



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Trip Report China – Private Przevalski's Finch Extension

27th to 31st May 2016 (5 days)



Siberian Rubythroat by Tom Heatley

Trip report compiled by tour leader: Glen Valentine

Top 5 Birds for the Przevalski’s Finch tour as voted by tour participants:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| 1. Siberian Rubythroat | 3. Daurian Partridge |
| 2. Guldenstadt’s (White-winged)
Redstart & Mongolian Lark | 4. Robin Accentor |
| | 5. Lesser Sand Plover |

Other species that received several votes but fell just short of the top 5: Henri’s, Rufous-necked and Blanford’s Snowfinches and Pine Bunting

Tour Summary:

Our three and a half week tour of Yunnan and Sichuan had drawn to a close and it was time for our post-tour extension up to Qinghai province, which is located almost entirely on the Tibetan Plateau. After a fairly short and pleasant flight from Chengdu we arrived in Xining in the mid-morning and met up with our excellent local guide, Kevin in the arrival hall. We immediately struck out for the



Chinese Nuthatch by Glen Valentine

Yaozigou Forest Reserve about an hour’s drive west of the city but we first popped into a small, roadside restaurant soon after leaving Xining and enjoyed a fine lunch as well as some good birding in the surrounding thickets. Azure-winged and Eurasian Magpies were evident as were Rook, Carrion and Large-billed Crows, Oriental Turtle Dove, Eurasian Collared Dove, Dusky Warbler and a Grey-headed Woodpecker that didn’t stick around too long. A few Black-faced Buntings skulked about in the dense bushes and suddenly the song of a male Siberian Rubythroat was heard from close-by. We stared into the thickets watching and waiting for the slightest bit of movement and suddenly there it was, in full view, a gorgeous male in all his glory. Siberian Rubythroats are always great birds to see but this was, for many reasons, an especially pleasing sighting for Tom. The monkey was indeed finally off his back! After lunch we continued the short drive towards the conifer-clad hills of Yaozigou where we spent the rest of the afternoon birding the coniferous forest and adjacent thickets. We found a few Common Pheasants standing in fields along the drive as well as a Common Buzzard. A good afternoon’s birding ensued and we quickly picked up the target Gansu Leaf Warbler that was seen nice and close while uttering its very distinctive song. A pair of White-browed Tit-Warbler flitted about in the undergrowth and we were delighted to see and

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Gansu Leaf Warbler by Glen Valentine



Chukar Partridge by Glen Valentine

Up early the next morning we struck out for some nearby hills. A slight drizzle filled the air but this did not put a damper on the birding and if anything improved our chances of partridges, which we were particularly lucky with this morning. Almost immediately after arriving in their habitat we located a pair of fabulous Daurian Partridge next to the road. They were quite shy though and scurried up the embankment and out of sight before flying across the road and down the hillside. We jumped out of the vehicle and tried to relocate them which proved fruitless until one began calling above us on the ridge. We shifted our position ever so slightly and there it was in full view! We ended up enjoying superb scope views of this difficult species and afterwards enjoyed our field breakfast in high spirits before making our way back down the mountain. While winding our way back down the road our driver produced some excellent spotting with a pair of Chukar Partridge clambering their way up the steep slope to the left of the road. What a wonderful bonus! Other noteworthy species seen this morning included Godlewski's Bunting, Daurian Redstart and Grey-capped Greenfinch. We left the mountain while it was still relatively early and began the drive out west towards Qinghai Lake. As we climbed higher so the weather deteriorated and by the time we reached our scheduled birding stop near the eastern shore of Qinghai Lake it was rather icy indeed. However the birding was excellent despite the cold and we quickly racked up a bunch of great birds. The first bird we saw as we exited the vehicle was a Rock Sparrow and the second was a pair of Pine Bunting! Wow, what a fantastic start! Also around were Oriental Skylark, Crested, Horned and the very striking Mongolian Larks (Dale's 6000th bird!), Black Redstart, Isabelline Wheatear and the ubiquitous Twite. Upon reaching the lake we were greeted by a number of water-associated birds such as Greylag and Bar-headed Geese, Ruddy Shelduck, Great Crested Grebe and Pallas's Gull and Common Tern in full breeding plumage, while the adjacent arid fields harboured Hume's Short-toed Lark, Ground Tit and a few Pere David's Snowfinches. A nearby small wetland adjacent to the main lake was teeming with birds and here we added Eastern Spot-billed and Ferruginous Ducks, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Red-crested and Common Pochards, Black-necked Grebe, the handsome Black-necked Crane,

photograph yet more male Siberian Rubythroats. In the taller forest we found Sichuan and Rufous-vented Tits, several more *phylloscopus* warblers, nesting Chinese Nuthatch, Slaty-backed Flycatcher and a female Red Crossbill, while some thickets further on produced Chinese White-browed Rosefinch, Elliott's Laughingthrush and White-throated Redstart. After an enjoyable and productive afternoon's birding we drove back to Xining and settled into our very pleasant hotel in town and stocked up with some better-than-average Great Wall wine for the next few days in remote Qinghai.



Robin Accentor by Tom Heatley



Rufous-necked Snowfinch by Tom Heatley

Black-winged Stilt and the best of all, several breeding plumage Lesser Sand Plovers. In the late afternoon we departed the eastern shores of the lake and made our way across the southern edge towards our hotel near Heimahe. Our final birding stop of the day was in some good-looking grassland and although we didn't pick up any new birds here we did see many more of the same quality species encountered earlier in the day with particularly good, close views of Mongolian Lark and Pere David's Snowfinch in gorgeous afternoon light. The skies were filled with Pacific Swifts and we also noticed a Pallas's Fish Eagle soaring in the distance as well as an Upland Buzzard perched up on a fence post. After a delicious dinner in town

we continued the short drive to our accommodation where we were based for the next two nights.

We had a wonderful, full day birding in the nearby mountains of Xanpishan and the Cha Ka Lake area. Our early morning started with a bang as we found several Rufous-necked Snowfinches right around our breakfast area and a short exploration of the scrubby slope above us yielded Robin and Brown Accentors, Alpine Leaf Warbler and a couple of Tibetan Roe Deer. A little higher up the pass we encountered another Brown Accentor and our first of several Henri's Snowfinches. We continued up to the top of the pass and birded the alpine grassy meadows either side of the road. Hundreds of pikas scurried around their burrows and from what I can gather consisted mostly of Plateau and Daurian Pikas and we also encountered a pair of the attractive Guldenstadt's Redstart. Tibetan Larks also fed close-by along with Henri's, Tibetan, Rufous-necked and White-rumped Snowfinches, while Pale Martins were a constant sight in the air. A Red Fox was also seen in this area as were several very cute Himalayan Marmots. We put in quite a bit of effort and mileage for our final Snowfinch: Blanford's; and it was only after lunch and an unplanned stop for a "ground jay-like bird" that we found two pairs of these small, scarce and attractive snowfinches along with a few Greater Short-toed Larks. The late afternoon was spent marching across the arid, scrubby plains surrounding Cha Ka Lake in search of two rare birds, here at the extreme southern tip of their ranges: Pallas's Sandgrouse and Henderson's Ground Jay. Some folks were fortunate to obtain brief flight views of a pair of jays but the sandgrouse unfortunately eluded us. We did also find an unexpected pair of Northern Lapwing and well as several Desert Wheatears during our time around the saline lake.

Our final day saw us birding the eastern shore of Qinghai Lake and adjacent grasslands once again in search of the elusive and nomadic Asian Short-toed Lark but without success. We ventured further north than where we'd birded two days prior, into some extremely barren



Rock Sparrow by Glen Valentine

dune habitat where we located more Brown Accentors, Rock Sparrow and Hume’s Short-toed Larks but found little else so decided to continue back towards the lake. A stroll along the roadside through the endless grassy plains that dominate this area produced more Mongolian Larks as well as many of the species seen on our second day of the trip and in the late morning we began the drive back to Xining where our quick-fire journey around Qinghai concluded with a lovely dinner at our sumptuous and now familiar hotel in town.

Thank you to everyone for a most enjoyable and fun trip and I hope to see you all again soon on another exciting Rockjumper birding adventure!



Qinghai Lake Scenery by Glen Valentine

**ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED
(107 species (104 seen and 3 heard only))**

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC List 6.2. Please cite: Gill, F. and M. Wright. 2016. *Birds of the World: Recommended English Names*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. Names in round brackets represent alternative names for the species. Square brackets are used for names that are given by IOC but omitted by Clements. A notes section is included where the taxonomy differs between IOC and Clements, where a distinctive subspecies exists that may be split in future or where a recent split has occurred.

Key to abbreviations:
(H) = Heard only

Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae

Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Large numbers on Qinghai Lake	
Bar-headed Goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>
Over 200 seen on Qinghai Lake	
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Around 40 birds on Qinghai Lake	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Two on a smaller backwater of Qinghai Lake	
Eastern (Chinese) Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>
Two on a smaller backwater of Qinghai Lake	
<i>NOTE: Spot-billed Duck now consists of two species: Eastern Spot-billed Duck and Indian Spot-billed Duck</i>	
Northern (Eurasian) Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Ten male on a smaller backwater of Qinghai Lake	
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
One male on a smaller backwater of Qinghai Lake	
Eurasian (Common/Green-winged) Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Six on a smaller backwater of Qinghai Lake	
<i>NOTE: IOC recognizes two species: Eurasian Teal and Green-winged Teal whereas Clements only accepts one species, Green-winged Teal.</i>	
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Around 25 seen on Qinghai Lake and a nearby backwater where they were nesting	
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
15 on a smaller backwater of Qinghai Lake	
Ferruginous Duck (Pochard)	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>
Four on a smaller backwater of Qinghai Lake	

Pheasants & Allies Phasianidae

Daurian Partridge	<i>Perdix dauurica</i>
Wonderful scope views of a pair in the hills behind Xining	
Chukar Partridge	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>
Superb views of a pair in the hills behind Xining	
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>
Several seen near Xining	
<i>NOTE: We saw the very striking and endemic Suehschanensis race during the trip.</i>	

Grebes Podicipedidae

Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Small numbers on Qinghai Lake	
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
Good, close views at a smaller backwater at the edge of Qinghai Lake	

Cormorants & Shags Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Around 20 resting on an island in Qinghai Lake	
<i>NOTE: IOC recognizes two species: Great Cormorant and White-breasted Cormorant whereas Clements does not accept this split as yet</i>	

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae**Himalayan Vulture (Griffon)** *Gyps himalayensis*

Four seen around Xanpishan

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

One in flight near Xining

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucorhynchus*

One in flight in the distance at the southern edge of Qinghai Lake

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

Several were seen around Qinghai Lake

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

One seen near Xining

*NOTE: Eastern and Himalayan Buzzards have been recently split from Common Buzzard. We saw the vulpinus race of Common Buzzard on our tour.***Rails, Crakes & Coots Rallidae****Eurasian (Common) Coot** *Fulica atra*

Large numbers on Qinghai Lake

Cranes Gruidae**Black-necked Crane** *Grus nigricollis*

A total of 7 seen around Qinghai Lake

Stilts & Avocets Recurvirostridae**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*

Four seen around Qinghai Lake

Plovers & Lapwings Charadriidae**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

Two seen in flight at Cha Ka Lake was a surprise

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One seen at Qinghai Lake

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

Voted one of the star birds of the trip! We enjoyed excellent views of 8 birds in full breeding plumage at a small back-water near Qinghai Lake

Sandpipers and Allies Scolopacidae**Common Redshank** *Tringa tetanus*

A few seen at Qinghai Lake

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

One at Qinghai Lake

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers Laridae**Pallas's (Great Black-headed) Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*

Around 30 birds in full breeding plumage at Qinghai Lake

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Beautiful in full breeding plumage, we had about 30 birds, including several nesting around Qinghai Lake

Pigeons, Doves Columbidae

- Rock Dove (Pigeon)** *Columba livia*
Commonly seen around towns and cities throughout
- Hill Pigeon** *Columba rupestris*
Three birds flew past at checklist time at our hotel in Heimaha
- Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis*
Several seen Yaozigou Forest Park
- Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*
Three just west of Xining

Cuckoos Cuculidae

- Common Cuckoo (H)** *Cuculus canorus*
Heard near Xining

Owls Strigidae

- Little Owl** *Athene noctua*
One seen near Qinghai Lake

Swifts Apodidae

- Pacific Swift** *Apus*
Large numbers overhead on most days
NOTE: Pacific Swift was recently split into four species: Blyth's Swift, Salim Ali's Swift, Cook's Swift and Pacific Swift.

Woodpeckers Picidae

- Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Picus canus*
Singletons seen on consecutive days near Xining

Shrikes Laniidae

- Grey-backed Shrike** *Lanius tephronotus*
Small numbers seen on three days

Crows, Jays Corvidae

- Azure-winged Magpie** *Cyanopica cyanus*
Around 12 birds seen near Xining
- Eurasian (Common) Magpie** *Pica pica*
Small numbers seen most days
- Henderson's (Mongolian) Ground Jay** *Podoces hendersoni*
A pair popped up for a short while at the edge of Cha Ka Lake
- Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*
Small numbers seen on three days
- Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*
Around 10 seen near Xining
- Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone*
Small numbers found near Xining
- Large-billed Crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos*
A few seen just west of Xining

Tits, Chickadees Paridae

- Rufous-vented Tit** *Periparus rubidiventris*
Two birds seen at Yaozigou Forest Park
- Sichuan Tit** *Poecile weigoldicus*
Two seen at Yaozigou and also heard at Xanpishan
NOTE: This species was recently split from Marsh Tit
- Ground Tit (Hume's Groundpecker)** *Pseudopodoces humilis*
Fair numbers seen most days

Larks Alaudidae

- Oriental Skylark** *Alda da gulgula*
Large numbers seen most days
- Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*
One seen near Qinghai Lake
- Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris*
Large numbers found most days
- Hume's Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella acutirostris*
Small numbers were found around Qinghai Lake
- Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*
Three birds were seen in the Qinghai Lake area
- Mongolian Lark** *Melanocorypha mongolica*
Small numbers of these extremely attractive larks were found in and around the Qinghai Lake area
- Tibetan Lark** *Melanocorypha maxima*
At least 6 of these large larks were seen in the Xanpishan area

Swallows, Martins Hirundinidae

- Pale Martin** *Riparia diluta*
Small numbers seen daily
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*
Fair numbers found between Xining and Heimahe

Bushtits Aegithalidae

- White-browed Tit-warbler** *Leptopoeile sophiae*
A pair showed well in Yaozigou Forest Park

Leaf Warblers and allies Phylloscopidae

- Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*
At least two seen at our lunch stop near Xining on day 1
- Alpine Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus occisinensis*
Singletons seen around Yaozigou and Xanpishan
NOTE: This species was recently split from Tickell's Leaf Warbler.
- Yellow-streaked Warbler (H)** *Phylloscopus armandii*
Heard at Yaozigou
- Buff-barred Warbler** *Phylloscopus pulcher*
Small numbers at Yaozigou
- Gansu Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus kansuensis*
At least four seen at Yaozigou

Hume's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>
At least one bird at Yaozigou	
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
Around 15 birds at Yaozigou	
Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
One seen at Yaozigou	

Laughingthrushes Leiothrichidae

Plain (Pere David's) Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax davidi</i>
A few birds seen near Xining	
Elliot's Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax elliotii</i>
Small numbers at Yaozigou	

Nuthatches Sittidae

Chinese (Black-capped) Nuthatch	<i>Sitta villosa</i>
Excellent views of four, including a nesting pair at Yaozigou	
Przevalski's (White-cheeked) Nuthatch (H)	<i>Sitta przewalskii</i>
Heard on a few occasions at Yaozigou	

NOTE: This species was recently split from White-cheeked Nuthatch.

Thrushes Turdidae

Chestnut Thrush	<i>Turdus rubrocanus</i>
Two seen at Yaozigou	
NOTE: We saw the distinctive, dark-grey headed guoldi race of Chestnut Thrush on this tour.	
Kessler's (White-backed) Thrush	<i>Turdus kessleri</i>
One near Xining	

Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

Siberian Rubythroat	<i>Calliope calliope</i>
Several stunning males and a few females were seen extremely well in full song near Xining and at Yaozigou	
Slaty-backed Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hodgsonii</i>
One male at Yaozigou	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Small numbers around Qinghai Lake and Xanpishan	
White-throated Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i>
A few males and females seen at Xanpishan	
Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>
One male in the hills behind Xining	
Guldenstadt's (White-winged) Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythrogastrus</i>
At least two males and one female showed superbly well at the top of Xanpishan	
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>
One male near Qinghai Lake	
NOTE: This species was recently split from Eurasian (Common) Stonechat along with several other species.	
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Large numbers around Qinghai Lake	
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Small numbers at Cha Ka Lake	
Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>

One male was seen from the vehicle near Xining

Old World Sparrows Passeridae

Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Commonly recorded throughout the trip	
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
Fair numbers seen most days	
Henri's Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla henrici</i>
At least 6 seen around Xanpishan	
NOTE: This species was recently split from White-winged Snowfinch	
Tibetan (Black-winged) Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla adamsi</i>
At least three seen at the top of Xanpishan	
White-rumped Snowfinch	<i>Onychostruthus taczanowskii</i>
Around a dozen at the top of Xanpishan	
Pere David's (Small) Snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda davidiana</i>
Small numbers near the eastern shore and around the southern shore of Qinghai Lake	
Rufous-necked Snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda ruficollis</i>
Small numbers near the top of Xanpishan	
Blanford's (Plain-backed) Snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda blanfordi</i>
Around 4 birds seen very well between Xanpishan and Cha Ka Lake	

Accentors Prunellidae

Robin Accentor	<i>Prunella rubeculoides</i>
Around 6 near the top of Xanpishan	
Rufous-breasted (-browed) Accentor	<i>Prunella strophciata</i>
One seen near Xining	
Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>
Two seen in the Xanpishan area and another three around the NE shore of Qinghai Lake	

Wagtails, Pipits Motacillidae

Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
1 bird in full breeding plumage representing the black-backed race was seen near the NE shore of Qinghai Lake	
NOTE: We saw the black-backed (<i>calcarata</i>) race of Citrine Wagtail on this tour. This race may very well be split in the near future as Tibetan Wagtail.	
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Small numbers seen around Qinghai Lake	
NOTE: Many distinctive races of White Wagtail exist. The races that we saw on this trip were <i>personata</i> and <i>baicalensis</i> . These may very well be split in future.	
Blyth's Pipit	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>
One bird seen and heard in flight around Cha Ka Lake	
Rosy Pipit	<i>Anthus roseus</i>
Around 20 birds seen around Xanpishan	

Finches Fringillidae

Chinese White-browed Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus dubius</i>
Several pairs seen at Yaozigou	
NOTE: White-browed Rosefinch has now been split into two species: Chinese White-browed Rosefinch and	

Himalayan Chinese Rosefinch.

Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch *Chloris sinica*

Two birds seen in the hills behind Xining

Twite *Linaria flavirostris*

Large numbers seen most days

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

One female showed well at Yaozigou

Buntings & allies Emberizidae

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*

We were delighted to find a pair of these scarce and elusive buntings at a roadside stop near the eastern edge of Qinghai Lake

Godlewski’s Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii*

Excellent views of three in the hills behind Xining

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

Two birds seen at our lunch stop near Xining on day 1

ANNOTATED LIST OF MAMMALS RECORDED (6 species seen)

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*

Three seen in the Qinghai Lake area

Plateau Pika *Ochotona curzoniae*

Hundreds seen throughout the trip

Daurian Pika *Ochotona dauurica*

Large numbers seen throughout the trip

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*

At least three seen in the Xanpishan area

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

A singleton was seen well in the Xanpishan area

Siberian Roe (Red) Deer *Capreolus pygargus*

Two seen at Xanpishan

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