rusty-fronted Barwings, Yunnan Fulvetta, the usually ultra-secretive Lesser Shortwing, the gaudy Silver-eared Mesia, Grey Bush Chat, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush, Blue Whistling Thrush, the seldom-seen Black-breasted Thrush, Crested Finchbill, Flavescent Bulbul, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch and possibly even the near-mythical and outstanding Gould's Shortwing that regularly visits these hides during winter, as well as a chance of the rarely seen and seldom-photographed Mrs. Hume's Pheasant. These hides have become a major feature of any visit to Gaoligong.

The lower altitude secondary forest along the track between our guest house and the reserve entrance can also be excellent for bird photography and we can expect to find and photograph many of the species seen and photographed at the hides, as well as Wedge-tailed and Pin-tailed Green Pigeons, Speckled Wood Pigeon, the

tricky Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler, Striated, Brown-breasted and Mountain Bulbuls, buzzing Black-throated Bushtits, Chestnut-flanked White-eye, Grey Treepie, Hill Prinia, Black-throated Sunbird and with some luck the rare and unobtrusive Brown-winged Parrotbill. It is also quite likely that we will be treated to flight photographic opportunities of Crested Goshawk and the magnificent and often low-flying Black Eagle soaring overhead.

The bird photography in the pristine, higher elevation forest is a lot more challenging and we therefore won't spend much time in this area, but we may opt for a leisurely stroll along the road through this lush and beautiful forest if we are completely satiated with views and photo ops that the hides have provided us. New and noteworthy species that we may be fortunate to encounter and photograph here include the miniscule Grey-bellied Tesia, the furtive and inconspicuous Yellow-throated Fulvetta, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush, Pygmy Cupwing, the partially-diurnal Collared Owlet, the handsome Yellow-cheeked Tit, richly-colored Chestnut-crowned Warbler, Blyth's Shrike-Babbler, Chestnut-tailed, Red-tailed and Blue-winged Minla, Grey-headed Parrotbill, Green-tailed Sunbird and the shy and retiring Hill Partridge.



Rufous-throated Partridge by Glen Valentine

If we are very fortunate, we may even find one or two of Gaoligong's very rarely seen inhabitants such as the very rare and secretive Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler, Grey-bellied Wren-Babbler or Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler, while an evening excursion to the forest edge could yield photogenic Collared Scops Owl.

Tour Grading & Key

Photography		Good (to very good if weather is suitable). Several purpose-built hides & blinds. Lighting can be heavily impacted by grey, overcast skies, light fog or drizzle.
Overall Ease		Moderate paced tour. Days are mostly cool & quite short, there is no planned night birding. Some early starts, full days in the field. Several flights & one bullet train ride.
Accommodation		Comfortable, more basic in remote areas.
Walking / Trails		Some walking, mostly on roads and tracks. Riverside trail on Le An River can be rocky & distance variable depending on where Scaly-sided Mergansers are found.
Vehicles / Roads		Mostly good quality roads in a comfortable vehicle. A few long drives.
Birding Ease		Easy to moderate. Several rare/difficult species, some low-density species require repeat searches.
Annoyances		Some biting insects. Generally cool to very cold, overcast with occasional sunny spells. Expect sub-zero conditions with brisk wind.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 16;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour (including train transport);
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- This China tour is designed to be a comprehensive bird photography experience, and we will attempt to acquire excellent photographs of select species that are both beautiful and captivating. We will also spend time opportunistically photographing birds along tracks and trails but most of our photography will be done from well-appointed and strategically situated hides/blinds.
- This tour is not physically challenging, and our pace will always be slow. However, one should be in good general health as some of the bird photography will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time.
- Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.
- We will be well away from modern medical facilities for most of this tour.
- In some areas it can get very cold (-10°C is not unusual) and could be compounded by high winds.
- Some of the birds are low in density and we should expect full days birding without mid-day breaks to find the maximum variety of species. Critically endangered species such as Spoon-billed Sandpipe are very difficult and may not be found at all.
- Accommodation varies greatly in China, from excellent in the main centres to basic in the more remote areas. Some lodges can be very cold.
- We move accommodation regularly, so the more luggage you pack the less mobile you are. It is thus important for your comfort and ease of travel that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- Guests who are allergic to bees/other insect bites must carry the necessary medication.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins in Shanghai on day 1 with a welcome dinner, and as this is scheduled as an arrival day; you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude after breakfast in Shanghai on day 16.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Shanghai Pudong International Airport, Shanghai (IATA: PVG) is the main port of entry for international flights into China.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.