

PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS  
GIANT PANDA EXPEDITION

2<sup>nd</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> December 2010

**TOUR REPORT**

**LEADER:** Chris Doughty

Our tour to the heart of China was very enjoyable, even if it did get a little strenuous at times. We were able to get well off the beaten track and see for ourselves, how life is lived in rural China, which is in great contrast, to the rapidly modernizing way of life, currently enveloping the larger cities and towns of China. We very much enjoyed birding in some incredibly beautiful mountains, experienced tasty food and saw some superb birds and mammals. Birding highlights included such beautiful and difficult to find species as Crested Ibis, Ferruginous Pochard, Hen Harrier, Crested Goshawk, Mountain Hawk-Eagle, Chinese Bamboo Partridge, Golden Pheasant, Long-billed Plover, Crested Kingfisher, Asian Barred Owlet, Grey-capped Pygmy-Woodpecker, Water Pipit, Dusky Thrush, Little Forktail, Barred Laughingthrush, Chinese Babax, Pallas's and Tickell's Leaf-Warblers, Hodgson's Redstart, Green Shrike-Babbler, Dusky Fulvetta, Spectacled and Vinous-throated Parrotbills, Sooty and Grey-crested Tits, Wallcreeper, Spotted Nutcracker, Grey-headed Bullfinch and Yellow-billed Grosbeak. Mammalian highlights included Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel, Pere David's Rock Squirrel, Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel, the rarely seen Red-and-white Giant Flying-Squirrel, and best of all, the rarely encountered Giant Panda.

Following a long and exhausting flight from Australia; we arrived at Xian, China's fourth largest city and the bustling capital of Shaanxi province. Here we were met by our local guide and driver and set off for our very comfortable hotel in downtown Xian. On the drive to our hotel, we noticed a couple of Common Kestrels along the roadside; the tour was off and running. Once we had settled into our hotel, we ate a very pleasant lunch and then visited the original wall around the old part of the city. Here we found a few Feral Pigeons and good numbers of Eurasian Tree Sparrows. We took a very relaxed stroll through some parkland in the heart of the city, known as Revolutionary Park. New birds here included Spotted Dove, Light-vented Bulbul, Common Blackbird, the very attractive Asian Azure-winged Magpie and a large flock of White-cheeked Starlings.

The following morning we drove to the now world-famous, Terracotta Warrior Exhibit. The Terracotta Warriors were only discovered in 1974, they had remained hidden under a layer of sand and earth for centuries. The Chinese government should be congratulated on creating an attractive and very informative archeological exhibit, which we all enjoyed visiting. We were joined by hundreds of mainly Chinese tourists to view the Terracotta Warriors who had been painstakingly put together again, piece by piece. For the latter part of the morning we did some birding in parkland, surrounding the exhibit. The birding was surprisingly, very good; new birds for the tour included large flocks of

Oriental Turtle-Doves, a very obliging female White-backed Woodpecker, several Collared Finchbills, lots of Brown-breasted Bulbuls, a pair of delightful Pallas's Leaf-Warblers, referred to by British birders as 'The Jewel of the East', a few Great Tits, plenty of Red-billed Blue Magpies and best of all, a couple of adult male Yellow-billed Grosbeaks. In the afternoon, we went birding along the Ba River, on the outskirts of Xian, and this too, proved very rewarding. New birds here included, good numbers of Little Grebes, several Little Egrets, a single Ferruginous Pochard, which is always a good bird to see, several Common Pheasants, a solitary Common Moorhen, a beautiful Green Sandpiper, a dazzling Common Kingfisher, a small flock of Olive-backed Pipits and a large, but very shy, flock of Little Buntings.

After driving through the sprawling suburbs of Xian, we headed south towards the Foping Panda Reserve. We broke the long drive with a birding stop at the Black River Dam, at the foot of the Qinling Mountains, before making the ascent to Foping township. Here we enjoyed watching a few Great Crested Grebes, swimming amongst the far more numerous Little Grebes, there was a lone Grey Heron along the edge of the dam, and then two adult female Hen Harriers came flying overhead and stayed for quite some time, as they quartered the grassland that surrounded the dam, searching for prey. A beautiful male Hodgson's Redstart then popped up in front of us, several very beautiful Black-billed Magpies were seen at close quarters, along with a few Large-billed Crows. A walk below some steep cliffs in the Qinling Mountains produced a very close Wallcreeper, which we were able to watch creeping around the steep cliffs. This was undoubtedly one of the great highlights of the tour and we were all very pleased to have found one. Following lunch in Foping, we birded along a narrow valley, which had a fast flowing stream, running right through the middle of it. The stream was surrounded by farmland and it was a very pleasant area to do some birding, and it also gave us the chance to observe every day life, in rural China. New birds for us included the stunning Crested Kingfisher, several playful White Wagtails, a solitary Winter Wren, a couple of very interesting Brown Dippers, a couple of very attractive Blue-fronted Redstarts, even more attractive White-capped Water-Redstarts and several delightful Plumbeous Water-Redstarts. We found a couple of rather skulking Hwameis, a few Green-backed Tits and a small flock of ground frequenting White-rumped Munias.

The following morning we drove the 24 kilometres to the Foping Panda Reserve; a designated United Nations Biosphere Reserve. There were still traces of snow along the roadside, and we were very happy to have five layers of clothing on! The reserve has the highest density of Giant Pandas in the wild, and this was our main reason for visiting during the very cold winter months, when the Pandas descend to a much lower altitude and are consequently, much easier to find. From the entrance of the reserve we set off on foot to walk the seven and half kilometre to the Panda Research Centre. There is no vehicle access in the reserve, only a narrow concrete walkway. We walked quite briskly, in order to reach the reserve by lunch time, not wanting to miss out on our lunch. During the walk we stumbled across a mixed species feeding flock, which contained a few new birds for us; they included the very uncommon Green Shrike-Babbler, Grey-cheeked Fulvetta and the uncommon Grey-crested Tit. In the afternoon we did some birding below the research centre, where we added a couple of uncommon Mountain Hawk-

Eagles, stunningly attractive Golden Pheasants, Great Spotted Woodpecker, a few very attractive Rufous-breasted Accentors, a pair of very smart Dusky Thrushes, a delightful Little Forktail, which foraged in a stream, a few very shy flocks of Chinese Babax, very confiding Songar Tits, a Eurasian Nuthatch and a few very impressive Spotted Nutcrackers.

We then spent the next three days birding in this designated United Nations Biosphere Reserve. The reserve has the highest density of Giant Pandas in the wild and at this time of year they come down to lower elevations, where we were hoping to see one or two. As we sat in a clearing amongst the very dense bamboo forest, our local Panda trackers set off in search of a Panda. Approximately an hour later, one of them came back to tell us that they had located one. What they didn't tell us, was that it would be very tough going, all up hill and all through very dense bamboo thickets. It was a very long and arduous trek and only the three youngest members of the party, managed to keep up with our guides. Shelley and I managed to enjoy a couple of quick looks at an adult Giant Panda, before it disappeared over a ridge. Unfortunately, Michael was unable to see it. An even more difficult trek, up an even steeper part of the mountain then followed; once again, we struggled to keep up with the local guides, who were taking us to see some other species of mammal, which they did not know the English name of. Eventually, Shelley, Michael and I arrived at a small valley, where the guides told us to watch a hole in a nearby tree. They scratched the tree, but nothing came out of the hole. They tried a second tree a little further up the valley, and this time, out popped a huge Red-and-white Giant Flying-Squirrel, which glided down the valley and onto the tree that we had originally been told to watch. It then climbed up the tree and disappeared into the hole in the trunk. It was a magnificent sighting of a truly splendid mammal.

Given that it was the middle of winter and it was very cold, even the waterfalls had partially frozen over, the birding was surprisingly good, and new birds for the tour came thick and fast. These included Crested Goshawk, the very distinctive *japonicus* race of Common Buzzard, Chinese Bamboo Partridge, both Grey-capped Pygmy and Crimson-breasted Woodpeckers, Orange-flanked Bush-Robin, White-crowned Forktail, the rarely observed and little-known Barred Laughingthrush, the more widespread Elliot's Laughingthrush, Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, Dusky Fulvetta, Spectacled and Vinous-throated Parrotbills, Eurasian Treecreeper, Sooty Tit, Eurasian Jay and the delightful Grey-headed Bullfinch. Michael spent a second full day with the Panda trackers and this time, he was justly rewarded with good views of a Giant Panda; well done Michael. Other mammals seen in the reserve included Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel, Pere David's Rock Squirrel and Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel.

The following morning we drove the short distance to nearby Yangxian, where we did some birding in an agricultural area, where our main target bird was the Crested Ibis, which not so long ago, was thought to be extinct. Then rumors began to circulate, that they had been found in a remote valley in central China. The rumors proved to be true, but even here, in 1981 the total world population was down to seven birds. With careful planning and management the number of Crested Ibis in the area is approximately 1,000. In no time at all, we were enjoying scope views of several of these rather prehistoric-looking birds. It was a real treat to see these beautiful birds, in their natural surroundings.

Along with the Crested Ibis there was also a supporting cast of a small flock of Common Snipe, which we saw exceptionally well in the scope, we found an Asian Barred Owllet sat on telegraph wires in broad daylight and a few beautiful Long-tailed Shrikes.

Following lunch we did some birding along the Han River, where we found large numbers of wintering wetland birds. New birds for the tour included a couple of Great Egrets, small numbers of Great Cormorants, several Ruddy Shelducks, a few Gadwall, a flock of a dozen or so Eurasian Teal, equal numbers of dazzling Common Goldeneyes, similar numbers of Common Mergansers, a couple of Northern Lapwings, half a dozen extremely range restricted Long-billed Plovers, a couple of Kentish Plovers, a single Common Greenshank, a couple of Common Sandpipers, a large flock of range restricted Pale Sand Martins, a beautiful Grey Wagtail, a couple of Daurian Redstarts, a small flock of range restricted Silver-throated Tits and a large flock of Grey-capped Greenfinches.

We were then driven to a small forested island, in the middle of a large reservoir, where the Crested Ibis roost for the night. While waiting for the Ibis to come in, we added four uncommon species of birds that were new for the tour. We observed a solitary Tickell's Leaf-Warbler very well, a pair of wintering White-shouldered Starlings, a solitary Black-faced Bunting and a beautiful Chestnut-eared Bunting.

The following morning, the day dawned sunny and bright and we birded a patch of forested hills above Yangxian, where we found a total of five new species of birds, for the tour. We enjoyed a couple of Grey-headed Woodpeckers, several White-browed Laughingthrushes, a small flock of Black-throated Tits, a few stunning Meadow Buntings and a very beautiful male Yellow-throated Bunting. Following a very fine lunch, we drove to Xian, where we spent the night at a very fine hotel.

This completed a most enjoyable and successful tour to China, where a good time was had by all.

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

### PODICEPIDIDAE

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis* The Little Grebe is both a resident and a summer

visitor to this part of China; we recorded small numbers on a number of the wetlands that we visited.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus* This large species of grebe is a summer visitor and passage migrant in this part of China. We observed a single bird swimming on the Black River Dam, below Foping, and then we observed four birds along the Han River, at Yangxian.

#### PHALACROCORACIDAE

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* In this part of China, the Great Cormorant is a summer breeding visitor. We found small numbers along the Han River, at Yangxian and then found a large breeding colony nesting on the same island that the Crested Ibis roost on.

#### ARDEIDAE

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea* A summer breeding visitor to this part of China, small numbers were present at the Black River Dam, along the Han River and in agricultural areas close to Yangxian.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba* A summer visitor and passage migrant to this part of China; we found a couple of birds along the Han River, at Yangxian.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* A summer breeding visitor to the area we visited in China; we found small numbers along the Ba River, at Xian, along a couple of rivers close to Foping and along the Han River, at Yangxian.

#### THRESKIORNITHIDAE

**Crested Ibis** *Nipponia nippon* This species once nested in the Russian far east, Japan and much of China. Unfortunately, it is now extinct over all its former range with the exception of only one known breeding population; the one we visited at Yangxian. In 1981 the population here dwindled to only 7 birds; the local farmers then began to protect the birds only breeding colony and numbers started to slowly increase. There are now approximately 1,000 birds in this colony. This species is listed as endangered in 'Threatened Birds of the World'. As the population increases the main threat to the birds is starvation, especially in winter. Autopsies conducted on dead birds have shown that 80% of birds had very little food in their stomachs. Some birds are occasionally shot by hunters.

#### ANATIDAE

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* In this part of China the Ruddy Shelduck is a breeding summer visitor, a passage migrant and a winter visitor. We saw half a dozen or so birds very well along the Han River, at Yangxian.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera* The Gadwall is a passage migrant in Shaanxi province; we observed a few birds together, along the Han River, at Yangxian.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* In this part of China the Eurasian Teal is a passage migrant and winter visitor. We found a large flock on the Han River, at Yangxian and a further small flock, on a small dam in the mountains above Yangxian.

**Ferruginous Pochard** *Aythya nyroca* The Ferruginous Pochard is a very uncommon

passage migrant through this area of China. We observed a single bird swimming around on the Ba River, at Xian.

**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula* The very attractive Common Goldeneye is an uncommon winter visitor, to the Shaanxi province of China. A flock of 10 or so birds were observed very well, along the Han River, at Yangxian.

**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser* The Common Merganser is an uncommon winter visitor to this part of China. We found a dozen or so birds grouped together along the Han River, at Yangxian.

#### ACCIPITRIDAE

**Hen Harrier** *Circus cyaneus* This species is a fairly common passage migrant, through this part of China. We very much enjoyed watching two adult females hunting over open grassland surrounding the Black River Dam, at the foot of the Qinling Mountains, below Foping.

**Crested Goshawk** *Accipiter trivirgatus* According to the literature, this species does not occur in Shaanxi province of China. However, we observed a bird circling just above a forest clearing, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo* I saw an adult of the race *japonicus*, which is a fairly common winter visitor to this part of China, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Mountain Hawk-Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis* The literature states that we were a little too far north to be in the range of this species. Even so, we enjoyed daily sightings of this species, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### FALCONIDAE

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* A common resident which we only observed in farmland, close to the airport at Xian.

#### PHASIANIDAE

**Chinese Bamboo-Partridge** *Bambusicola thoracica* This fairly common resident was observed by myself and Michael, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus* We enjoyed many good sightings of this resident species throughout the tour.

**Golden Pheasant** *Chrysolophus pictus* We enjoyed many sightings of this common resident in the Foping Panda Reserve. Some mornings there were up to a dozen or so birds feeding in the open area, behind the accommodation block.

#### RALLIDAE

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* At this time of year the Common Moorhen is a passage migrant in this part of China. We observed a single bird swimming around reedbeds in the Ba River, at Xian.

#### CHARADRIIDAE

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* This species is a fairly common winter visitor to southern Shaanxi province. We saw a couple of birds along the edge of the Han River, at Yangxian.

**Long-billed Plover** *Charadrius placidus* This threatened species is a summer breeding

species in southern Shaanxi province. We saw good numbers along the Han River, at Yangxian.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus* This species is a fairly common summer breeding visitor to Shaanxi province. We observed a couple of birds along the Han River, at Yangxian.

#### SCOLOPACIDAE

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* This species of snipe is a common passage migrant and winter visitor to southern Shaanxi province. We watched a flock of four birds feeding right out in the open, along the edge of a small stream in farmland on the outskirts of Yangxian. To see snipe so well is somewhat of a rarity and we were able to enjoy good scope views of them

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* This large species of wader is a common passage migrant and winter visitor, to southern Shaanxi province. We watched a solitary bird along the Han River, at Yangxian.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* The Green Sandpiper is a very common passage migrant and winter visitor to this part of southern Shaanxi province. We found it along the Ba River at Xian, along the Han River at Yangxian and in farmland around Yangxian.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* This species is a common passage migrant, through this part of China. We saw a couple of birds along the Han River, at Yangxian.

#### COLUMBIDAE

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia* Small numbers present throughout the larger towns and villages.

**Oriental Turtle-Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis* This attractive species proved to be an abundant resident, in all areas that we visited.

**Spotted Dove** *Streptopelia chinensis* This resident species was common in and around Xian.

#### STRIGIDAE

**Asian Barred Owlet** *Glaucidium cuculoides* We enjoyed super looks at this resident species perched on telegraph wires, in broad daylight, close to Yangxian.

#### ALCEDINIDAE

**Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* A common resident in this part of China; we enjoyed super close looks at a single bird, along the Ba River, at Xian.

**Crested Kingfisher** *Megaceryle lugubris* An uncommon resident, we observed it in farmland close to both Foping and Yangxian.

#### PICIDAE

**Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Dendropicos spodocephalus* We saw this uncommon resident in a forested area above Yangxian.

**Grey-capped Pygmy-Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos canicapillus* We observed this uncommon resident, on one occasion, in the Foping Panda Reserve. Where we

were able to enjoy prolonged looks at it.

**Crimson-breasted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos cathpharius* The Crimson-breasted Woodpecker is a rare resident in China; we saw it very well in the Foping Panda Reserve and in woodland above Yangxian.

**White-backed Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos leucotos* This beautiful species of woodpecker occurs mainly throughout northern Europe and northern Asia. There is an isolated race *tangi*, which is a fairly common resident in the forests of central Sichuan and southern Shaanxi provinces of China. We were very fortunate to enjoy prolonged looks at an adult female, in the grounds of the Terracotta Warriors Exhibit, at Xian.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* This large species of woodpecker is a common resident throughout the woodlands of Shaanxi province. We saw it well on a few occasions during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### HIRUNDINIDAE

**Pale Sand Martin** *Riparia diluta* A recent split from Collared Sand Martin/Bank Swallow. This species is a localised and uncommon resident in southern Shaanxi province. We found large numbers flying and presumably nesting, along the Han River, at Yangxian.

#### MOTACILLIDAE

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* The White Wagtail is a common resident and summer visitor to southern Shaanxi province and was commonly encountered throughout the tour.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* A common summer visitor to southern Shaanxi province; one bird was observed along the Han River, and would no doubt be leaving shortly afterwards, for its wintering grounds in Southeast Asia.

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* The Olive-backed Pipit is a fairly common summer visitor to southern Shaanxi province. Post dispersal breeding flocks were observed along the Ba River, at Xian and along the Han River at Yangxian.

**Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta* An uncommon bird in China; small numbers winter in southern Shaanxi province, we found a good number of birds wintering along the Han River, at Yangxian.

#### PYCNONOTIDAE

**Collared Finchbill** *Spizixos semitorques* This proved to be a common resident throughout all the forested areas we visited.

**Brown-breasted Bulbul** *Pycnonotus xanthorrhous* This also proved to be a common resident in all of the forested areas we visited.

**Light-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus sinensis* This also proved to be a common resident throughout the lowlands and foothills of southern Shaanxi province.

#### REGULIDAE

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* A fairly common resident in southern Shaanxi province; we saw it briefly on one occasion, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### CINCLIDAE

**Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasi* A common resident along fast flowing streams in southern Shaanxi province; which we saw well on numerous occasions.

#### TROGLODYTINAE

**Winter Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* A fairly common resident, which we saw well close to Foping and in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### PRUNELLIDAE

**Rufous-breasted Accentor** *Prunella strophciata* An uncommon altitudinal migrant in southern Shaanxi province. We were fortunate to observe a few of these birds on their lower altitude wintering grounds, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### TURDIDAE

**Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula* We saw small numbers of this common resident, in all the forested areas we visited.

**Dusky Thrush** *Turdus naumanni* A fairly common passage migrant in southern Shaanxi province. We were fortunate to observe a pair of these beautifully marked thrushes, on one occasion, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### SYLVIIDAE

**Tickell's Leaf-Warbler** *Phylloscopus affinis* A fairly common summer visitor to alpine areas of southern Shaanxi province. Therefore, we were very fortunate to enjoy good looks at a single bird, at the Crested Ibis roost site, at Yangxian. Colonel Samuel Richard Tickell (1811-1875) was a British army officer, artist and ornithologist in India and Burma. He made important early contributions to Indian ornithology while observing and collecting both bird and mammal specimens, in the states of Bihar, Orissa, Darjeeling and Tenasserim.

**Pallas's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus* This beautiful little warbler is an uncommon passage migrant through southern Shaanxi province. Therefore, we were very fortunate to observe two birds together, in parkland at the Terracotta Warriors Exhibit, at Xian. Peter Simon Pallas (1741-1811) was a German zoologist and one of the greatest of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century naturalists. He led numerous expeditions throughout much of Russia between 1768-1774. He described many new species of mammals, birds, fish and insects.

#### MUSCICAPIDAE

**Orange-flanked Bush-Robin** *Tarsiger cyanurus* A common summer visitor to southern Shaanxi province; we enjoyed good looks at this attractive species in the Foping Panda Reserve and in both farmland and woodland at Yangxian.

**Hodgson's Redstart** *Phoenicurus hodgsoni* A fairly common summer visitor to southern Shaanxi province; we observed it well at the Black River Dam, below Foping and along the Han River, at Yangxian. Brian Houghton Hodgson FRC (1800-1894) was an official of the East India Company and Assistant Resident in Nepal from 1825 until 1843 and in Darjeeling between 1845 and 1859. He

amassed a collection of 9,512 specimens of birds, belong to 672 species, of which 124 had never been described previously.

- Daurian Redstart** *Phoenicurus aureus* A summer breeding visitor to southern Shaanxi province, we found it along the Han River and in woodland at Yangxian.
- Blue-fronted Redstart** *Phoenicurus frontalis* A fairly common summer visitor to southern Shaanxi province, we saw it well in farmland close to Foping, and in woodland, close to Yangxian.
- White-capped Water-Redstart** *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* One of the most beautiful of all the redstarts, we encountered this common resident along all the high altitude mountain streams we visited.
- Plumbeous Water-Redstart** *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* A common altitudinal migrant, of fast flowing mountain streams, which we encountered throughout the tour.
- Little Forktail** *Enicurus scouleri* A fairly common altitudinal migrant; we recorded this stunningly attractive species along a fast flowing mountain stream in the Foping Panda Reserve.
- White-crowned Forktail** *Enicurus leschenaulti* This common resident of fast flowing mountain streams, was observed well in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### TIMALIIDAE

- Barred Laughingthrush** *Garrulax lunulatus* This uncommon and near-threatened species of laughingthrush is endemic to central China and occurs in small groups, in dense bamboo understorey of broadleaf and coniferous forests. This was exactly the habitat where Julie and I saw a small group, in the Foping Panda Reserve.
- Hwamei** *Garrulax canorus* We enjoyed many sightings of this attractive resident throughout the tour. This is also a very popular cage bird in China, because of its attractive song.
- White-browed Laughingthrush** *Garrulax sannio* A common resident of southern Shaanxi province, which we saw well in woodland above Yangxian.
- Elliot's Laughingthrush** *Garrulax elliotii* We enjoyed a few good looks at this rather common Chinese endemic, while birding in the Foping Panda Reserve. Daniel Giraud Elliot (1835-1915) was Curator of Zoology at The Field Museum in Chicago and was one of the founders of the American Ornithologist's Union. He had a great interest in ornithology and was independently wealthy and that enabled him to produce a series of bird books illustrated by magnificent colour plates, including his own excellent work, long after most publishers employed smaller formats and cheaper techniques. Elliot, could also afford to commission the best bird artists of the day, including Josef Wolf and Josef Smit, both formerly employed by John Gould. The lithograph series include works on pittas, pheasants, hornbills and birds of prey.
- Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler** *Pomatorhinus ruficollis* A fairly common resident of southern Shaanxi province, we saw it very well on a few occasions, while birding in the Foping Panda Reserve.
- Chinese Babax** *Babax lanceolatus* Small family parties of this fairly common resident were observed well, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Green Shrike-Babbler** *Pteruthius xanthochlorus* This small species of babbler is an uncommon resident of subalpine, mixed and conifer forests from 760-5,600 metres. We were very fortunate to enjoy good looks on two separate occasions, of a single bird in a mixed species feeding flock, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Dusky Fulvetta** *Alcippe brunnea* We found this common resident amongst mixed species feeding flocks, on a couple of occasions, while birding in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Grey-cheeked Fulvetta** *Alcippe morrisonia* We also observed this common resident on a couple of occasions, in mixed species feeding flocks, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### PARADOXORNITHIDAE

**Spectacled Parrotbill** *Paradoxornis conspicillatus* We were very fortunate to enjoy good looks at this very uncommon and range restricted species of Parrotbill, which is endemic to central China. We saw a small flock very well on one occasion, while birding in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Vinous-throated Parrotbill** *Paradoxornis webbiana* We encountered several large flocks of this charming species, in the Foping Panda Reserve, along the Han River and in woodland above Yangxian.

#### AEGITHALIDAE

**Silver-throated Tit** *Aegithalos glaucogularis* We saw family parties of this fairly common resident along the Han River and in woodland above Yangxian.

**Black-throated Tit** *Aegithalos concinnus* This attractive and common resident was observed in the Foping Panda Reserve and in woodland above Yangxian.

**Sooty Tit** *Aegithalos fuliginosus* Endemic to central China; we saw this uncommon species on a few occasions, in mixed species feeding flocks, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### PARIDAE

**Songar Tit** *Poecile songarus* A recent split from Willow Tit, the Songar Tit is endemic to central China, where it is a common resident. We saw it every day, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Grey-crested Tit** *Lophophanes dichrous* An uncommon resident of conifer forests from 2,480-4,000 metres. We saw it well on a couple of occasions in mixed species feeding flocks, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Great Tit** *Parus major* We enjoyed many sightings of this common resident, throughout the whole tour.

**Green-backed Tit** *Parus monticolus* We also observed this common resident in all the forested areas we visited.

#### SITTIDAE

**Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* This common resident was seen very well on a few occasions, in mixed species feeding flocks, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### TRICHODOMINAE

**Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* This beautiful species is an uncommon inhabitant of cliffs and rocks and is an altitudinal migrant. We enjoyed splendid looks at a bird in winter plumage on a rock face, not far from Foping. Michael saw a second bird, as we were driving from the Foping Panda Reserve, to Foping township.

#### CERTHIIDAE

**Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* We saw this common resident on a couple of occasions, in mixed species feeding flocks, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### LANIIDAE

**Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach* A common resident of the more open areas of the lowlands; we saw it well in farmland at Yangxian.

#### CORVIDAE

**Eurasian Jay** *Garrulus glandarius* A common resident in this part of China; we saw it well in the Foping Panda Reserve and in both farmland and woodland at Yangxian.

**Asian Azure-winged Magpie** *Cyanopica cyanus* A common resident of northern China; we encountered small flocks in the Revolutionary Park, at Xian and in the grounds of the Terracotta Warriors exhibit, on the outskirts of Xian.

**Red-billed Blue Magpie** *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* A common resident in all the forested areas we visited throughout the tour.

**Black-billed Magpie** *Pica pica* A common resident which we saw on most days of the tour.

**Spotted Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* A fairly common resident of subalpine conifer forests in China. We saw it on a daily basis during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Large-billed Crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos* Small numbers of this common resident species were observed at the Black River Dam, below Foping and in the Foping Panda Reserve.

#### STURNIDAE

**White-shouldered Starling** *Sturnia sinensis* A common winter visitor to southern Shaanxi province; we observed a pair of birds at the Crested Ibis roost site, in farmland, close to Yangxian.

**White-cheeked Starling** *Sturnus cineraceus* This species is also a common winter visitor to southern Shaanxi province. We observed small flocks in farmland and woodland, throughout the tour.

#### PASSERIDAE

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* This common resident was commonly encountered through the towns and villages we visited.

#### ESTRILDIDAE

**White-rumped Munia** *Lonchura striata* A small flock of this common resident was observed very well on one occasion, in farmland close to Foping.

#### FRINGILLIDAE

**Grey-capped Greenfinch** *Carduelis sinica* A common resident which we saw very well along the Han River and in woodland above Yangxian.

**Grey-headed Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula erythaca* An uncommon, resident species of subalpine conifer and mixed forests. We very much enjoyed a few good sightings of this very beautiful species, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Yellow-billed Grosbeak** *Eophona migratoria* An uncommon summer breeding visitor to southern Shaanxi province. Sightings of two males in the grounds of the Terracotta Warrior Exhibit at Xian, got our blood racing, at the very beginning of the tour.

#### EMBERIZIDAE

**Meadow Bunting** *Emberiza cioides* A fairly common resident, we found a small flock feeding on the ground, which included a beautiful adult male in full breeding plumage, while birding in a forested area, above Yangxian.

**Chestnut-eared Bunting** *Emberiza fucata* An uncommon resident in this part of China, we observed a beautiful adult in farmland just outside Yangxian, while waiting for the Crested Ibis to return to their roosting site for the night.

**Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla* A common winter visitor to southern Shaanxi province; we found a large flock along the Ba River, at Xian and smaller flocks along the Han River, at Yangxian and in a forested area above Yangxian.

**Yellow-throated Bunting** *Emberiza elegans* A fairly common resident of this area of China; we saw a stunningly beautiful adult male in a forest area above Yangxian.

**Black-faced Bunting** *Emberiza spodocephala* A common summer breeding visitor to this part of China. We saw single birds in farmland close to Yangxian and in a forested area above Yangxian.

#### MAMMALS

**Red-and-white Giant Flying-Squirrel** *Petaurista alborufus* This species of flying-squirrel inhabits dense hillside forest in mountainous terrain, where their nests are normally located high in tree hollows. It is nocturnal and covers the whole range

by climbing high in trees and gliding distances of up to 400 metres. We enjoyed a magnificent display of gliding in broad daylight in the Foping Panda Reserve, when our local guides disturbed one from its daytime roost.

**Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel** *Dremomys pernyi* This small species of squirrel is found in upland forest from 2,000-3,500 metres in elevation, where they live in evergreen broadleaf trees and conifers. They are diurnal and primarily terrestrial, commonly seen running along fallen tree trunks. Julie and I observed one very well on one occasion, in the Foping Panda Reserve.

**Pere David's Rock-Squirrel** *Sciurotamias davidianus* This squirrel favours rocky terrain and makes dens in deep crevices between rocks. They show great agility, and while capable of climbing trees, apparently rarely do so. This species of squirrel does not hibernate. We enjoyed a few good sightings of this species while walking from the research centre to the entrance of the Foping Panda Reserve. Father Jean Pere Armand David (1826-1900) was a French Lazarist priest as well as a fine zoologist. He was a missionary in China from 1862 and he started collecting both birds and mammals a year later. This remarkable man collected 1000's of specimens of plants, insects, birds and mammals.

**Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel** *Tamiops swinhoei* This species of squirrel inhabits evergreen broadleaf forest and conifers at elevations between 2,500-3,000 metres. It is almost exclusively arboreal, living in holes in trees. They are primarily active at dawn and dusk. Robert Swinhoe (1836-1877) was born in Calcutta, India, and was sent to England to be educated. He worked in China as a diplomat and during this time he explored a vast area which had not been open previously to any other collector. As a result, he discovered new species at the rate of about one per month throughout the more than 19 years he was there. He discovered more than 200 new species of birds.

**Giant Panda** *Ailuropoda melanoleuca* Giant Pandas inhabit montane forest, generally mixed coniferous and broad-leafed forests, at elevations of 1,200-3,900 metres, where stands of *Sinarundinaria* bamboo are present. They descend to lower elevations during the winter months. They feed almost entirely on the leaves of 30 or more species of bamboo; which accounts for up to 99% of their diet. Adults consume 12 to 15 kgs of food per day. They are solitary, nocturnal and crepuscular. Up to three cubs may be born in a litter, but normally only one cub survives to adulthood. At one time the range of this species covered almost all of the entire southern half of China and part of Myanmar. However, there numbers have been drastically reduced and they now occupy six disjunct populations. Unless corridors of forest are established so that contact between the various disjunct populations can be encouraged, thereby maintaining a viable gene pool, this symbol of conservation, will inevitably slide towards extinction, in the wild. Some members of our group enjoyed sightings of this wonderful animal, during our time in the Foping Panda Reserve.