China

Photography tour



Giant Panda by Daniel Danckwerts

China is a vast country of extraordinary natural and cultural diversity, and Sichuan Province offers some of the most exciting wildlife and landscape photography opportunities in Asia. This tour has been designed specifically for photographers, combining time at productive bird and mammal sites with carefully chosen opportunities for close wildlife encounters, hide photography, environmental images and dramatic mountain landscapes.

Our journey takes us through an exceptional range of habitats. We begin among the parks and wetlands of Chengdu before travelling into richly forested mountain country, where bamboo, moss-draped broad-leaved forest, conifers and rhododendron-covered slopes support an extraordinary diversity of wildlife. From there we climb progressively higher, eventually reaching the immense alpine meadows, rugged passes, open grasslands and sweeping skies of the Tibetan Plateau. These constantly changing environments provide not only an impressive variety of photographic subjects, but also superb opportunities to place birds and mammals within the landscapes they inhabit.

Pheasants and other gamebirds will be among the principal photographic subjects of the tour. Sichuan supports an exceptional assemblage, and possibilities include Chinese Monal, White Eared and Blue Eared Pheasants, Koklass, Blood and Lady Amherst's Pheasants, Temminck's Tragopan, Chinese Grouse, Tibetan and Snow

Partridges, Chestnut-throated Monal-Partridge and Tibetan Snowcock. Many of these birds inhabit remote forests or high-altitude slopes, but our itinerary has been structured to give us the best realistic opportunities to photograph them in the field.

At Long Hua we will spend time in dedicated hides, where patience may be rewarded with close photographic opportunities of some of Sichuan's most secretive forest birds. Chief among these is the endemic Sichuan Partridge, but the hides may also produce Red-winged and Buffy Laughingthrushes, Emei Shan Liocichla and, with luck, spectacular gamebirds such as Lady Amherst's Pheasant, Silver Pheasant and Temminck's Tragopan. These sessions allow us to work quietly at close range and concentrate on portraits, behaviour and clean forest compositions that can be extremely difficult to achieve while birding on foot.

Wawushan provides a very different photographic experience and should be one of the major highlights of the journey. Its bamboo forests, mist-shrouded slopes and montane woodland support an exceptional range of birds including Streaked Barwing, Emei Shan Liocichla, numerous parrotbills, laughingthrushes, fulvettas, bush robins, woodpeckers and pheasants. Just as importantly, Wawushan offers one of our most exciting mammal possibilities: the beautiful and elusive Chinese Red Panda.

For many photographers, a wild Chinese Red Panda could be among the most memorable subjects of the entire tour. We will spend considerable time within its favoured high-altitude bamboo habitat, scanning for animals feeding, climbing or resting in the forest. An encounter could provide anything from intimate portraits to wider environmental images of this extraordinary mammal among bamboo, moss-covered branches and misty mountain forest. Other mammal possibilities at Wawushan include Chinese Serow, Red-and-white Giant Flying Squirrel, Sambar, Greater Hog Badger, Mainland Leopard Cat and Takin.

The Wolong and Balangshan region brings together spectacular high-altitude wildlife and some of the finest mountain scenery of the tour. Here we will photograph among forested valleys, alpine meadows, rhododendron, rocky slopes and snow-capped peaks while searching for Chinese Monal, White Eared Pheasant, Tibetan Snowcock, Blood Pheasant, Snow Partridge, Grandala, rosefinches, bush robins and many other montane specialities. We will also visit the Giant Panda centre at Wolong, providing an opportunity for close portraits and behavioural photography of Giant Pandas while learning more about the conservation work for which the region is internationally famous.

As we continue west and north, the scale of the landscape becomes increasingly dramatic. The forests around Mengbishan support species such as Sichuan Jay, Crested Tit-warbler, Przevalski's Nuthatch, Black Woodpecker, White-throated Redstart and several striking pheasants, while the surrounding mountain passes offer excellent opportunities for wider landscape photography in soft morning light.

Eventually we emerge onto the Tibetan Plateau, where the character of the tour changes completely. The immense open grasslands, high-altitude wetlands and huge skies provide a magnificent setting for both wildlife and landscape photography. Here we will search for Przevalski's Finch, White-browed Tit-warbler, Tibetan Partridge, Tibetan Lark, snowfinches, rosefinches, Black-necked Crane, Saker Falcon and a wide range of other open-country birds.

The plateau is equally exciting for mammals. Tibetan and Red Foxes, Grey Wolf, Himalayan Marmot, Eastern Roe Deer, Greater Hog Badger and Plateau Pika are all possible, and the open terrain often allows us to photograph animals within the vast landscapes that define this region. At Flower Lake, Black-necked Cranes may provide some of the tour's finest behavioural opportunities, while the surrounding wetlands and grasslands can be particularly rewarding in the softer light of late afternoon.

Landscape photography will be an important element throughout the journey rather than simply a by-product of the wildlife photography. Mist-filled forests, bamboo-clad mountains, river valleys, traditional settlements, high passes, snow-capped peaks, alpine meadows, plateau wetlands and immense grasslands will all form part of the visual story of the tour. Whenever light and conditions are suitable, we will take time to work with wider compositions and environmental images that capture the atmosphere and scale of western Sichuan.

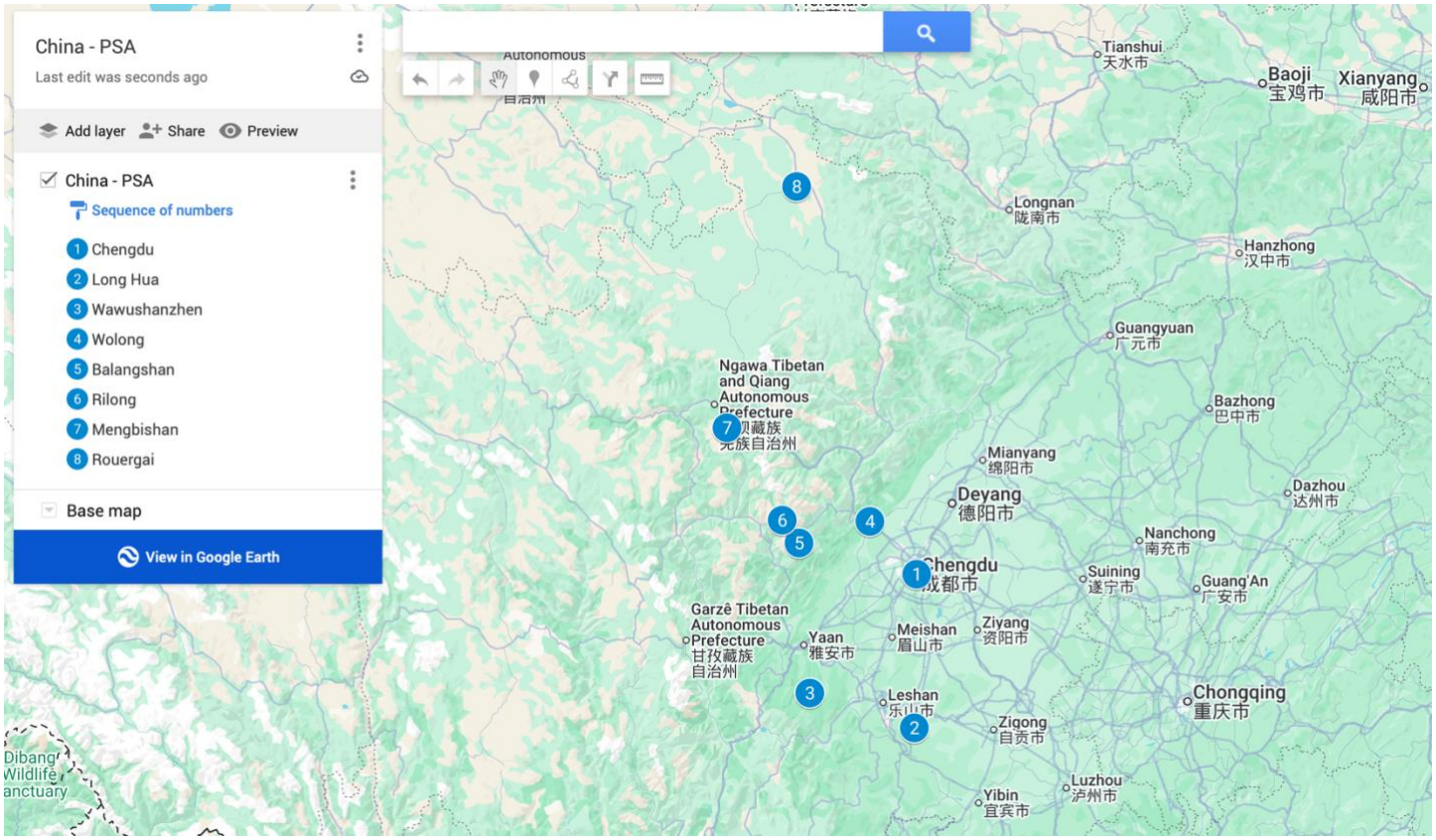
This is therefore not simply a tour to see a long list of rare birds. It is a photographic journey through some of China's most beautiful and wildlife-rich landscapes, with time devoted to working patiently with exceptional subjects and creating images that reflect both the animals themselves and the remarkable environments in which they live.

Fascinating cultures, breathtaking mountain scenery, rare and highly localised birds, iconic mammals and an extraordinary variety of photographic settings combine to make Sichuan one of Asia's most rewarding destinations for wildlife photographers.

Itinerary & Map

Sichuan Birding

Day 1	**Arrival in Chengdu**
Day 2	**Chengdu to Long Hua**
Day 3	**Pheasant photo hides at Long Hua**
Day 4	**Long Hua to Wawushan**
Days 5 & 6	**Explore Wawushan**
Day 7	**Wawushan to Wolong**
Day 8	**Wolong, then continue to Rilong via the Balangshan Pass**
Day 9	**Rilong to Mengbishan**
Day 10	**Mengbishan Mountain**
Day 11	**Mengbishan Mountain to Rouergai across the Tibetan Plateau**
Days 12 & 13	**Explore the Tibetan Plateau**
Day 14	**Ruoergai to Chengdu**
Day 15	**Final departures from Chengdu**



Birding sites in detail



Lady Amherst's Pheasant by Daniel Danckwerts

Chengdu. We'll commence our photographic exploration of this bird-rich city in a nearby park, where mature trees, open lawns and relatively habituated birds provide an excellent introduction to some of Sichuan's lowland species. Among our main subjects will be Chinese Grosbeak, Collared Finchbill, Vinous-throated and Ashy-throated Parrotbills, David's Fulvetta and Chinese Blackbird. White-browed Laughingthrushes are pleasantly common and can be especially confiding, potentially allowing prolonged photographic opportunities at close range.

We should also encounter a good selection of more widespread species, including Light-vented and Brown-breasted Bulbuls, Oriental Magpie-Robin, Spotted and Oriental Turtle Doves, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Long-tailed Shrike, Cinereous Tit, Eastern Red-rumped Swallow, Black-throated Bushtit, Swinhoe's White-eye and Crested Myna. These city parks can be surprisingly productive photographically, with birds often feeding at eye level or using open perches that allow for clean backgrounds. If we are very fortunate, we may also find a few of the area's rarer species such as Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Amur Paradise Flycatcher, Speckled Piculet and Tiger Shrike.

Although our attention here will be largely on birds, Chengdu also provides an opportunity to begin documenting the wider journey, from leafy urban parks and traditional garden scenes to the contrast between the city and the increasingly wild landscapes that await us further west.



Sichuan Partridge by Daniel Danckwerts

Chengdu Botanical Gardens & surrounds. If we still need one or two of the city's lowland species, we will make a short visit to the Chengdu Botanical Gardens. The open water, landscaped vegetation and wetland margins provide a useful range of photographic settings and may produce Black-crowned Night Heron, Little and Eastern Cattle Egrets, Grey and Chinese Pond Herons, Oriental Greenfinch, Red-billed Leiothrix and Rufous-capped Babbler, in addition to several species we may already have encountered elsewhere in Chengdu.

Alternatively, we may visit a small wetland on the outskirts of the city. Here the more open environment can be particularly useful for photography, especially where waterbirds can be approached without disturbance. A variety of waterfowl may be present, together with possibilities such as Cinnamon Bittern, Pale Martin and Long-billed Plover. Reflections, reedbeds and open water can also provide some pleasing wider compositions and environmental images.

Long Hua. Long Hua offers one of the most exciting photographic opportunities of the tour: the chance to see and photograph the near-mythical endemic Sichuan Partridge. Long considered one of China's most difficult birds to encounter, this secretive forest species has only recently become a realistic possibility thanks to a carefully maintained feeding station and a small network of hides positioned within suitable habitat. Even here success is never guaranteed, and photography may require extended periods of quiet waiting, but a bird stepping from the undergrowth at close range could provide one of the defining images of the tour.



Silver Pheasant by Daniel Danckwerts

Much of our time will be divided between several hides overlooking feeding areas or quiet forest openings. These give us the opportunity to work patiently with shy forest birds at relatively close range and without disturbing them. In addition to Sichuan Partridge, Red-winged and Buffy Laughingthrushes are among the most important possibilities. Both tend to remain close to bamboo and tangled vegetation, but the hides can greatly

improve our chances of obtaining unobstructed views and, with luck, photographs as they briefly move into the open.

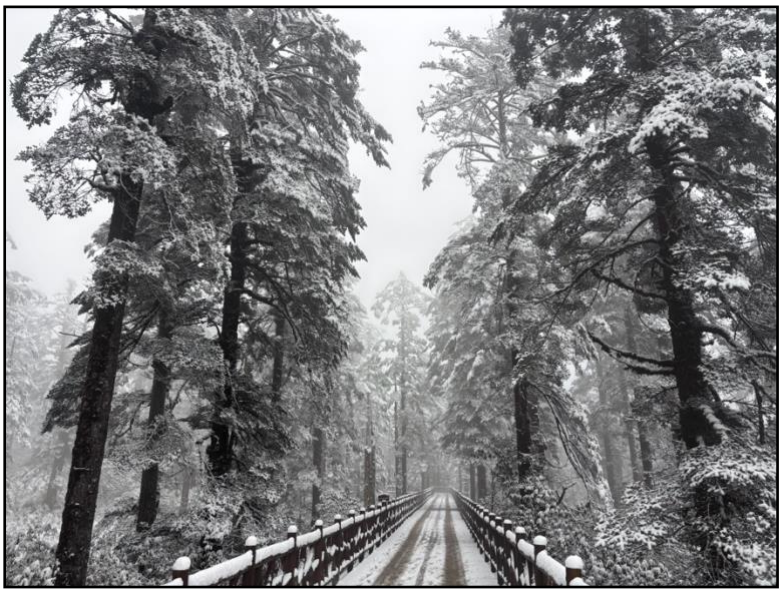


Temminck's Tragopan by Daniel Danckwerts

The distinctive Emei Shan Liocichla is another key target. This highly localised species usually inhabits dense undergrowth and bamboo, where photography can be extremely challenging despite its loud, far-carrying calls. Birds occasionally approach the feeding areas or move through vegetation near the hides, giving us a valuable opportunity to photograph a species that is normally frustratingly difficult to see well. We will also remain alert for fulvettas, babblers, laughingthrushes, bush warblers and small forest thrushes joining the activity around the hides.

Several spectacular gamebirds may also appear. Lady Amherst's and Silver Pheasants are both possible, while Temminck's Tragopan is a more unpredictable visitor. All can disappear into cover almost instantly, making patience, silence and having cameras ready particularly important.

Away from the hides, we will explore a network of quiet forest roads and tracks bordered by bamboo, mature woodland and dense secondary growth. These provide access to otherwise difficult habitat and offer a different style of photography, particularly when mixed-species flocks move alongside the road. Fulvettas, yuhinas, leaf warblers, tits, minlas and small babblers may all occur, while laughingthrushes frequently forage nearer the ground. Flowering or fruiting trees can provide attractive natural settings for bulbuls and other canopy birds, while shaded gullies may hold robins, shortwings and bush warblers. Early mornings and late afternoons may also produce pheasants crossing the road, sometimes creating brief but memorable photographic opportunities.



Wawushan scenery by Daniel Danckwerts

The surrounding forested hills also lend themselves to wider environmental photography. Mist hanging in the valleys, layered forest-covered ridges and dense subtropical vegetation can all make attractive scene-setting images and help tell the broader story of the habitat occupied by these exceptionally elusive birds.

Wawushan National Forest Park. This rugged and exceptionally scenic reserve should be one of the major photographic highlights of the tour. Paired with Emei Shan to the east, Wawushan is a towering, isolated peak with a cable car providing access to habitats ranging from around 1,100m (3,600ft) near the base to 2,700m (8,900ft) at the summit. The combination of ancient forest, dense bamboo, mist, mountain scenery and an extraordinary diversity of wildlife means that Wawushan is as rewarding for landscape and habitat photography as it is for birds and mammals.



We have an excellent chance of encountering wild Chines Red Pandas, by Daniel Danckwerts

Most of our time will be spent above 2,000m (7,000ft), where we hope to photograph a superb selection of montane species. These include the inexplicably scarce Streaked Barwing, Spotted and Black-faced Laughingthrushes, Golden and White-browed Bush Robins, Hodgson's and Sichuan Treecreepers — Wawushan being the type locality for the latter — the extremely rare Bar-winged Wren-Babbler, Darjeeling and Necklaced Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied, Aberrant, Spotted, Chestnut-crowned and Brown Bush Warblers, Bianchi's Warbler, Golden-breasted and Grey-hooded Fulvettas and White-bellied Redstart.

An extraordinary variety of parrotbills is possible here, including Fulvous, Golden, Three-toed, Great, Brown, Grey-headed and Grey-hooded Parrotbills. Their tendency to move in energetic groups through bamboo can make them challenging photographic subjects, but a flock feeding close to a trail may produce excellent opportunities for both tight portraits and wider images showing the birds within their characteristic habitat.

The higher-altitude areas also give us a very good chance of encountering Lady Amherst's Pheasant and a reasonable possibility of Temminck's Tragopan. A male tragopan, with its extraordinary glowing-red plumage, would naturally rank among the most desirable bird photographs of the tour.



Mrs Gould's Sunbird by Daniel Danckwerts

At lower elevations we will search for the scarce and unobtrusive Emei Shan Liocichla, handsome but shy Red-winged Laughingthrush, rare Emei Leaf and White-spectacled Warblers, Sichuan Bush Warbler, secretive Buffy Laughingthrush, tricky Chinese Blue Flycatcher and shy Slaty Bunting. Golden-fronted Fulvetta is also possible at Wawushan, although our best chances will be at Longcanggou.

While searching for these specialities we should encounter many more photographic subjects, including Brown Bullfinch, Red-billed Leiothrix, Yellow-

browed, Fire-capped, Coal and Green-backed Tits, Martens's, Grey-crowned and Alström's Warblers, Elliot's Laughingthrush, Large Hawk-Cuckoo, Short-billed and Long-tailed Minivets, Bay and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Great Barbet, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Green and White-browed Shrike-babblers, Hair-crested Drongo and the difficult-to-see Pygmy Cupwing.



Sharpe's Rosefinch by Daniel Danckwerts

For many photographers, however, Chinese Red Panda will be every bit as important as the birds, and potentially one of the most coveted mammals of the entire tour**.** Wawushan offers an excellent opportunity to search for this rare and exceptionally photogenic species, and much of our time will be spent within its favored high-altitude bamboo habitat. We will continually scan the bamboo canopy and forest margins for an animal feeding, climbing or resting among the branches.

A Red Panda encounter could provide a remarkable range of photographic possibilities: intimate portraits, behavioral images of animals feeding on bamboo, and wider compositions placing this unmistakable mammal within the misty mountain forest. Their rich chestnut-red coats contrast beautifully with green bamboo, moss-covered branches and dark forest backgrounds, making them especially rewarding photographic subjects when conditions come together. As always with a wild and elusive mammal, sightings can never be guaranteed, but we will give any encounter the time it deserves and photograph from a respectful distance without disturbing the animal.

Wawushan also offers an intriguing supporting cast of mammals. Chinese Serow may be encountered on forested slopes, while the enormous Red-and-white Giant Flying Squirrel would be a particularly memorable sighting. Sambar, Greater Hog Badger, Mainland Leopard Cat and Takin are also possible, although several of these are genuinely difficult and unpredictable. The possibility of encountering one of these mammals adds another layer to our photography, particularly during quieter periods between bird activity.



Golden Bush Robin by Daniel Danckwerts

The mountain itself deserves considerable photographic attention. Layers of forest disappearing into mist, bamboo-clad slopes, dramatic cloud formations and distant peaks can produce beautiful landscape images, particularly in changing mountain weather. Rather than treating these as incidental scenery, we will make

use of suitable light and conditions for wider compositions that capture the atmosphere of this exceptional reserve.



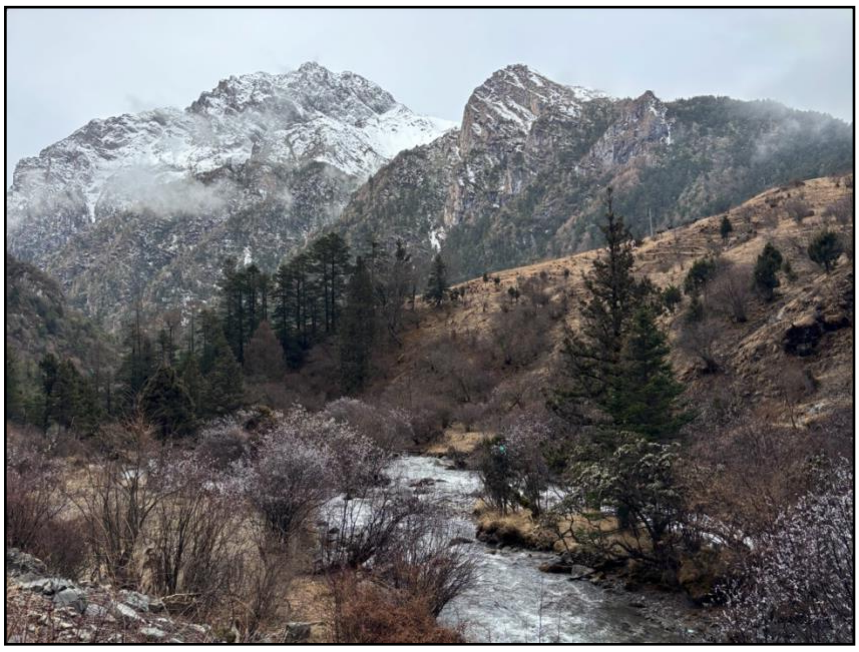
Chinese Monal by Daniel Danckwerts

Balangshan Mountain & Wolong Giant Panda Reserve. Wolong is world famous for its role in Giant Panda research and conservation. The pioneering work of George Schaller was carried out amid this spectacular landscape of forested mountains, bamboo thickets, alpine meadows and jagged, often snow-covered peaks. For photographers, the region combines exceptional wildlife with some of the most dramatic mountain scenery of the entire tour.

During our stay we will also visit the Giant Panda center, giving us the opportunity to spend time with the animal most closely associated with Wolong and Sichuan. Although quite different from photographing wild mammals in the mountains, this provides an excellent opportunity for close portraits and behavioral images of Giant Pandas, while also offering an insight into the conservation work that has made Wolong internationally famous.

Our field photography will begin early as we head towards Balangshan, reaching elevations of around 4,500m (14,800ft). The surrounding coniferous and mixed *rhododendron* forests gradually give way to alpine slopes, rocky ridges and snow-capped peaks. These dramatic changes in elevation create excellent opportunities for landscape photography, and we will make use of favorable light to capture the scale of the mountains as well as more intimate scenes of forests, alpine vegetation, winding roads and high-altitude valleys.

A major objective will be the endemic and rare Chinese Monal. These magnificent birds may be seen feeding on open slopes, and a cooperative individual in early morning light would offer outstanding photographic possibilities. The equally impressive White Eared Pheasant is another major subject. Koklass Pheasant is likely to be heard around dawn, although obtaining photographs of this shy forest species is considerably more difficult.



Sichuan mountain scenery by Daniel Danckwerts

Other possibilities include Chestnut-throated Monal-Partridge, the stately Tibetan Snowcock and Blood Pheasant. Near the top of the pass we will look for Snow Partridge, Grandala and Red-fronted Rosefinch, while the low vegetation around the treeline can hold Streaked, Pink-rumped, Common, Dark-breasted and Chinese White-browed Rosefinches, White-backed (Kessler's) Thrush, Blue-fronted and White-throated Redstarts,



Chinese Grouse by Daniel Danckwerts

immaculate Golden Bush Robin, Chinese Rubythroat and, with considerable luck, the rare and range-restricted Sharpe's Rosefinch.

A nearby stream may hold resident White-throated Dipper, and the tumbling water, polished rocks and surrounding mountain vegetation can make an especially attractive photographic setting. Mammal possibilities in the wider area include Greater Hog Badger, Tufted Deer and Chinese Goral, any of which would add welcome variety to our portfolio.

The construction of a tunnel has caused Balangshan to be closed to general traffic. We have arranged special permission to access the old pass; however, access conditions may change.

Rilong to Maerkang. This is a lengthy transfer of roughly six hours from Rilong towards Maerkang. Leaving the lower slopes of impressive Balangshan Mountain, we travel west through superb mountain country, and although primarily a travel day, the route should provide some excellent opportunities for landscape photography.

As we journey onwards, dramatic mountain scenery gradually gives way to forest-clad slopes, deep river valleys and traditional settlements. Suitable roadside viewpoints will be used whenever time and conditions permit, allowing us to capture not simply a record of the journey, but a sense of the scale and character of the mountains of western Sichuan.

We will also remain ready for wildlife opportunities along the way. Brief stops will be made at sites where previous tours have encountered Long-tailed Rosefinch, Wallcreeper and Hill Pigeon before we eventually continue towards Maerkang.

Mengbishan Mountain. An early start gives us the best chance to photograph Mengbishan's spectacular pheasants in the softer morning light. We will drive towards the top of the pass at around 4,000m (13,200ft), searching particularly for Blood and White Eared Pheasants, as well as Chestnut-throated Monal-Partridge. These large and striking birds will be among our priority photographic subjects, and we will take advantage of any cooperative individuals encountered beside the road or on open slopes.



Saker Falcon by Daniel Danckwerts

For the remainder of the morning we will work slowly downhill through pine and spruce forest. Among the star birds will be the scarce and elusive Sichuan Jay, beautiful Crested Tit-warbler, huge Black Woodpecker, Three-banded Rosefinch and low-density Przevalski's Nuthatch. Long-tailed Thrush often sings from the tallest pines in the early morning, potentially providing opportunities for perched photographs against clean mountain backgrounds.



Rufous-necked Snowfinch by Daniel Danckwerts

Mixed flocks may contain Goldcrest, Rufous-vented, Coal and Grey-crested Tits and Hodgson's Treecreeper. The attractive White-throated Redstart is usually common and may prove one of the more obliging photographic subjects here. We will also be alert for Collared and White-winged Grosbeaks, Southern Nutcracker, Chinese Fulvetta, Grey-headed Bullfinch and Red Crossbill.

With considerable luck we may also encounter some of the mountain's rarer and less predictable species, including Chinese Grouse, Long-tailed Rosefinch and Chinese Babax. Even brief sightings of these can be exciting; a photographic opportunity would be especially memorable.

Mengbishan is also an impressive landscape destination in its own right. High passes, dark coniferous forests, distant ridgelines and expansive mountain views offer excellent opportunities for wide-angle photography, particularly when early light or shifting cloud adds drama to the scene.

The construction of a tunnel may cause this pass to be closed in the future.

Maerkang to Ruoergai. We embark on a long drive from Maerkang towards Ruoergai, gradually climbing onto the vast Tibetan Plateau at around 3,500m (11,500ft). Leaving town, swathes of dense coniferous and bamboo forest gradually give way to immense open grasslands. For photographers, this transition is an important part of the day, with increasingly expansive landscapes and a chance to capture the huge scale of the plateau as mountain valleys open into rolling grasslands beneath broad skies.



Blue Eared-Pheasant by Daniel Danckwerts

As we cross the plateau we will make regular photographic stops for Horned Lark, Black-rumped and Azure-winged Magpies, Oriental Skylark, Daurian Jackdaw, Carrion Crow, Northern Raven, Little Owl, Common Hoopoe, Grey-backed Shrike, Twite, Rock Sparrow and

Siberian Stonechat. Roadside birds perched on rocks, fence posts and low vegetation can offer particularly useful opportunities for environmental portraits.



Himalayan Vulture and Carrion Crow by Daniel Danckwerts

Three rarer grassland species we hope to encounter are the impressive Saker Falcon, scarce Tibetan Snowfinch and little-known Giant Grey Shrike. We will also check roadside quarries for roosting Eurasian Eagle Owl.

Mammals become increasingly prominent as we move onto the plateau. Possibilities include Greater Hog Badger, Eastern Roe Deer, Tibetan and Red Foxes and Grey Wolf. The open terrain can sometimes provide unobstructed views over considerable distances and, should we encounter one of the larger mammals in good circumstances, there may be scope for both closer images and wider compositions showing the animal within the vast plateau landscape.

Further along our route we will stop to search for one of the region's most distinctive birds, Przevalski's Finch, or Pinktail. Its open scrubby habitat gives us the possibility not only of seeing the species well but of photographing it within the characteristic landscape of the Tibetan Plateau. The same habitat supports scarce White-browed Tit, exquisite White-browed Tit-warbler and Tibetan Partridge, all of which will receive plenty of attention should good photographic opportunities arise.

Eventually we continue across the sweeping grasslands towards Ruoergai. The scale of the plateau, broad skies, isolated wetlands and distant mountain ranges should ensure that landscape photography remains an important part of the journey throughout the day.

Ruoergai – Baxi Valley. The forests and valleys around Baxi provide a marked contrast to the open plateau and offer an exciting morning of forest photography. One of our prime subjects will be the superb Blue Eared Pheasant. Early morning gives us the best opportunity to find these striking birds active along forest edges or more open areas, where they may occasionally remain in view long enough for photography.



White-browed Tit-warbler by Daniel Danckwerts

The surrounding coniferous forest supports the rare Sichuan Jay as well as Black and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, Przevalski's and Chinese Nuthatches — the latter at the very edge of its range here — Crested Tit-warbler and the rare and exceptionally shy Chinese Grouse.

We will also concentrate on densely vegetated gullies, where Snowy-cheeked, Plain, Giant and Elliot's Laughingthrushes occur alongside White-throated and Hodgson's Redstarts, Spectacled Parrotbill, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Sichuan Tit, White-browed Tit-warbler and Pink-rumped, Himalayan Beautiful and Chinese White-browed Rosefinches. Working patiently along the forest edge can sometimes provide brief windows in which these typically secretive birds emerge into more open vegetation.



Przevalski's Finch by Daniel Danckwerts

The attractive White-backed and Chestnut Thrushes are usually present in reasonable numbers and can provide excellent photographic subjects. We may also encounter Godlewski's Bunting, Eurasian Wryneck and Yellow-streaked Warbler.

We will listen carefully for the distinctive songs of Siberian Rubythroat and White-bellied Redstart. At this time of year both species may perch prominently while singing to attract mates and proclaim territories, potentially giving us some of the finest passerine photography of the tour.



Black-necked Crane by Daniel Danckwerts

Mammals are also well represented in the Baxi Valley, with Maned Serow a particular target and an exciting photographic prospect should we locate one. The combination of dense forest, mountain slopes and sheltered valleys also makes Baxi an attractive location for broader habitat images, especially in early morning mist or soft, overcast light.

Ruoergai – Flower Lake. Flower Lake and its surrounding grasslands and wetlands provide some of the tour's finest opportunities for open-country, waterbird and landscape photography. The broad skies, reflective water, marshland and distant plateau scenery create a very different photographic environment from the forest sites we have visited previously.

The main waterbody can hold a wide selection of passage and resident waterbirds, including Greylag and the much rarer Bar-headed Geese, Great Crested and Black-necked Grebes, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Tufted Duck, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler and Eurasian Teal. Whooper Swan is also possible. Where birds approach within reasonable distance, the open water can provide clean backgrounds and excellent opportunities for portraits, flight shots and behavioural photography.

The marshy grassland around the wetland edge supports Eurasian Bittern, Brown-cheeked Rail and breeding-plumaged

Citrine Wagtail of the particularly attractive black-backed race. Areas of exposed shoreline may additionally produce White-winged, Common and Whiskered Terns together with Little Ringed Plover, Temminck's and Red-necked Stints, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Eurasian Whimbrel and breeding-plumaged Tibetan Sand Plover.



Golden Eagle by Daniel Danckwerts

One of our principal photographic subjects will be the stately Black-necked Crane, which breeds here at this time of year. We should encounter fair numbers during the afternoon, giving us time to seek uncluttered compositions and images showing these elegant birds in their plateau habitat. If we are especially fortunate, we may even witness and photograph pairs performing their spectacular dances.

The surrounding grasslands will also be searched for Tibetan Lark, the bizarre Ground Tit, Black Redstart and Rufous-necked and White-rumped Snowfinches. Hen Harrier and Saker Falcon are sometimes seen hunting over the open country during the late afternoon and could provide exciting flight-photography opportunities.

The mammal photography can also be excellent. Grey Wolf, Tibetan and Red Foxes and Himalayan Marmot are all possible during our travels through the surrounding grasslands, while large numbers of burrowing Plateau (Black-lipped) Pikas should be present. The pikas in particular can offer entertaining behavioural photography and make excellent subjects in the soft, low light of late afternoon, while predators moving through the grasslands would rank among the most exciting photographic encounters of the tour.

Flower Lake is also one of the best places on the itinerary to devote time specifically to landscape work. Sweeping grasslands, reflective wetlands, enormous skies, changing clouds and distant mountains allow for everything from broad panoramic images to more intimate studies of reeds, water, flowers and the textures of the plateau. Late-afternoon light can be particularly beautiful, bringing warmth and depth to the grasslands and providing a fitting finale to our photographic exploration of this remarkable region.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	■ ■ ■	Moderately paced, with several early starts, long days & periods at high altitude. Best suited to experienced travellers in good general health; not recommended for anyone with significant mobility limitations or medical conditions affected by altitude or cold.
Birding Ease	■ ■ ■	Mostly easy to moderate.
Accommodation	■ ■ ■	Generally comfortable to very comfortable.
Walking / Trails	■ ■ ■	A fair amount of walking, mostly along roads and tracks.

Vehicles / Roads		Mostly good-quality roads in a comfortable vehicle, with several long drives.
Photography		Good to very good, including opportunities from purpose-built hides. The tour is not designed for dedicated photography.
Annoyances		Several early starts and long days; cold to very cold conditions and high altitude at times; occasional crowds at popular sites.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

The price for this 15-day Tailor-made tour of China is **US$5,995.00** per person, on a twin/sharing basis based on a minimum group size of 5 guests.

Single supplement: US$595.00

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 15 of the Sichuan Tour; and;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- 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 notice 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 tour is designed to be a comprehensive photographic tour combining bird, general wildlife, landscape, and cultural photography.
- Most of the walking is not technically difficult, although participants should be prepared for long days in the field, several hours on foot and repeated exposure to elevations above 3,000m.
- In some areas it can get very cold, especially if we encounter high winds.
- Some of the birds are low in density and we should expect full days' birding to find the maximum variety of species.
- Large crowds of local tourists are possible at some locations.
  This tour requires a good level of fitness and participants should be in good general health, as much of the birding is conducted on foot and may involve walking for several hours. On several days, we will be above 3,000m in elevation. We will also be far from modern medical facilities for much of the tour. Please notify the Rockjumper office before departure of any medical conditions, physical limitations or concerns that may affect your participation.
- We change 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.
- Biting insects are present but generally not problematic during this tour; however, some people prefer insect repellent. Guests who are allergic to bees/other insect bites must carry the necessary medication.

Arrival and Departure Details

The main tour will begin at our hotel in Chengdu on day 1. The first day of the tour is set aside as an arrival day. The tour will conclude in Chengdu after breakfast on day 19.

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.

Chengdu Tianfu International Airport, Chengdu (IATA: TFU) is the main port of entry for international flights for this tour and is well serviced by several major airlines.

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.