

Shanxi & Sichuan, China

26th March – 11th April, 2018

Tour leader : Summer Wong (Wang Wenjuan)

Participants: Mark & Louise Smiles



Gold-fronted Fulvetta © Summer Wong

Mark had been to Sichuan before in 2015 May with another few friends, they did a one week tour to Balang Shan and Longcanggou, got most of the targets there, only a few missed. And Mark did lots of birding in the world, he only needs those endemic and rare ones on this tour, so this March-April Sichuan tour just focus on the northern endemic/rare Sichuan species, and the species he missed in last trip, and the trip turned out to be great, we got all the possible targets, including 5 Streaked Barwings, 4 Gold-fronted Fulvettas. And in this season while most of the places still covered by snow, the residential endemic or rare ones were quite “easy” compared to May and June.

26 / 3 Xi'an – Yangxian

Picked up Mark and Louise in the morning at Xining beside the city wall, we drove to Foping panda base where they not just hold a Giant Panda rescued from Erlang, and also kept a family group of Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys in day time, after 5pm, monkeys will go back up to high mountain to sleep, next early morning, “monkey chasers” go to their sleeping place and push them down to the panda base area where tourists can reach. After around 5 hours drive, just before Foping town, we had one stop on the roadside on a slope we got Grey-capped Greenfinches, 2 Vinous-throated Parrotbills, 2 Streak-breasted Scimitar Babblers, Darian Redstart, Collared Finchbill, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler, a male Yellow-throated Bunting, Brown-breasted Bulbuls. Red-billed Blue Magpie, Common Magpie and Large-billed Crow are common all along the road. Drove into town and had a little walk on the street while waiting for the food to serve, and surprisedly got a Chinese Bamboo Partridge seating on top of the roadside tree on a busy road full of traffic ! Had a great very local lunch then we headed to the panda base, there we had good view and interaction with the monkeys, and saw active Giant Panda Erlang who

named after the place where he was rescued, he just moved to the new enclosure this day so he was actively checking and marking the new place. Not many birds in the panda base at this time of the year, but got a wonderful pair of Sooty Tits, had great close view. And this day we encounters 3 Pere David's Rock Squirrels. After 2 hours drive we arrived at Yangxian and still got a bit light so we decided to have a look of Crested Ibis, and eventually we got 11 of them roosting on the same tree! In the field we got a hunting Asian Barred Owlet, and Eurasian Hobby quite actively hunting too before dark.



Golden Snub-nosed Monkey © Summer Wong



Sooty Tit at Foping Panda Center © Summer Wong



Chinese Bamboo Partridge on tree at a busy road © Summer Wong
27 / 3 Yangxian – Tangjiahe

In the morning we did some birding at the field and village area before going to Tangjiahe, there we got 9 Crested Ibises in total, two of them had great view,

local people noticed we were watching birds, and very proudly told us there were two Crested Ibises nesting on the big tree behind their house, and led us to see it. There we got great view of the ibis couple building their nest. We drove to Tangjiahe and birding outside before entering the park, we got 2 Chinese Hwamei, 2 David's Fulvetta, Ashy-throated Parrotbills, Brown Deeper, White-capped Water Redstart, Russet Sparrow. 2 Collared Crow just flying around actively out of the gate. After enter the park, we did some birding behind the hotel. There we got 4 Slaty Bunting, 1 male Golden Pheasant, only head and up body view, it's hiding but not far on the slope. Also got Little Bunting, White-crowned Forktail, Little Forktail, male Snowy-browed Flycatcher, Pygmy Wren Babbler, Crested Kingfisher, Asian House Martin etc. On the way to hotel, we got a Chinese Goral on the road side. After dinner when it's dark out, we did mammal watching , got 5 Tibetan Macaques, 2 Hog Badgers, 1 Wild Boar, 13 Reeve's Muntjacs, 12 Takins, 2 Chinese Gorals, 3 Masked Civets.



Crested Ibis, individuals born in the wild without ring on leg © Summer Wong



Red-billed Starling at a roof dragon head © Summer Wong

28 / 3 Tangjiahe

Before we took the shuttle bus inside the park to Motianling area, we did some birding in the early morning to look for Golden Pheasant, and we got a nice male one on the grass slope next to a Takin ! Whole body view of the pheasant! At the shuttle bus station, we got Sulphur-breasted Warbler, Speckled Piculet, Yellow-browed Tit etc. Then after breakfast we spend the whole day birding at Motianling area the way up and down. Heard Temminck's Tragopan, but didn't see it. Got Fire-capped Tit now and then, in total 6. Sooty Tits found on the top area and also Sichuan Treecreeper. A pair of Spectacled Fulvettas were very active on the foot of Motianling. Barred Laughingthrushes feeding quietly inside the bamboo on the up area, 4 of them. Heard White-browed Shortwing.



Takin © Summer Wong



Reeve's Muntjac © Summer Wong



Spectacled Fulvetta © Summer Wong



Great Parrotbill © Summer Wong



Fire-capped Tit © Summer Wong

29 / 3 Tangjiahe – Chuanzhusi

On the way from Tangjiahe to Chuanzhusi, we got a pair of Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler, and a pair of Hwamei, on the pass called Huangtuliang, we had field lunch there and got Pink-rumped Rosefinch, Rufous-vented Tit, White-throated Redstart, Giant Laughingthrush, Hodgson's Treecreeper, Rosy Pipit, Chinese Fulvetta. When we arrived at Jiuzhaigou area, we tried to look for Spectacled Parrotbill, but our first try at a usual spot failed, only got Spectacled Fulvetta, we had to try other places due to my experience of winter birding, I found a slope has bushes very similar to where I had seen Spectacled Parrotbill in winter before, so we went up the slope and flashed out a female Golden Pheasant and a female Common Pheasant, on the way back we eventually got a singing pair Spectacled Parrotbill ! Before we checked in hotel at Chuanzhusi, we did some birding at Gonggangling forest, there we got a pair of Crested Tit Warblers were very active on pine trees, and a pair of White-browed Tit Warblers were busy building their nest, a female Grey-headed Woodpecker was singing a lot and spotted on a distance pine tree, a pair of Blue Eared-Pheasants were spotted just on a slope very close to the road.



Blue Eared-pheasant © Summer Wong



female Crested Tit Warbler © Summer Wong



White-browed Tit Warbler © Summer Wong

30 / 3 Chuanzhusi-Ruoergai

We checked out hotel 2 hours before sunrise for Sichuan Wood Owl, and got a pair easily in the dark, both calling a lot. They stayed in the nearby pine forest and calling a lot for the whole morning. In the day time, we got Three-banded Rosefinches perched on top of pine trees, long way up, can ID them but not very good clear view, our best view of a male one was at the last spot before we left gong gangling forest, it came in a bird wave and perched on a short pine tree in the nice morning sunshine, in the scope it looked great. Saw Blood Pheasants two times, in total 6 of them. Red Crossbills flying above head and calling a lot in big flocks, at least 50 of them. Also got Grey-headed Bullfinch and Rufous-vented Tit, Grey-crested Tit, White-winged Grosbeak, Red-billed Starling strange place to see it on top of the pine trees, a male Crested Tit Warbler came in a bird wave, also a male Three-banded Rosefinch.

After Gonggangling, we drove directly to Ruoergai, had self-heating rice on the plateau, bright sunny day on the plateau grassland. As we arrived at Ruoergai at early afternoon, so I decided to do some birding at Baxi forest. The edge of the grassland and forest covered by fog, when we over the pass entered the forest, it's raining there, and the further we went the heavier the rain was, I thought it's no chance to see targets in this kind of weather, so I suggested to drive back go to the flower lake area try snowfinches and Tibetan Larks there as it's sunny on the plateau grassland. On the way out of the forest, near to the pass, the rain stopped and had clear blue sky, I was wondering maybe should try another spot at the forest then, I told to Mark about this idea, he preferred to stick to the plan we made, so we drove to plateau flower lake area and did birding there. It turned out to be a great decision, as the next morning the whole plateau was covered by heavy snow and the snowing lasted the whole next day, it's gonna be very hard to look for the Tibetan Lark in snow like that. On 30th April afternoon, we got hundreds of White-rumped Snowfinch, 6 Rufous-necked Snowfinches, and 12 Tibetan Larks which took us hours long walk to find out near the flower lake. And 3 Tibetan Foxes on the way when we looked for the larks.



Sichuan Wood Owl/ Pere David's Owl © Summer Wong



Sichuan Wood Owl/ Pere David's Owl © Summer Wong



Rufous-necked Snowfinches in fighting © Summer Wong



Black-necked Crane © Summer Wong



Plateau Pika © Summer Wong

31 / 3 Baxi forest

When we left hotel, it was snowing outside, the town and plateau were all covered by snow already, glad we tried the plateau flower lake area the day before in the sunshine. We spent the early morning looking for Chinese Grouse, and eventually got 5 in total, one male and one female were seen well. Snowy-cheeked Laughingthrush took us time to got 2 in the snow covered bushes, they were not very active in the snow. At least 50 Red Crossbills were seen flying across above head. 1 male White-browed Tit Warbler and 1 male Streaked Rosefinch was seen in the bushes. When we headed to the other valley for Sichuan Jay and Chestnut-throated Monal Partridge the snow was coming down more heavily. On the way up we got a pair of Chestnut-throated Monal Partridges, and 6 Blue-eared Pheasants flying down the mountain one by one, had great flying view. Crested Tit Warblers were seen a few times, in total

number at least 10. Chinese Fulvetta and Hodgson's Treecreeper were seen at same place. We searched up and down the valley for Sichuan Jay but no good luck. On the way back we got another pair of Chinese Grouses and 16 Blue-eared Pheasants. 2 Wallcreepers were spotted at different places on the way back.



Crested Tit Warbler © Summer Wong



Chestnut-throated Monal Partridge © Summer Wong



Blue Eared-pheasant



Blue Eared-pheasant © Summer Wong



Red Crossbill © Summer Wong



Wallcreeper © Summer Wong



Snowy-cheeked Laughingthrush © Summer Wong



Chinese Grouse © Summer Wong

1 / 4 Ruoergai-Maerkang

The whole town was covered by snow after full day snowing the day before, we checked out hotel just about sunrise, had breakfast at town, then we headed to Maerkang. The whole plateau was covered by heavy snow, seems like the snow never melted during the winter. Our first trying for Przevalski's Finch was stopped by the heavy snow, can't even see much bushes, because they almost all covered under the snow, how the finch can survive in snow like this? And it's so quiet there, no sign of finch at all, only skylarks in distance on the roadside. Even with no hope, still kept trying another spot, no sign either. Tried the third one, we got a Black-eared Kite sitting on top of a big bush in the middle of the slope, then I heard White-browed Tit in distance, follow the sound I spotted it not far from the kite, I called out loudly to Mark, he told me at night bird call, he thought I was saying white-browed tit warbler, so he didn't pay much attention till the second tit showed up on a closer bush! But anyway, the tit gave us much hope and faith, if the tit can survive in snow like this, why not the finch? 2 minutes after that thinking, I heard finch calling in distance, and spotted the male Przevalski's Finch sitting on top of bush in long distance ! Then two females showed up, the male was displaying there! Driving on snow covered road is very slow, and had a little traffic jam because other car stuck up on road, arrived at Hongyuan lunch time, had good dumpling lunch. On the way, got 3 Black Storks, 72 Black-necked Cranes.



Black-winged Snowfinch © Summer Wong



White-browed Tit © Summer Wong



Przevalski's Finch, male displaying © Summer Wong



Black Stork © Summer Wong



Brown-headed Gull © Summer Wong



Three-banded Rosefinch © Summer Wong

2 / 4 Mengbishan

This morning we tried very hard for Sichuan Jay, walked down a trail through the big valley, during the 3 and half hours walking, we got dozens of Blood Pheasants, 2 Chestnut-throated Monal Partridges, and dozens of Giant Laughingthrushes, 4 White-throated Dippers, 1 male Crested Tit Warbler. But no Jay. Giant Laughingthrush imitating the jay calling a lot, annoying! After lunch, we tried another up slope for the jay, but no luck. The slope was covered by heavy snow, when walked on it, my whole leg sank into it, had to crawl on the snow to avoid sinking in. On the way down we started to play with snow, had great fun with playing snow, driving away the disappointment of not seeing the jay. We eventually back to the concrete road, and walking slowly checking trees around, so quiet, we discussed about the plan for the next day, we will come back to pass the mountain to Wolong, so we have another morning for the jay then, suddenly we heard some barking sound, Mark thought it's from distance White-eared Pheasant, I was expecting it's from the jay, and it is a jay! I spotted it popping up on the tree in front of us, then another 2 spotted ! I was too lazy, didn't bring my camera, Mark got some recording shots of the first one sitting on the pine tree a while. We finished the day early.



Blood Pheasant © Summer Wong



Elliot's Laughingthrush © Summer Wong



White-throated Deeper © Summer Wong

3 / 4 Maerkang – Labahe

This morning we started late, left hotel at 7:00 AM, we arrived at Chestnut-throated Monal Partridge spot, heard them calling high up on the slope and moved even higher later, seems like no chance see them at that spot, so we tried another spot, and got a pair calling on the open slope, Mark eventually had the chance to see the whole body well and check the throat color which he couldn't manage to see well in the last two times. On the pass, when we left, it's -12 degrees there, and windy ! We arrived at Balang Shan around lunch time, at a toilet stop, we got a pair of Streaked Rosefinches. We tried to go up to the pass, but failed, because the road was all covered by ice and snow on the up area, we returned and went through by the tunnel. We had lunch at the small tunnel place, and got a Lammergeier circling above head. After lunch we decided to go straight to Labahe this day as Mark don't want to spend time at Balang Shan, he got most of the targets at his last visit in 2015. After long driving day, We arrived at Labahe quite late, around 9 PM.



Streaked Rosefinch © Summer Wong

4 / 4 Labahe

As it's a long driving day yesterday, we decided to have a short day tomorrow, do birding in the morning and rest in the hotel in the afternoon, and do some birding just before sunset. In the morning we got a male Lady Amherst's Pheasant while we were trying to see Temminck's Tragopan which we only heard, got good view of a Chinese Wren Babbler after we went up the bamboo slope to reach it. Got a pair of Fulvous Parrotbills mixed in a bird wave of Golden-breasted Fulvetta and Grey-hooded Fulvetta. On the middle of the mountain we got 3 Pere David's Tits in a bird wave which also brought etc. On the way down, we got a Pygmy Wren Babbler in the bamboo. Near to the gate before the shuttle bus picked us up to hotel, we got another bird wave, it brought lots of speices, except Fire-capped Tits, Ashy-throated Warblers, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Sichuan Leaf Warblers, Black-browed Tits, Chestnut-vented Nuthatches, Mrs Gould's Sunbirds, Coal Tits, also a pair of Fulvous Parrotbills, Long-tailed Minivets, Grey-hooded and Golden-breasted Fulvettas. After lunch a hotel, we rest a few hours at hotel, and did some birding just before sunset, we went to the trail behind Luming Hotel, there we were trying to look for Maroon-backed Accentor which I saw quite a few in Dec, but no sign of it in April, probably they moved up . We got similar species as on middle mountain, but other stuff is Green Shrike Babbler, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, Dusky Thrush.



Fire-capped Tit © Summer Wong



Yellow-browed Tit © Summer Wong



Grey-hooded Fulvetta © Summer Wong



Golden-breasted Fulvetta © Summer Wong



Pere David's Tit © Summer Wong



Fulvous Parrotbill © Summer Wong

5 / 4 Labahe – Longcanggou

The original plan is we will do some birding in the early morning up on the mountain at Labahe, but it rained the whole night, and in the morning still raining heavily, so we decided go straight to Longcanggou. We had lunch at Hulin Hotel, then we headed to the mountain, it's also raining there, but not too heavy, we spent the afternoon birding in the lower area of the mountain. We successfully found 2 Golden-fronted Fulvettas at 2 bird waves! The first time I spotted it quite close to the roadside mixed with lots of David's Fulvettas, as it's quite close I regretted I didn't bring my camera, but later I realized no need to regret, because it moved too fast, no chance to photograph it at all! Every time when I or Mark spotted it in the bird waves, we just put bins on it and spotted it, then it moved, either dropped down or moved into leaves, disappeared then lost it, no chance to direct Louise to the bird at all ! The Golden-fronted Fulvettas lighten up the day! We tried for Sichuan Bush Warbler, no sound at all, probably not arrive yet, no sign of Buffy Laughingthrush either .

6 / 4 Longcanggou

It's a foggy and raining day. During the heavy fog and rain, we got 2 male 1 female Temminck's Tragopans on the way up in the early morning. Got another male tragopan on the trail while we were trying for the Streaked Barwing, but no barwing. We back to vehicle to have field lunch, and got a group of Three-toed Parrotbills on the corner while I went to have a toilet stop and spotted them, at least 6 of them, feeding in the bamboo and heavy fog. We spent lot time to look for Streaked Barwing before we went back to hotel, but didn't see it. We assume the weather maybe the problem, and decided to look for Tibetan Partridge and Buff-throated Monal Partridge in the west instead wasting too much time for the barwing.



Temminck's Tragopan © Summer Wong



Three-toed Parrotbill © Summer Wong



Sichuan Forest Thrush © Summer Wong

7 / 4 Longcanggou-Xinduqiao

In the early morning we tried for Ashy-throated Parrotbills before we left, it's a clear day in the bottom of the mountain, got the parrotbills easily near hotel, they were in group, singing a lot, at least 20 of them. We drove directly to Xinduqiao, because the express way from Ya'an to Luding is available, make it possible to arrive at Pengbuxixiang where has feeding spot for Tibetan Partridge in day time, it took us around 7 hours drive, arrived there around 4 PM. There we got 3 Tibetan Partridges, and lots of Giant Laughingthrushes, Pink-rumped Rosefinches, 2 Blood Pheasants, 2 White Eared-pheasants, a pair of Streaked Rosefinches, and 3 male Grandalas! Heard Buff-throated Monal Partridge way up on the mountain slope, tried to pick them out, but failed because it's snowing heavily around 6 PM. We decided to try the next morning. We spent the night at a tibetan family, with the fire woods oven in the living

room, we had a great dinner time and a warm night while it's still snowing outside.



Tibetan Partridge © Summer Wong



Grandala © Summer Wong

8 Xinduqiao – Pamuling

The next morning, when we looked out the window, the whole place was covered by heavy snow! And the road was covered by ice, so we decided not drive to the monal partridge place, instead we walked to a feeding place for White Eared-Pheasant, on the way we got Robin Accentors, Pink-rumped Rosefinches, Giant Laughingthrushes. At least 20 White Eared-pheasants feeding on the snow, not afraid of people at all, can photograph them by cellphone right in front of you! After that we headed to Yajiang Pamuling Monastery, the tunnel on the way is available so, it only took us 2.5 hours to drive there, we had lunch at Yajiang, then we drove up to the monastery, the road is very basic, 10 km to the top, but took us one hour driving, on the way when meeting other local cars, it's scary passing on narrow road up on the mountain. It's a bright sunny day, we had great time at the top, it's over 4100 meters on the top, can see the highest mountain of Sichuan Gognga Shan, and eye level view is all snow covered mountains surround us. But in such bright middle day, no chance for monal partridge at all, we had to wait till sunset. Giant Laughingthrushes, Large-billed Crows were every where, and we witness a fighting between a group of Rhesus Macaques and Large-billed Crows in a wasteyard down the top. Late afternoon around 6 PM, we decided to walked down the other side of the mountain to look for the monal partridge, and just after two corners, I spotted a pair were just about to moving away from the main road. Finished the day just one hour before sunset, we drove down to the mountain foot just before dark, spent the night at a new hotel at mountain foot

where lots of other bird photographers stayed.



White Eared-pheasant © Summer Wong



Giant Laughingthrush © Summer Wong



Buff-throated Monal Partridge © Summer Wong

9 / 4 Pamuling – Luding

We drove to Erlang Shan, had lunch at Luding, spent the whole afternoon at Erlang Shan. I heard that the old road was blocked by local government to avoid tourist visiting, but when we arrived there, no barriers there, and met a van with local government workers checking the mountain, they said no problem to visit this place for tourists. As Mark had been here before in 2015, had Rufous-tailed Babbler already, so we just focused on the barwing. We went up and birding along the road, on the middle area, we encountered a bird wave, two Golden-fronted Fulvettas mixed in, we had good chance to see it in close view, much better than the chance in Longcanggou. When we walked on the quite road, our chatting sound disturbed a big bird in the bushes, we heard the strong wing flapping voice, then Mark spotted a male Temminck's Tragopan! While it's

getting dark birds became more active and calling more, we heard a Chinese Song Thrush singing on the down slope, tried to get the bins on it, but too many trees in front, couldn't see it. Heard Streaked Barwing calling in long long distance, but it's getting dark, so we decided to try next morning, went straight down and back to hotel. Other species there, got a nice male Lady Amherst's Pheasant crossed the road, Blyth's Shrike Babbler, Green Shrike Babbler, Ashy-throated Warbler, Chestnut-crowned Warbler etc.



Temminck's Tragopan © Summer Wong

10 / 4 Luding – Chengdu airport

On our last morning before going to airport, we focused on Streaked Barwing, back to where heard it yesterday, I heard the sound again, we went all the way up to get closer to the sound and eventually got it! 5 of them in a group! On the way from hotel to Erlang Shan, we got a female Lady Amherst's Pheasant seating on the concrete fence of road. Heard Chinese Song Thrush again, but no chance to see it. After the success of the barwing, we left and drove to the airport.



Gold-fronted Fulvetta © Summer Wong



Streaked Barwing © Summer Wong



Streaked Barwing © Summer Wong