



# Rockjumper Birding Tours

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## CHINA

### *The Tibetan Plateau & Migrants on China's East Coast* 30<sup>th</sup> September - 19<sup>th</sup> October 2008



Henderson's Ground-Jay and Tibetan Scenery

All photos by David Shackelford

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**Trip Report compiled by Tour Leader David Hoddinott**

#### **Some of the top Birds and Mammals seen on the tour:**

Tibetan Snowcock, Przevalski's and Tibetan Partridge, Bean, Bar-headed and Lesser White-fronted Geese, Mandarin Duck, Baikal Teal, Saker Falcon, Bearded and Cinereous Vultures, Japanese Sparrowhawk, Upland Buzzard, Water Rail, Demoiselle and Black-necked Cranes, Eurasian Woodcock, Saunders's and Relict Gulls, Tibetan and Pallas's Sandgrouse, Henderson's Ground Jay, White-browed and Yellow-bellied Tit, Groundpecker, Crested Tit-Warbler, Mongolian and Tibetan Larks, Chinese Hill Warbler, Gansu Leaf Warbler, Plain and Elliot's Laughingthrushes, Bearded Reedling, Chinese and White-cheeked Nuthatches, Wallcreeper, Grey-backed and Kessler's Thrushes, Przevalski's Redstart, 6 species of Snowfinch, Pink-tailed and Tibetan Rosefinches and 15 species of Bunting. Grey Wolf, Himalayan Marmot, Tibetan Fox, Pallas's Cat, Tibetan Wild Ass, Blue Sheep and Tibetan and Goitered Gazelle.

## Tour Summary

A mid-morning flight saw us arriving in Xining, provincial capital of Qinghai and after settling into our comfortable hotel we enjoyed a scrumptious lunch. In the afternoon we visited a nearby arid hillside. These barren slopes are home to the endemic Przevalski's Partridge and we enjoyed great scope views of a flock of no less than six birds. Other species seen here included a stunning male Common Pheasant, superb views of a soaring group of five Black Stork on their migration southwards, Hill Pigeon, a large flock of three hundred Red-billed Chough and Godlewski's Bunting. That evening we enjoyed a delicious Chinese Duck dinner, the first of many great Chinese dinners.

An early start saw us driving to a spruce forested mountain near Xining. On arrival we enjoyed hot coffee and breakfast whilst enjoying the dawn chorus of Elliot's Laughingthrushes. Migration was in full swing and we saw Crested Honey Buzzard, Northern Harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Northern Goshawk, Common Buzzard heading southwards. A real treat and this was to be one of the highlights of the trip was watching 4000 Demoiselle Cranes migrating and calling overhead during their long journey to their wintering grounds in India. The spruce woodland and buckthorn thickets produce some exciting birding and we picked up the smart looking Rufous-vented Tit, Crested Tit-warbler, the highly localized Gansu Leaf Warbler, Chinese and White-cheeked Nuthatches, Eurasian Treecreeper, scope views of a stunning male Guldenstadt's and Blue-fronted Redstarts, flocks of Rufous-breasted Accentor, Olive-backed Pipit, smart White-browed Rosefinch and Red Crossbill. En route back to Xining we enjoyed good scope views of Little Owl and White-capped Redstart, an end to a fabulous day!

Fully prepared with extra warm clothes for the Tibetan Plateau, we gathered our gear and loaded all three, 4x4 vehicles and departed early on the drive to Lake Koko Nor, situated above 3000m and our first stop in this culturally unique region. At dawn we enjoyed our packed breakfast and marveled at the stunning scenery that surrounded us. Soon we were watching the comical Groundpecker with its regular bobbing motion, then both Pere David's and White-rumped Snowfinches posed for scope views of all. The surrounding wetlands simply teemed with a diverse array of waterfowl and waders such as the lovely Bar-headed and Greylag Geese, Ruddy Shelduck, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, smart Red-crested and Common Pochard, Common Merganser, Great Crested and Eared Grebes and Pacific Golden Plover, Black-tailed Godwit and Temminck's Stint amongst many others. A Saker Falcon dashed by, startling thousands of waterfowl and Upland Buzzard was seen soaring low overhead. A real highlight was observing a stunning pair of regal Black-necked Cranes with young chick – a real specialty of the area. Shortly before leaving the area a Mongolian Finch flew over and a stunning pair of Bearded Reedling show well in the sedges of a nearby wetland.

Moving on to an even harsher climate with wind swept plains and semi-desert like conditions, we observed local Tibetans with their herds of sheep and Yak. Trekking across the tussock-grass fields we found several flocks of the cryptic Pallas's Sandgrouse, impressive Mongolian Lark and attractive Blanford's Snowfinch. Traditionally dressed Tibetans were seen at the roadside during an arduous pilgrimage southwards to the holy city of Lhasa in a spiritual journey that may take many weeks to months as we continued scanning through the desolate habitat eventually locating the fabulous Henderson's Ground-Jay, one of only five species of unique terrestrial jays found only in western Asia and the Middle East. Buckthorn thickets in the area produced memorable sightings of Black and Red-throated Thrushes, the stunning endemic Przevalski's Redstart and a vagrant male Blue-and-white Flycatcher.

Hiking through the juniper and willow-clad slopes west of Koko Nor we managed crippling views of Tibetan Partridge, several massive Red Deer sporting large antlers galloped over a steep ridge after first pausing for marvelous observation. We located the unique Tibetan form of Eurasian Magpie, as well as flocks of Rufous-necked Snowfinch, Brown Accentor, confiding White-browed Tit, electric White-browed Tit-Warbler darting through the undergrowth, both Beautiful and Streaked Rosefinches showing well, the lovely Kessler's Thrush, White-winged Grosbeak and Pine Bunting. Raptors performed at eye level including huge Himalayan Griffon and magnificent Bearded Vulture, plus good views of Cinereous Vulture and multiple views of the powerful Saker Falcon - on one occasion seen harassing a juvenile Demoiselle Crane and thus showing off its extraordinary aerobatic skills. After a lengthy search we even managed fantastically close scope views of the male Pink-tailed Rosefinch, a rare taxonomically challenged species recently placed in its own monotypic family and one of the real highlights of the trip! (a very special sighting for Paul, notching up his final bird family). Just when we thought things could not get any better after encountering the rare Goitered Gazelle on the plains and both Himalayan Marmot and Black-lipped Pikas scurrying over the mountain slopes we were thrilled to see huge flocks of Demoiselle Cranes migrating overhead and found several flocks on the ground enabling us great scope views of these most elegant birds.

After a good acclimatization period we ascended to more than 4,000 meters above sea level, spending time amongst the highest peaks of the tour south of Koko Nor, in search of some very special birds.

The mountain scenery was simply breathtaking along our journey winding over lofty snow-capped passes as we located White-throated Dipper on a mountain stream, sought after Tibetan Snowcock high up on a scree slope, both Henri's and Tibetan Snowfinches, flocks of Guldenstadt's Redstart, and after an arduous but worthwhile trek the rare endemic Tibetan Rosefinch and magnificent Tibetan Sandgrouse and memorable views of two separate sightings of Wallcreepers as they foraged on the edge of a sheer precipice. Mammals were no less astounding with amazing views of both Red and the grey-flanked Tibetan Foxes hunting on the plains, hundreds of graceful Tibetan Gazelle, Tibetan Wild Ass perfectly positioned against the towering ice-laden mountains in the background. During one terrific final ascent into the mountains at nearly 5,000 meters we clambered over the rocks and scanned carefully into the distance locating a herd of powerful Blue Sheep including several intimidating mature rams. We were particularly fortunate to see Grey Wolves on two occasions, our first sighting was superb with good close views of three relaxed animals moving slowly along a mountain ridge and lucky for us they startled a single very rare Pallas's Cat that showed briefly.

A final day at another forested site near Xining produced memorable sightings of the stunning Crested Tit-warbler, Goldcrest, Elliot's Laughingthrushes and Grey-headed Bullfinch plus several raptors migrating overhead including Greater Spotted and Steppe Eagles and Long-legged Buzzard.

Flying eastward to the bustling modern city of Beijing home to over twenty million people, we shifted gears into warmer weather at sea level and began the journey to China's east coast and Happy Island. Located in the north Yellow Sea east of Beidaihe, this small island serves as a critical stopping point for literally tens of thousands of Siberian and Manchurian birds streaming southwards on their annual migration to favored wintering grounds in Southeast Asia and beyond. After ferrying to the island we settled in to our comfortable cabins. An afternoon walk was most productive with great views of the endangered Saunter's and Relict Gulls and three Lesser White-fronted Geese mixed with an abundance of waterfowl and waders.

Due to a lack of favorable winds and haze we did not see some of the northern species we may have expected however we were still treated to a good selection of migrants. Due to Happy Islands diverse

habitats such as grasslands, boggy marsh, two small woodlands and extensive coastline we were afforded a good variety of species. While walking on the scrubby embankments we found numerous Red-flanked Bluetail, Pallas's Leaf-Warbler, Brambling, large flocks of Chinese Penduline-Tit, the retiring Japanese Quail, superb views of the little-known Marsh Grassbird and both Pallas's and Japanese Reed Buntings. Each morning during our five day stint on the island a profusion of larks, pipits, wagtails, thrushes and buntings would perform overhead in symphony as we set out searching for newly arrived avian visitors. Inside the woodland we searched diligently for undergrowth species finding the cryptically marked White's, Grey-backed and attractive Dusky Thrush, skulky Bluethroat and the smart Tristram's and Yellow-breasted Buntings amongst twelve species of bunting. Other surprises were a flushed Water Rail, Eurasian Woodcock and Lesser Coucal. A few Baikal Teal were seen amongst a large flock of Eurasian Teal and many sleek Amur Falcons streamed by overhead!

Returning to the mainland, we set out early the following day to the celebrated Great Wall of China. Mostly the remains from the ancient Ming Dynasty during an era of tremendous construction, the Great Wall is a series of sandstone and earthen fortifications built between the 5th century BC and the 16th century to protect the northern borders of the Chinese Empire during the rule of successive dynasties. The world's longest human-made structure stretching more than four thousands miles, we climbed along the top of the wall soaking in the visual grandeur of this magnificent formation while finding a friendly group of Plain Laughingthrushes, several fantastic Red-billed Blue Magpie and outstanding views of the unique but retiring Chinese Hill Warbler. At the conclusion of the tour we celebrated a final farewell dinner while reminiscing about our adventures shared together traveling through the scenic riches of China and across the vast Tibetan Plateau.



Black-necked Crane pair and the Great Wall of China

## Annotated List of Bird Species recorded

### Pheasants, Fowl & Allies Phasianidae

#### **Tibetan Snowcock**

*Tetraoallus tibetanus*

A pair was seen by some of the group on the lofty Er La Pass.

#### **Przevalski's Partridge (E)**

*Alectoris magna*

A flock of six were scoped and seen fairly well near Xining.

#### **Tibetan Partridge**

*Perdix hodgsoniae*

Some of us were fortunate to have about ten minutes watching a dozen of these entertaining birds calling and feeding on the steep slopes of Rubber Mountain.

**Japanese Quail***Coturnix japonica*

Flushed daily from the tall grasses of Happy Island with a high of fifteen birds in a single day.

**Common Pheasant***Phasianus colchicus*

First seen in the pastoral fields near Xining followed by daily encounters on Happy Island.

**Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae****Bean Goose***Anser fabalis*

We enjoyed daily sightings on Happy Island with peak numbers of sixty-eight.

**Greylag Goose***Anser anser*

Found at a wetland near Koko Nor where we observed a flock of twenty.

**Greater White-fronted Goose***Anser albifrons*

We had good sightings on two occasions on Happy Island where we observed peak numbers of five birds.

**Lesser White-fronted Goose***Anser erythropus*

We had great views of three on our first day at Happy Island, a rarely recorded species at this site.

**Bar-headed Goose***Anser indicus*

Up to fifty birds were seen at lake Koko Nor.

**Common Shelduck***Tadorna tadorna*

We found two at lake Koko Nor and peak numbers of three thousand eight hundred birds observed daily on Happy Island.

**Ruddy Shelduck***Tadorna ferruginea*

Seen throughout the trip with our largest numbers of one hundred plus on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Mandarin Duck***Aix galericulata*

We had good views of four on Happy Island.

**Gadwall***Anas strepera*

Up to forty birds on several days on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Falcated Duck***Anas falcata*

Jesper was fortunate to see a flock of fifteen on Happy Island.

**Eurasian Wigeon***Anas penelope*

Up to thirty seen at lake Koko Nor.

**Mallard***Anas platyrhynchos*

Small numbers were seen on the Tibetan Plateau with peak numbers of three hundred on Happy Island.

**Eastern Spot-billed Duck***Anas zonorhyncha*

About thirty birds seen first in a wetland near Koko Nor followed by up to five hundred birds daily on Happy Island often flying in large flocks.

**Northern Shoveler***Anas clypeata*

We found up to seventy-five at a wetland near Koko Nor with small numbers seen on Happy Island.

**Northern Pintail***Anas acuta*

We saw over two thousand at Koko Nor with further sightings of small numbers on Happy Island.

**Garganey***Anas querquedula*

A total of three birds seen at Koko Nor followed by a single bird on Happy Island.

**Baikal Teal***Anas formosa*

A couple was seen in amongst flocks of common teal on Happy Island.

**Eurasian Teal***Anas crecca*

Abundant during the tour with up to five hundred birds on Koko Nor and on several days over one thousand seen on Happy Island.

**Red-crested Pochard***Netta rufina*

About two thousand five hundred birds seen on the lake of Koko Nor.

**Common Pochard***Aythya ferina*

Up to thirty were encountered at lake Koko Nor.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

About fifty scoped on Koko Nor with smaller numbers found on several occasions while birding Happy Island.

**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

Two birds scoped on Koko Nor.

**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser*

Up to a dozen birds were found on several days while exploring the Tibetan Plateau.

### Grebes Podicipedidae

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

We found this widespread species on Happy Island with up to six daily.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

Observed on two occasions while on the Tibetan Plateau with up to thirty birds scoped in a day.

**Black-necked (Eared) Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*

Found in similar areas as Great Crested Grebe with up to forty birds scoped in a day.

### Storks Ciconidae

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*

A flock of five birds was seen near Xining and a further two on the Tibetan Plateau.

### Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*

We found a single huddle of eight birds that were scoped at length along the shoreline of Happy Island.

### Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns Ardeidae

**Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*

We heard this species on several occasions at dawn and dusk while birding Happy Island.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

A group of three was seen on the Tibetan Plateau followed by daily encounters of up to seven on Happy Island.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*

A flock of twenty-five was seen near water on the Tibetan Plateau followed by numerous encounters on Happy Island.

**Eastern Great Egret** *Ardea modesta*

We had good views of three on the Tibetan Plateau.

*Note: This is a very recent split from Western Great Egret, A.alba.*

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

Good numbers encountered daily on the muddy shores of Happy Island.

### Cormorants Phalacrocoracidae

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*

We saw several hundred on the Tibetan Plateau with up to 500 daily on Happy Island.

### Falcons & Kestrels Falconidae

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

Commonly found daily throughout the tour in good numbers.

**Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis*

What a beautiful bird to watch in flight! We found this migrant species daily on Happy Island with up to thirty birds estimated during a single day.

**Merlin** *Falco columbarius*

One bird was scope at Lake Koko Nor, with further sightings of two seen hunting on Happy Island.

**Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug*

This magnificent falcon was found on several occasions on the Tibetan Plateau with a grand high of ten during one day. We enjoyed several encounters of them hunting and on one occasion an adult was seen harassing a juvenile demoiselle crane.

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus*

Found on Happy Island on two days.

### Hawks, Eagles & Kites Accipitridae

**Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

One was seen on the mudflats on Happy Island.

**Crested (Oriental) Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

We found one during our first day birding near Xining.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*

Four birds total all seen near Xining.

**Bearded Vulture** *Gypaetus barbatus*

We enjoyed absolutely amazing views of this impressive species almost daily on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Himalayan Vulture** *Gyps himalayensis*

We found up to thirty of these massive birds daily on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*

One bird was seen cruising over the high slopes of the Tibetan Plateau.

**Eastern Marsh Harrier** *Circus spilonotus*

Small numbers on the Tibetan Plateau followed by daily sightings of migrant birds on Happy Island.

**Northern (Hen) Harrier** *Circus cyaneus*

Small numbers were seen virtually daily throughout the tour.

**Japanese Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter gularis*

One was seen on the Tibetan Plateau and a further two on Happy Island.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*

Up to ten birds seen almost daily throughout the tour with or largest numbers found at Lao Ye Shan.

**Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*

We enjoyed great views of this species on numerous occasions both on the Tibetan Plateau and on Happy Island.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*

Small numbers seen fairly regularly during the tour with a high of fifteen birds during one day in the mountains near Xining.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*

We enjoyed good sightings of four at Lao Ye Shan.

**Upland Buzzard** *Buteo hemilasius*

Up to forty were seen daily on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga*

One was seen very well in the mountains near Xining.

**Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis*

One juvenile was seen well in the mountains near Xining.

**Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos*

We enjoyed sightings on four days in the Tibetan Plateau.

### Rails, Gallinules & Coots Rallidae

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*

We had good flight views of one on Happy Island.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*

We enjoyed a good sighting of one at lake Koko Nor.

**Common Coot** *Fulica atra*

Up to one thousand eight hundred birds were seen on Koko Nor.

### Cranes Gruidae

**Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo*

We were very fortunate to see a fantastic 12700, over six days on the Tibetan Plateau. These smart cranes were seen heading south to wintering grounds in western India. We had wonderful views of many flocks flying in formation overhead as well as great scope views of flocks on the ground on several occasions.

**Black-necked Crane** *Grus nigricollis*

Absolutely brilliant encounters with seven birds total on two days on the Tibetan Plateau including flight views and their wonderful bugle calls.

### Buttonquails Turnicidae

**Yellow-legged Buttonquail** *Turnix tanki*

Jesper was fortunate to see a single bird that flushed briefly from the grasslands on Happy Island.

### Oystercatchers Haematopodidae

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

One was heard calling from the muddy shores of Happy Island.

### Plovers & Lapwings Charadriidae

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

Good numbers were seen on several occasions throughout the tour with up to five hundred and forty birds in a single day on Happy Island.

**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva*

Seen twice on short grass and muddy areas along a wetland near Koko Nor with eighty and fifteen birds total.

**Grey (Black-bellied) Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*

A couple was seen along the muddy shores of Happy Island.

**Kentish (Snowy) Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Twenty were seen along the shores of Koko Nor followed by daily sightings of small numbers on Happy Island.

### Sandpipers and Allies Scolopacidae

**Eurasian Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola*

A single bird was seen flushing from the dense undergrowth on Happy Island.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*

Found in small numbers along wetland edges on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

Nine birds were seen near Koko Nor.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata*

A minimum of twenty birds was found daily probing in the mud on the shores of Happy Island.

**Eastern Curlew** *Numenius madagascariensis*

At least two were seen on several days on muddy banks on Happy Island.

**Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*

We encountered peak numbers of forty of this migrant species along Koko Nor.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*

Five were seen at a wetland on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

Up to eight seen at a wetland near lake Koko Nor and later up to fifteen seen daily on Happy Island.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*

Small numbers were seen on the Tibetan Plateau and a further one on Happy Island.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*

We had good scope views of two at Lake Koko Nor.

**Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii*

Up to seven were found along the wetland edges near Koko Nor.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*

A small flock of eight birds was seen on Happy Island.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*

Two were seen along the shores of Koko Nor on the Tibetan Plateau.

### Gulls Laridae

**Black-tailed Gull** *Larus crassirostris*

We enjoyed good views of two at Happy Island.

**Mew (Common) Gull** *Larus canus*

Only a single bird picked out of a host of other gulls on Happy Island with the use of a scope.

**Lesser Black-backed (Heuglin's) Gull** *Larus fuscus (heuglini)*

A single bird identified as this species out of a confusing complex of other similar gulls.

**Greater Black-headed (Pallas's) Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus*

Seen regularly on the Tibetan Plateau with many seen on our first visit to Koko Nor including great views of five birds.

**Brown-headed Gull** *Larus brunnicephalus*

Seen on the Tibetan Plateau near water with great views of two birds seen in a single day.

**Common Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus*

A few scattered birds on the Tibetan Plateau before we found large numbers on Happy Island with up to 150 birds in a single day.

**Saunders's Gull** *Larus saundersi*

A very localized species, we enjoyed great sightings of up to ten birds daily.

**Relict Gull** *Larus relictus*

Another very localized species, we found this bird each time we scanned the shores of Happy Island and on one diligent count found exactly ninety birds.

### Terns Sternidae

**Gull-billed Tern** *Sterna nilotica*

A single bird was seen very well while birding on Happy Island.

**Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia*

Small numbers were seen daily on Happy Island.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

One was seen at Lake Koko Nor.

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**Whiskered Tern**

*Chlidonias hybrida*

We enjoyed great views of one flying along the surface of the water at Koko Nor on the Tibetan Plateau.

**White-winged Tern**

*Chlidonias leucopterus*

We enjoyed good sightings of five at Koko Nor.

**Sandgrouse Pteroclididae**

**Tibetan Sandgrouse**

*Syrrhaptes tibetanus*

The participants that climbed up Er la Pass were treated to fantastic views of thirteen of these highly sought after birds.

**Pallas's Sandgrouse**

*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

Seventy birds were seen on the Tibetan Plateau many in flight and a few scoped on the ground. This is another stunning and soughtafter species.

**Pigeons & Doves Columbidae**

**Hill Pigeon**

*Columba rupestris*

Seen only during the first portion of the tour where we found up to thirty birds daily in the mountains.

**Oriental Turtle Dove**

*Streptopelia orientalis*

First seen near Xining followed by daily sightings of up to twenty birds on Happy Island.

**Eurasian Collared Dove**

*Streptopelia decaocto*

Small numbers of up to seven birds on five consecutive days were found near Koko Nor.

**Red Turtle Dove**

*Streptopelia tranquebarica*

A couple was seen during our time on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Cuckoos Cuculidae**

**Lesser Coucal**

*Centropus bengalensis*

We were fortunate to have great views of one on Happy Island.

**Typical Owls Strigidae**

**Little Owl**

*Athene noctua*

We enjoyed several excellent sightings during our time on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Kingfishers Alcedinidae**

**Common Kingfisher**

*Alcedo atthis*

One was seen by Rod at Lake Koko Nor and another along the canals of Happy Island.

**Hoopoes Upupidae**

**Eurasian Hoopoe**

*Upupa epops*

Seen in small numbers on the Tibetan Plateau and up to six seen daily on Happy Island.

**Wrynecks, Piculets & Woodpeckers Picidae**

**Eurasian Wryneck**

*Jynx torquilla*

One was seen on four consecutive days on Happy Island, allowing great scope views for all.

**Rufous-bellied Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos hyperythrus*

We had good views of one on Happy Island.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker**

*Dendrocopos major*

A female was found at a small woodland on the Tibetan Plateau.

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**Grey-headed Woodpecker**

*Picus canus*

A male was seen perched atop a telephone pole on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Cuckooshrikes Campephagidae**

**Ashy Minivet**

*Pericrocotus divaricatus*

We had good flight views of two birds on Happy Island.

**Shrikes Laniidae**

**Bull-headed Shrike**

*Lanius bucephalus*

We had superb scope views of one, seen on four days on Happy Island.

**Brown Shrike**

*Lanius cristatus*

Up to three were seen almost daily on Happy Island.

**Chinese Grey Shrike**

*Lanius sphenocercus*

An attractive shrike and quite noisy, we had great views of this species on one occasions on the Tibetan Plateau and many times on Happy Island.

**Drongos Dicruridae**

**Black Drongo**

*Dicrurus macrocercus*

We enjoyed great views of three birds on Happy Island.

**Crows, Jays & Magpies Corvidae**

**Eurasian Jay**

*Garrulus glandarius*

Two were seen in the deciduous forest along the Great Wall of China.

**Azure-winged Magpie**

*Cyanopica cyanus*

Three birds were seen on the drive back to Xining and several in the hotel gardens in Beijing.

**Red-billed Blue Magpie**

*Urocissa erythrorhyncha*

We enjoyed spectacular views of this attractive species along the forested area surrounding the Great Wall of China.

**Eurasian (Common) Magpie**

*Pica pica*

A few birds were seen towards the beginning of the tour near Xining followed by up to two hundred birds daily on Happy Island.

*Note: We also observed the subspecies Tibetan Magpie, P.p.bottanensis that may become a full species in the future. We found several birds in a forested site south of Koko Nor.*

**Henderson's (Mongolian) Ground Jay (NE)**

*Podoces hendersoni*

After a lengthy search we had scope views of one of these impressive birds actively feeding on the dry plains of the Tibetan Plateau.

**Red-billed Chough**

*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Large flocks totaling three hundred were seen on our first day near Xining, thereafter seen on the Tibetan Plateau where we found this species in small numbers daily.

**Rook**

*Corvus frugilegus*

Three were seen on the drive back to Xining.

**Carrion Crow**

*Corvus corone*

A flock of eleven birds was seen on Happy Island.

**Large-billed Crow**

*Corvus macrorhynchos*

Up to thirty birds found near Xining with a further sighting of twenty at the Great Wall of China.

**Northern (Common) Raven**

*Corvus corax*

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Found only in the higher areas near Er La Pass on the Tibetan Plateau where we found up to ten birds daily.

### Tits & Chickadees Paridae

**Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris*

One bird was seen at the Great Wall of China.

**Willow (Songar) Tit** *Poecile montana*

Eight were seen in a forested area near Xining.

*Note: Clements splits the birds we observed as Songar Tit, P. songara.*

**White-browed Tit (E)** *Poecile superciliosa*

A beautiful and localized species, we found small groups in the mountain scrub on the Tibetan Plateau with a high of five birds in a single day.

**Rufous-vented Tit** *Periparus rubidiventris*

About twenty birds total were seen on the slopes of a mountainous forest near Xining.

**Yellow-bellied Tit (E)** *Periparus venustulus*

An attractive endemic, we located one in a small woodland on the Tibetan Plateau and a further seven were seen in the forested portions of Happy Island.

**Great Tit** *Parus major*

First found in a forested area near Xining followed by five seen well at the Great Wall of China.

**Groundpecker (Ground Tit) (E)** *Parus humilis*

A charismatic bird with a hop in its step, we found this bird both common and confiding on the Tibetan Plateau with up to fifteen birds daily.

### Penduline Tits Remizidae

**Chinese Penduline Tit** *Remiz consobrinus*

Impressive numbers of up to three hundred and fifty birds were found daily on Happy Island in the reed beds.

### Swallows & Martins Hirundinidae

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

Up to two hundred birds were seen daily on Happy Island.

**Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Ten individuals were seen soaring in a forested area near Xining.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica*

Up to twenty birds were encountered almost daily during our time exploring Happy Island.

### Bushtits Aegithalidae

**Long-tailed Bushtit** *Aegithalos caudatus*

Some of us found a small flock of five on the Tibetan Plateau.

*Note: We observed the dark-headed form A. vinaceus which is a proposed split by some authorities.*

**White-browed Tit-warbler** *Leptopoecile sophiae*

We enjoyed scattered sightings of this stunning bird on many occasions throughout the Tibetan Plateau in dense scrub.

**Crested Tit-warbler (E)** *Leptopoecile elegans*

Five birds were found in a high forested area near Xining and later we enjoyed stunning views of a male at another forested site near Xining.

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### Larks Alaudidae

- Mongolian Lark (NE)** *Melanocorypha mongolica*  
Three were seen very well on the Tibetan Plateau.
- Tibetan Lark** *Melanocorypha maxima*  
A flock of about thirty birds was scoped in open habitat on the Tibetan Plateau.
- Hume's Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella acutirostris*  
Twenty birds were seen in flight calling as they flew past on the Tibetan Plateau.
- Asian Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella cheleensis*  
Tricky to see on the ground, we found fifteen on the Tibetan Plateau.
- Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*  
This species was found in good numbers daily on Happy Island with up to five hundred birds daily.
- Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula*  
This species was common on the Tibetan Plateau with up to thirty birds almost daily.
- Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris*  
This species was even more common than the preceding species with up to sixty birds seen daily.

### Cisticolas & Allies Cisticolidae

- Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis*  
Two were seen on Happy Island.
- Chinese Hill Warbler (E)** *Rhopophilus pekinensis*  
We had good views of six at the Great Wall of China.

### Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

- Light-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus sinensis*  
Up to thirty birds were seen on a daily basis while birding on Happy Island.

### Old World Warblers Sylviidae

- Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata*  
One of these difficult migratory birds was seen in rank grass on Happy Island.
- Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella certhiola*  
We enjoyed good views of two on Happy Island.
- Marsh Grassbird (Japanese Marsh Warbler)** *Locustella pryeri*  
Everyone saw a single individual of this impossible skulker on Happy Island.
- Black-browed Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*  
We enjoyed up to three birds daily showing well in the tall grasslands on Happy Island.
- Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*  
Found daily on Happy Island with up to eight birds seen and heard in the low undergrowth each day.
- Tickell's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus affinis*  
One was seen well in a scrubby area near Xining.
- Yellow-streaked Warbler** *Phylloscopus armandii*  
More often heard than seen, we found up two birds in a wooded mountainside near Xining.
- Radde's Warbler** *Phylloscopus schwarzi*  
One was seen very well on Happy Island.
- Gansu Leaf Warbler (E)** *Phylloscopus kansuensis*  
Very localized and poorly known, we found this species in the vegetated areas surrounding Xining with up to three birds daily.
- Pallas's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus*

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Commonly seen on Happy Island where we encountered up to fifteen daily in every habitat.

**Yellow-browed Warbler** *Phylloscopus inornatus*

We found up to forty daily on Happy Island.

**Desert Whitethroat** *Sylvia minula*

We were fortunate to find a single individual of the subspecies *margelanica* while birding in the dry scrub of the Tibetan Plateau.

*Note: Clements splits this subspecies into a full species Margelanic Whitethroat, S. margelanica.*

### Babblers, Parrotbills Timaliidae

**Plain (Pere David's) Laughingthrush (E)** *Garrulax davidi*

Pleasantly cooperative with three birds our first day birding near Xining followed by further stunning views near the Great Wall of China.

**Elliot's Laughingthrush** *Garrulax elliotii*

We had great views of ten birds in a forested area near Xining.

**Bearded Reedling** *Panurus biarmicus*

We enjoyed views of this reed-loving specialty at the wetlands in southeastern Koko Nor.

*Note: This species is sometimes placed in its own family.*

### White-eyes Zosteropidae

**Chestnut-flanked White-eye** *Zosterops erythropleurus*

Fairly common on Happy Island where we found up to twenty-five birds daily.

**Japanese White-eye** *Zosterops japonicus*

Three birds were seen on Happy Island.

### Kinglets Regulidae

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

We first found three birds in a forested area near Xining and later enjoyed superb views of one at another forested site near Xining.

### Nuthatches & Wallcreeper Sittidae

**Chinese (Snowy-browed) Nuthatch (E)** *Sitta villosa*

Three of these smart birds were seen in the forested mountain slopes near Xining.

**White-cheeked (Przevalski's) Nuthatch** *Sitta leucopsis*

Occupying the same habitat as the preceding species but much less common, we had great views of an amazing eleven birds.

**Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria*

Always a crowd pleaser, we had great views of two birds along steep rocky ledges on the Tibetan Plateau.

*Note: This species is sometimes placed in its own family.*

### Treecreepers Certhiidae

**Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*

One was found in a forested area near Xining.

### Starlings Sturnidae

**White-cheeked Starling** *Sturnus cineraceus*

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Our first sighting was of a flock of twenty during the drive from Beijing to Happy Island. Up to seventy birds were seen on two consecutive days on Happy Island.

### Thrushes Turdidae

#### **White's (Scaly) Thrush**

*Zoothera aurea*

We enjoyed several sightings of at least two birds on Happy Island.

*Note: Some authorities lump this with Scaly Thrush, Z.dauma*

#### **Grey-backed Thrush**

*Turdus hortulorum*

Small numbers were encountered of this attractive but shy thrush on Happy Island.

#### **Kessler's (White-backed) Thrush (NE)**

*Turdus kessleri*

A real stunner, we had great scope views of this species on several occasions with up to twenty birds watched at length in a coniferous area west of Koko Nor.

#### **Black-throated Thrush**

*Turdus atrogularis*

Single birds were seen mixed with red-throated thrushes on three occasions during the tour.

#### **Red-throated Thrush**

*Turdus ruficollis*

Up to fifty birds were seen in the forested areas near Xining on several days followed by scattered sightings on the Tibetan Plateau.

#### **Dusky Thrush**

*Turdus eunomus*

We found scattered numbers of this migrant on Happy Island with up to ten birds in a single day. Eventually everyone had good views.

### Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

#### **Bluethroat**

*Luscinia svecica*

Three birds were seen skulking in the undergrowth on Happy Island.

#### **Red-flanked Bluetail**

*Tarsiger cyanurus*

Small numbers were first seen in scattered locations on the Tibetan Plateau followed by up to thirty birds daily on Happy Island, one of the most common birds on the island.

#### **Przevalski's (Ala Shan) Redstart (E)**

*Phoenicurus alaschanicus*

Up to twelve of these beautiful endemics were seen daily in scrubby mountainous habitat on the Tibetan Plateau. One of the star birds of the trip!

#### **Black Redstart**

*Phoenicurus ochruros*

A single male was seen near Rubber Mountain on the Tibetan Plateau.

#### **Hodgson's Redstart**

*Phoenicurus hodgsoni*

We had good views of two females at a forested site near Xining.

#### **White-throated Redstart (NE)**

*Phoenicurus schisticeps*

A stunning species when the male is seen well, we found this bird on three days while birding on the Tibetan Plateau with four birds on one day west of Koko Nor.

#### **Daurian Redstart**

*Phoenicurus aureus*

We found this confiding species on a daily basis while on Happy Island with up to eight birds daily.

#### **Güldenstädt's (White-winged) Redstart**

*Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

Once we made our way up the mountainous area south of Koko Nor we found this bird in good numbers with an amazing day total of fifty birds at one site.

#### **Blue-fronted Redstart**

*Phoenicurus frontalis*

Located on three days across the Tibetan Plateau with up to twelve birds daily.

#### **White-capped Redstart**

*Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

Two birds were seen well at a small stream near Xining with a further sighting of one in a gully on the Tibetan Plateau.

#### **Eurasian (Common) Stonechat**

*Saxicola torquatus*

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Found in good numbers in the grassland on Happy Island with up to six birds each day.

**Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*

We were fortunate to see on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti*

One bird was found along our route driving west from Koko Nor.

**Taiga Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicilla*

Up to four birds were seen well on Happy Island.

**Blue-and-white Flycatcher** *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*

We found a male and female in small woodlands on the Tibetan Plateau, a vagrant in this area.

**Verditer Flycatcher** *Eumyias thalassinus*

A very lost individual was seen in a small woodland on the Tibetan Plateau.

### Dippers Cinclidae

**White-throated Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus*

Two birds were seen very well and scoped at length along a swift flowing mountain stream on the Tibetan Plateau.

### Old World Sparrows Passeridae

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*

We located a flock of fifteen in a small grove of trees, this migratory subspecies *bactrianus* migrates south from Russia.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*

Located in large numbers throughout the tour with up to one hundred birds daily.

**Rock Sparrow** *Petronia petronia*

Small numbers found at several sites on the Tibetan Plateau with peak numbers of twenty daily.

**Henri's (Tibetan) Snowfinch (NE)** *Montifringilla henrici*

Found on two consecutive days south of Koko Nor with up to ten birds in a single day.

**Tibetan (Black-winged) Snowfinch (NE)** *Montifringilla adamsi*

We enjoyed great looks at this localized species on three different days on the Tibetan Plateau with close to one hundred birds on one occasion.

**White-rumped Snowfinch (E)** *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*

Seen almost daily on the Tibetan Plateau in appropriate habitat with up to fifteen birds daily.

**Pere David's Snowfinch** *Pyrgilauda davidiana*

We enjoyed several sightings on one day while on the Tibetan Plateau with a total five seen.

**Rufous-necked Snowfinch (E)** *Pyrgilauda ruficollis*

A beautiful denizen of the Tibetan Plateau where this species was common with up to eighty birds almost daily.

**Blanford's Snowfinch (E)** *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*

More localized than some of the other Snowfinches, we had great views of this species on two days of the tour with a high of ten birds in a day.

### Accentors Prunellidae

**Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris*

A flock of twenty-three were seen flying over a forested mountain near Xining and a further three at the Great Wall of China.

**Robin Accentor** *Prunella rubeculoides*

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This species was pleasantly common on the Tibetan Plateau with up to thirty birds seen well almost daily.

**Rufous-breasted Accentor** *Prunella strophiatea*

Seen in small numbers on six days of the tour with a high of forty birds in the mountain scrub near Xining.

**Brown Accentor** *Prunella fulvescens*

Found in small numbers almost daily while on the Tibetan Plateau with a high of ten birds in a single day.

### Wagtails & Pipits Motacillidae

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola*

Up to six birds were seen daily while birding on the Tibetan Plateau.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*

Found in large numbers on the Tibetan Plateau and in small numbers on Happy Island.

**Richard's Pipit** *Anthus richardi*

We had several sightings on Happy Island.

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni*

We found this migratory species throughout the tour in reasonable numbers with a high of twenty birds in a day on Happy Island.

**Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens*

Large numbers were encountered only on Happy Island where we found up to thirty birds daily.

**Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta*

We first had great scope views of this species on a grassy slope on the Tibetan Plateau followed by scattered sightings thereafter during the tour.

### True Finches Fringillidae

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla*

We found up to two hundred birds almost daily on Happy Island and up to four hundred at the Great Wall of China.

**Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch** *Carduelis sinica*

Eight birds seen on one day near a woodland on the Tibetan Plateau and a further six at a forested site near Xining.

**Eurasian Siskin** *Carduelis spinus*

One was seen flying over Happy Island.

**Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris*

This little migrant was common on the Tibetan Plateau where we watched up to fifty birds daily.

**Plain Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte nemoricola*

A total of four birds were found on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Mongolian Finch** *Bucanetes mongolicus*

One was seen flying over a grassland near lake Koko Nor.

**Pink-tailed (Przevalski's) Rosefinch (E)** *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

Previously known as Pink-tailed Bunting, we had crippling views of this very rare monotypic family on one occasions. We located a pair on Rubber Mountain that were scoped for all to enjoy.

*Note: This species is sometimes placed in its own family.*

**Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*

We found small numbers scattered over Happy Island with no more than eight birds sighted in a day.

**(Chinese) Beautiful Rosefinch** *Carpodacus pulcherrimus davidianus*

Scrubby gullies throughout the Tibetan Plateau produced up to ten birds on several days including excellent scope views of the stunning males.

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**White-browed Rosefinch**

*Carpodacus thura*

We found up to fifteen birds on the forested slopes near Xining.

**Streaked (Eastern Great) Rosefinch**

*Carpodacus rubicilloides*

This brilliant Rosefinch was seen on two occasions on the Tibetan Plateau with our best views of close to ten birds scoped in a rocky gully.

**Great Rosefinch**

*Carpodacus rubicilla*

Four birds total were seen on the Tibetan Plateau with outrageous close views of one male.

**Tibetan (Roborovski's) Rosefinch (E)**

*Kozlowia roborowskii*

A lengthy search produced stunning scope views of twenty-five of these very rare rosefinches on Er La Pass.

**Red Crossbill**

*Loxia curvirostra*

Twenty of these widespread birds were sighted in the montane forest near Xining, allowing good scope views for all.

**Grey-headed Bullfinch**

*Pyrrhula erythaca*

Four birds were seen on a forested slope near Xining.

**White-winged Grosbeak**

*Mycerobas carniceps*

Five birds were scoped in a forested area west of Koko Nor.

### **Buntings & Allies Emberizidae**

**Pine Bunting**

*Emberiza leucocephalos*

We found this migrant on two occasions including great views of several west of Koko Nor.

**Godlewski's (Eastern Rock) Bunting**

*Emberiza godlewskii*

Seen on three separate occasions throughout the tour, we had scope views on the Tibetan Plateau and further views while birding along the Great Wall of China.

**Meadow Bunting**

*Emberiza cioides*

One bird was first seen at the Great Wall of China.

**Tristram's Bunting (NE)**

*Emberiza tristrami*

Small numbers found in the wooded areas of Happy Island.

**Chestnut-eared Bunting**

*Emberiza fucata*

Up to fifteen seen mixed with other buntings on four separate days on Happy Island.

**Little Bunting**

*Emberiza pusilla*

One bird seen our first day near Xining followed by numerous birds on Happy Island with up to thirty birds daily.

**Yellow-browed Bunting**

*Emberiza chrysophrys*

Small numbers were seen daily on Happy Island with a maximum of five birds seen in one day.

**Rustic Bunting**

*Emberiza rustica*

Up to seven birds found daily in the scrub on Happy Island.

**Yellow-throated Bunting**

*Emberiza elegans*

A couple was seen on Happy Island including a stunning male.

**Yellow-breasted Bunting**

*Emberiza aureola*

After only glimpsing one we were finally rewarded with scope views of a lovely male in open scrub on Happy Island.

**Chestnut Bunting**

*Emberiza rutila*

A few birds were seen on Happy Island.

**Black-faced Bunting**

*Emberiza spodocephala*

Present in large numbers on Happy Island with up to forty birds seen daily.

**Pallas's Reed Bunting**

*Emberiza pallasi*

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Present in large numbers on Happy Island but preferring more grassy habitat than the proceeding species.

**Japanese Reed (Ochre-rumped) Bunting** *Emberiza yessoensis*

Pleasantly common this year on Happy Island with up to six individuals present each day in grassy habitat.

**Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Small numbers were seen flying over Happy Island.

## Annotated List of Mammal Species recorded

**Chinese Hare** *Lepus sinensis*

We found single animals daily on Happy Island.

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*

Small numbers were seen almost daily on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Wooly Hare** *Lepus oiostolus*

We found a couple of animals each day on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Black-lipped Pika** *Ochotona curzoniae*

Numerous on the Tibetan Plateau with up to two hundred animals every day.

**Tibetan Gazelle** *Procapra picticaudata*

More than two hundred animals were seen on one day driving south from Koko Nor.

**Goitered Gazelle** *Gazella subgutturosa*

Eleven of these rare antelopes were scoped in an open area west of Koko Nor.

**Red Deer** *Cervus elaphus*

We found four females and a magnificent stag in a juniper forest west of Koko Nor.

**Himalayan Marmoset** *Callithrix penicillata*

Up to three animals were found on the Tibetan Plateau.

**Tibetan Fox** *Vulpes ferrilata*

Two of these beautiful animals were found while exploring the Tibetan Plateau.

**Tibetan Wild Ass** *Equus kiang*

We had memorable views of several groups of these rare animals totaling 112 on the Tibetan Plateau south of Koko Nor.

**Blue Sheep** *Pseudois schaeferi*

While scanning for Snow Leopard one afternoon we were fortunate to pick up twelve of these magnificent sheep scampering up a steep mountainside including some huge adults.

**Pallas's Cat** *Otocolobus manul*

We found one of these very rare cats sneaking through the rocky mountainside near Er la Pass.

**Pere David's Rock Squirrel** *Sciurotamias davidianus*

We found one scurrying along the Great Wall of China.

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