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## South-east China; Jiangxi, Henan and Guangxi

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*Nonggang Babbler*

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This return visit to south-east China followed on from our successful recce earlier in the year, which can be read [here](#). This time we visited different sites in Jiangxi and also visited Henan and Guangxi provinces. Highlights began with Scaly-sided Merganser along the fast-flowing rivers in Jiangxi followed by Siberian Crane, Lesser White-fronted Geese, Baikal Teal and Swan Geese among huge numbers of water-birds at the mighty Poyang Lake. After scouring the foot-hills of Nanchang we headed north to Henan, enjoying a fine male Reeve's Pheasant and plenty of Yellow-browed Buntings. Finally in the limestone karst forest of Guangxi province we were privileged to be among the first field observers of the Nonggang Babbler, a species discovered as recently as 2005 and formally described earlier in 2008.

After arriving into Guangzhou an overnight ride brought us to Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi province, and within three hours of arriving we were watching our first of several endangered Scaly-sided Merganser feeding on the fast-flowing rivers that run through the eastern portion of Jiangxi. These beautifully marked saw-bills were surprisingly unwary and allowed a reasonable approach without taking flight enabling us to obtain some scope-filling views although sadly they were just a little too distant for our camera lenses.

Although the landscape here can appear rather bleak in winter, it is actually home to good numbers of wintering passerines; Black-faced Bunting, Buff-bellied Pipit and Masked Laughingthrush were found in numbers along with a handsome 1<sup>st</sup> winter Bull-headed Shrike feeding from a low telegraph wire and a distinctive melanistic '*fuscatus*' Long-tailed Shrike. Pairs of Collared Crow were occasionally encountered, a species largely confined to south-east China and seemingly in a deep population decline.



*Scaly-sided Merganser* © Rob Hutchinson

After an overnight stay in bustling Nanchang we headed the following morning to the mighty Poyang Lake, famous for its vast numbers of water-birds. Although both the lake and water-birds have reduced drastically in size and numbers over the past 20 years due to hunting, climate change and the construction of the Three Gorges Dam we were still impressed by the sheer volume of geese, ducks, cranes and waders. This vast area requires plenty of exploration but with diligent scanning we successfully located all of our major targets in a little more than a day of birding. Along the marshy lake edges thousands of Greater White-fronted Geese fed and flew around us, Taiga Bean Geese soon became a common sight, as did Oriental Stork, from seeing just ones and two's we eventually came across two flocks containing well over 400 birds in each, a sizeable chunk of the wild population. Fortuitously the only close flock of grazing White-fronts contained 4 adult and 1 immature Lesser White-fronted Geese, a species now in drastic decline and a rare sight indeed at Poyang Lake. The endangered Swan Goose took some time to locate due to the sheer size of the area but eventually proved plentiful and could be seen to dwarf the other accompanying goose species. Bewick's Swans flew over in V-formation at regular intervals, with their eerie calls providing a wonderful back-drop. Dabbling ducks were well represented along the lake shore; Chinese Spot-billed Duck, Mallard, Gadwall, Eurasian Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Pintail were all present and we were delighted to find a small number of Baikal Teal including at least three stunning males. Surprisingly, these were all outnumbered by several hundred beautiful Falcated Duck.

Passerines along the marshy shore and lurking in the grasslands were dominated by *japonica* Buff-bellied Pipits although they were accompanied by quite a few *blakistoni* Water Pipit feeding in the roadside channels along with Zitting Cisticola's and excellent views were had of a couple Japanese Swamp Warblers, here at its stronghold. Both Eurasian and Oriental Skylarks gave us a unique opportunity to compare them directly at close proximity and agree that they can appear remarkably similar in appearance, the latter surely a long overdue species to be found in Europe. Scouring cultivated fields eventually yielded a suite of desirable buntings; Little and Black-faced were the most numerous but we also encountered several Chestnut-eared, single Meadow Bunting and a surprise Ochre-rumped Bunting – an absolutely stunning individual showing off his full suite of characters. Grey-capped Greenfinch, Chinese Blackbird, Chinese Grosbeak, a flock of 80 Vinous-throated Parrotbill and Hwamei were also enjoyed along with both the beautifully marked Dusky and even two, seemingly pure, Naumann's Thrushes perched atop a dead tree.

The crane flocks took some locating until we progressed beyond the village of Wucheng where we finally found a flock of 200 Hooded Crane with 40 or so White-naped Crane mingled in, and Common Cranes circling overhead though still no sign of the Holy Grail. After some repositioning we rescanned the flock to find a family of regal Siberian Crane giving nice views and what's more in the distance there was a blanket of white comprising in excess of 1000 of these elegant birds. Dawn the following morning, Christmas Day, was celebrated with the wonderful sight of small flocks of Siberian Cranes slowly flying overhead against a blue sky and unusually for this site, a beautiful sunrise.



*Bull-headed Shrike and Yellow-throated Bunting* © Rob Hutchinson

Moving on we spent two nights in the hills to the north-west of Nanchang exploring the forests and rivers for the highly secretive White-eared Night Heron which had been sighted there recently. Unfortunately despite dusk and dawn vigils we could not locate this species and the steep hillsides made for difficult birding and overall a frustrating Boxing Day! The forest contained a few feeding flocks, comprised largely of Pere David's Fulvetta – a range-restricted split from the Grey-cheeked Fulvetta complex, Red-billed Liothrix, Rufous-faced Warbler, Siberian Bluetail and the seven-striped sprite – Pallas's Leaf Warbler. The rivers played host to raucous Crested Kingfishers and surprisingly even a small flock of Scaly-sided Merganser. The surrounding fields and hedgerows were very birdy, especially for our bunting quest as we notched up much the same as at Poyang plus three striking male Yellow-throated, a single Rustic and best of all, two Yellow-browed Buntings – a species with a limited breeding and wintering range both of which are rarely visited by birders. Yet more Dusky and Naumann's Thrushes were encountered along with ground-dwelling Grey-backed Thrush and large numbers of endemic Yellow-bellied Tit gouging themselves on fallen berries along with a couple of Brambling.

Following almost a full day of travel north along China's impressive expressway system we arrived in Henan province at the headquarters of Dongzhai National Park. Dongzhai is one of just a few small, forested, reserves in central-east China but these reserves are essential as they protect most of the world's population of the beautiful Reeve's Pheasant. Awakening full of enthusiasm we were somewhat concerned upon bursting out of the hotel room to be greeted by damp, thick fog and a long, hard day was expected. Generally birding was slow-going with few birds heard or seen, in fact, one of our first birds of the morning was found as we pondered what one of the researchers currently on-site was attempting to do on top of a hill when a black-and-white head poked its head above a nearby rock and just as we realised what it was, the huge male Reeve's Pheasant took to the open sky giving us a wonderful flight view as we slowly headed into the mist through the tree-tops with his two meter tail waving behind him.

Delighted by our luck, especially with seeing a male so well we weren't quite sure what to do next! Despite the inclement weather we did pick up some goodies during the day as we birded the forest and fields and scrub that border the forest. Several Hwamei fed in the leaf-litter and a flock of buntings

comprised of several Yellow-throated, single Rustic and great views of several more Yellow-browed Buntings. A flock of well over 50 Yellow-bellied Tits was a surprise and some equally impressive flocks of Vinous-throated Parrotbill zipped through the under-storey. Around our accommodation several smart male Siberian Bluetail flicked around and the larger trees attracted several Grey-capped and Great Spotted Woodpeckers.



*Japanese Swamp Warbler* © Rob Hutchinson    *White-headed Langur* © James Eaton

The final leg of our tour took us to Guangxi province, straddled on the Vietnamese border. Here we visited Nonggang NNR, primarily in search of Nonggang Babbler, a limestone-karst specialist only described to science earlier this year and observed for the very first time just three years ago. It was with great anticipation that we hit a track cutting through the impressively tall limestone karst structures in the early morning and as we took our first breather after a surge uphill we were being shown the very locality where the species was first observed when a movement caught our eye... a dark passerine hopping along a small piece of track-side limestone and the whisper of 'Nonggang Babbler' uttered from both of our mouths as we watched in totally amazement that the very first bird of the morning would be our target! For the next 10 minutes we watched a small group of this enthralling bird, astonished at just how distinct it appeared, yet clearly behaviourally and structurally similar to Sooty Babbler, a similarly dark babbler restricted to the same habitat in the Annamites of central Vietnam and Lao. These birds were quite vocal and showy before eventually leaving the track-side and heading deeper into the forest. Elated with our early success we carried on along the track picking up various feeding flocks that enjoyed the open habitat; Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, Silver-eared Mesia and Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler dominated the flocks but careful scanning also revealed Common Green Magpie, Streaked Wren Babbler, Rufous-capped Babbler, Bianchi's Warbler, Pallas's Leaf and White-tailed Leaf Warbler along with a single Sulphur-breasted Warbler and later in the day another party, numbering 12, Nonggang Babbler slowly moved through the dense tangles in the dark under-storey. Walking towards an area of limestone where the rare Francois's Langur sometimes feed we came across a group of unusually showy White-winged Magpie calling raucously from open branches and a large troop of Rhesus Macaques though unfortunately no sign of the langurs which had been seen by the local farmers the previous day.

Satisfied with our views of the babbler the previous day we planned for some monkey-watching day on our final day. A visit to one of the remoter areas of Nonggang NNR was so remote that the valley floor was the only flat ground we came across in Guangxi that lacked a town or sugarcane! Unfortunately the increasingly rare and difficult Francois's Langur remained just that and we had to make do with seeing some recent droppings on the trail! Fortunately in the afternoon we were treated to one of the best moments of this tour as we visited a small area of limestone karst's near to Chongzuo, home to one of the rarest langur's in the world – White-headed Langur – which perhaps number less than 400 individuals. As dusk approached 21, including several young, of these beautifully marked monkeys skilfully made their across the vertical rock face clinging only to small outcrops and using some amazing

jumping and running techniques, although amusingly the kids took it at a slightly slower, more trepid pace. Eventually they settled down in a huddle together as the sun set for the final time in 2008.

We shall be running scheduled tours to south-east China from 2010, including a visit to Nonggang as described in this report. Please visit the Birdtour Asia [website](#) for tour details or contact us via [email](#) or **telephone:** +44 1332 516254.

## Systematic List

### ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

Swan Goose	<i>Anser cygnoides</i>
Taiga Bean Goose	<i>Anser fabalis</i>
Tundra Bean Goose	<i>Anser serrirostris</i>
Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
Lesser White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>
Bewick's Swan	<i>Cygnus bewickii</i>
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Falcated Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Chinese Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Baikal Teal	<i>Anas formosa</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Scaly-sided Merganser	<i>Mergus squamatus</i>

### GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae

Chinese Bamboo Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus</i>
Reeve's Pheasant	<i>Syrnaticus reevesii</i>
Ring-necked Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>

### PODICEPIDIFORMES: Podicipedidae

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>

### PELECANIFORMES: Phalacrocoracidae

Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
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### CICONIIFORMES: Ardeidae

Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
'Eastern' Great Egret	<i>Ardea [alba] modesta</i>
Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea minor</i>

### CICONIIFORMES: Ciconiidae

Oriental Stork	<i>Ciconia boyciana</i>
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### FALCONIFORMES: Accipitridae

Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
Crested Serpent-Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Eastern Marsh-Harrier	<i>Circus spilonotus</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>

Eurasian Sparrowhawk  
Himalayan Buzzard  
Imperial Eagle

*Accipiter nisus*  
*Buteo burmanicus*  
*Aquila heliaca*

**FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae**

Eurasian Kestrel  
Peregrine Falcon

*Falco tinnunculus*  
*Falco peregrinus*

**GRUIFORMES: Rallidae**

Brown Crake  
White-breasted Waterhen  
Common Moorhen  
Eurasian Coot

*Amaurornis akool*  
*Amaurornis phoenicurus*  
*Gallinula chloropus*  
*Fulica atra*

**GRUIFORMES: Gruidae**

Siberian Crane  
White-naped Crane  
Common Crane  
Hooded Crane

*Grus leucogeranus*  
*Grus vipio*  
*Grus grus*  
*Grus monacha*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Charadriidae**

Northern Lapwing  
Grey-headed Lapwing  
Pacific Golden Plover  
Little Ringed Plover

*Vanellus vanellus*  
*Vanellus cinereus*  
*Pluvialis fulva*  
*Charadrius dubius*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Recurvirostridae**

Pied Avocet

*Recurvirostra avosetta*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Jacanidae**

Pheasant-tailed Jacana

*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae**

Common Sandpiper  
Green Sandpiper  
Spotted Redshank  
Common Greenshank  
Marsh Sandpiper  
Wood Sandpiper  
Common Redshank  
Eurasian Curlew  
Dunlin  
Common Snipe

*Actitis hypoleucos*  
*Tringa ochropus*  
*Tringa erythropus*  
*Tringa nebularia*  
*Tringa stagnatilis*  
*Tringa glareola*  
*Tringa totanus*  
*Numerius arquata*  
*Calidris alpina*  
*Gallinago gallinago*

**CHARADRIIFORMES: Laridae**

Black-headed Gull  
Mongolian Gull

*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*  
*Larus mongolicus*

**COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae**

Rock Pigeon  
Oriental Turtle Dove  
Spotted Dove

*Columba livia*  
*Streptopelia orientalis*  
*Streptopelia chinensis*

**STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae**

Asian Barred Owlet

*Glaucidium cuculoides*

**CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae**

Greater Coucal

*Centropus sinensis***CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae**

Common Kingfisher

*Alcedo atthis*

White-throated Kingfisher

*Halcyon smyrnensis*

Crested Kingfisher

*Megaceryle lugubris*

Pied Kingfisher

*Ceryle rudis***PICIFORMES: Picidae**

Great Spotted Woodpecker

*Dendrocopos major*

Grey-capped Woodpecker

*Dendrocopos canicapillus*

Bay Woodpecker

*Blythipicus pyrrhotis*

Grey-faced Woodpecker

*Picus canus***PASSERIFORMES: Eurylaimidae**

Long-tailed Broadbill

*Psarisomus dalhousiae***PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae**

Bull-headed Shrike

*Lanius bucephalus*

Long-tailed Shrike

*Lanius schach*

Chinese Grey Shrike

*Lanius sphenocercus***PASSERIFORMES: Campephagidae**

Grey-chinned Minivet

*Pericrocotus solaris*

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike

*Hemipus picatus***PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae**

Eurasian Jay

*Garrulus glandarius*

Azure-winged Magpie

*Cyanopica cyanus*

White-winged Magpie

*Urocissa whiteheadi*

Green Magpie

*Cissa chinensis*

Gray Treepie

*Dendrocitta formosae*

Eurasian Magpie

*Pica pica*

Large-billed Crow

*Corvus macrorhynchos*

Collared Crow

*Corvus torquatus***PASSERIFORMES: Monarchidae**

Black-naped Monarch

*Hypothymis azurea***PASSERIFORMES: Alaudidae**

Eurasian Skylark

*Alauda arvensis*

Oriental Skylark

*Alauda gulgula***PASSERIFORMES: Paridae**

Yellow-bellied Tit

*Pardaliparus venustulus*

Green-backed Tit

*Parus monticolus*

Japanese Tit

*Parus minor*

Yellow-cheeked Tit

*Parus spilonotus*

Sultan Tit

*Melanochlora sultanea***PASSERIFORMES: Aegithalidae**

Black-throated Tit

*Aegithalos concinnus***PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae**

Chestnut-vented Nuthatch

*Sitta nagaensis*

**PASSERIFORMES: Cinclidae**

Brown Dipper

*Cinclus pallasii***PASSERIFORMES: Pycnonotidae**

Collared Finchbill

*Spizixos semitorques*

Black-crested Bulbul

*Pycnonotus melanicterus*

Red-whiskered Bulbul

*Pycnonotus jocosus*

Chinese Bulbul

*Pycnonotus sinensis*

Sooty-headed Bulbul

*Pycnonotus aurigaster*

Puff-throated Bulbul

*Alophoixus pallidus*

Chestnut Bulbul

*Hemixos castanonotus***PASSERIFORMES: Cisticolidae**

Zitting Cisticola

*Cisticola juncidis*

Yellow-bellied Prinia

*Prinia flaviventris*

Plain Prinia

*Prinia inornata***PASSERIFORMES: Sylviidae**

Bownish-flanked Bush Warbler

*Cettia fortipes*

Japanese Swamp Warbler

*Megalurus pryrei sinensis*

Common Tailorbird

*Orthotomus sutorius*

Pallas's Leaf Warbler

*Phylloscopus chloronotus*

Yellow-browed Warbler

*Phylloscopus inornatus*

White-tailed Leaf Warbler

*Phylloscopus davisoni*

Sulphur-breasted Warbler

*Phylloscopus ricketti*

Rufous-faced Warbler

*Abroscopus albogularis*

Bianchi's Warbler

*Seicercus valentini*

Chestnut-crowned Warbler

*Seicercus castaniceps***PASSERIFORMES: Muscicapidae**

Fujian Niltava

*Niltava davidi*

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher

*Culicicapa ceylonensis*

Siberian Bluetail

*Tarsiger cyanurus*

Oriental Magpie-Robin

*Copsychus saularis*

White-capped Redstart

*Chaimarrornis leucocephalos*

Plumbeous Redstart

*Rhyacornis fuliginosus*

Daurian Redstart

*Phoenicurus aureus*

Little Forktail

*Enicurus scouleri*

White-crowned Forktail

*Enicurus leschenaulti***PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae**

Grey-backed Thrush

*Turdus hortulorum*

Chinese Blackbird

*Turdus mandarinus*

Naumann's Thrush

*Turdus naumanni naumanni*

Dusky Thrush

*Turdus [naumanni] eunomus*

Blue Whistling Thrush

*Myophonus caeruleus***PASSERIFORMES: Timaliidae**

Masked Laughingthrush

*Garrulax perspicillatus*

Hwamei

*Garrulax canorus*

Buff-breasted Babbler

*Pellorneum tickelli*

Large Scimitar Babbler

*Pomatorhinus hypoleucos*

Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler

*Pomatorhinus ruficollis*

Streaked Wren Babbler

*Napothera brevicaudata*

Rufous-capped Babbler

*Stachyris ruficeps*

Golden Babbler

*Stachyris chrysaea*

Grey-throated Babbler

*Stachyris nigriceps*

Pin-striped Tit Babbler

*Macronous gularis*

Chestnut-capped Babbler

*Timalia pileata*

Silver-eared Mesia

*Leiothrix argentauris*

Red-billed Leiothrix

*Leiothrix lutea*heard  
only

Pere David's Fulvetta  
Grey-cheeked Fulvetta  
Indochinese Yuhina  
White-bellied Erpornis

*Alcippe hueti*  
*Alcippe schaefferi*  
*Yuhina torqueola*  
*Erpornis zantholeuca*

**PASSERIFORMES: Zosteropidae**

Chestnut-flanked White-eye  
Japanese White-eye

*Zosterops erythropleurus*  
*Zosterops japonicus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Paradoxornithidae**

Vinous-throated Parrotbill

*Paradoxornis webbianus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Nectariniidae**

Olive-backed Sunbird  
Fork-tailed Sunbird  
Little Spiderhunter

*Cinnyris jugularis*  
*Aethopyga christinae*  
*Arachnothera longirostra*

**PASSERIFORMES: Dicaeidae**

Fire-breasted Flowerpecker

*Dicaeum ignipectum*

**PASSERIFORMES: Oriolidae**

Black-naped Oriole

*Oriolus chinensis*

**PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae**

Crested Myna  
Common Myna  
Black-collared Starling  
Red-billed Starling  
White-cheeked Starling

*Acridotheres cristatellus*  
*Acridotheres tristis*  
*Gracupica nigricollis*  
*Sturnus sericeus*  
*Sturnus cineraceus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae**

Grey Wagtail  
Amur [White] Wagtail  
Olive-backed Pipit  
Water Pipit  
Red-throated Pipit  
Buff-bellied Pipit

*Motacilla cinerea*  
*Motacilla [alba] leucopsis*  
*Anthus hodgsoni*  
*Anthus spinoletta blakistoni*  
*Anthus cervinus*  
*Anthus rubescens japonica*

**PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae**

Crested Bunting  
Meadow Bunting  
Ochre-rumped Bunting  
Chestnut-eared Bunting  
Little Bunting  
Yellow-browed Bunting  
Rustic Bunting  
Yellow-throated Bunting  
Black-faced Bunting

*Melophus lathamii*  
*Emberiza cioides*  
*Emberiza yessoensis*  
*Emberiza fucata*  
*Emberiza pusilla*  
*Emberiza chrysophrys*  
*Emberiza rustica*  
*Emberiza elegans*  
*Emberiza spodocephala*

**PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae**

Brambling  
Eurasian Siskin  
Oriental Greenfinch  
Chinese Grosbeak

*Fringilla montifringilla*  
*Carduelis spinus*  
*Carduelis sinica*  
*Eophona migratoria*

**PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae**

House Sparrow  
Eurasian Tree Sparrow

*Passer domesticus*  
*Passer montanus*

**PASSERIFORMES: Estrildidae**

White-rumped Munia  
Scaly-breasted Munia

*Lonchura striata*  
*Lonchura punctulata*

A total of 195 species recorded

**MAMMALS**

Maritime Striped Squirrel  
Pallas's Squirrel  
Rhesus Macaque  
White-headed Langur

*Tamiops maritimus*  
*Callosciurus erythraeus*  
*Macaca mulatta*  
*Trachypithecus poliocephalus*



*Poyang Hu*

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