

China

Beidaihe

8–23 May 2013

Participants

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Harry Barnard

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Peter and Marjolein Lewis

Paul and Susan Murfitt

Stephen and Annette Phillips

Mike Potts

Robert and Elizabeth Wilson



Leaders Bill Blake and Vaughan
Ashby

Korean Flycatcher

Day 1: Most of the group met up at London Heathrow. Rob and Liz flew from Aberdeen, Peter and Marjolein flew out a day early; our short flight to Amsterdam departed on time as did our onward flight to Beijing.

Day 2: Arriving at Beijing Capital Airport early morning we negotiated immigration and baggage control before meeting up with Vaughan plus June (interpreter), Kevin (ground agent) and our driver, Mr Lee. Our coach took us to the Beijing International Hotel, our hotel for the next two nights, where we checked in, freshened up and had a tasty Chinese lunch before boarding the coach for an afternoon's sightseeing and birding. We started at Tiananmen Square, the largest public square in the world, before entering the Forbidden City by the Meridian Gate; this is the best preserved and most complete example of Imperial architecture in China. We left by the Divine Military Genius Gate and walked a short distance to the coach. As well as the ubiquitous Eurasian Magpies and Eurasian Tree Sparrows we saw a fine male Amur Falcon, a showy Eurasian Hoopoe, White-cheeked and Red-billed Starlings plus Barn and Red-rumped Swallows and Common Swifts of the race '*pekinensis*'. Sightseeing over, our coach took us to Yuyuantan Park, one of many green oases in this bustling city. A leisurely stroll introduced us to some of the commoner Chinese birds which included three Mandarin Ducks, Azure-winged Magpies, Spotted Doves, Chinese Bulbuls, Olive-backed Pipits, Black-browed Reed-warbler, Yellow-browed, (Two-barred) Greenish and Radde's Warblers plus three handsome Chinese Grosbeaks feeding on the ground; also seen here was a Siberian Chipmunk. Back at our hotel we had time for a refreshing shower before dinner at a nearby western style restaurant and sleep beckoned after a long day.

Day 3: An early breakfast in the hotel meant we could leave early to drive north out of the city to Bai He valley (White River). As we entered the mountains we could see sections of the Great Wall that included some fine old watchtowers perched loftily on the slopes. Approaching the river two Hill Pigeons were seen perched on wires and a Grey-headed Lapwing was found on a grassy island in the river. Leaving the coach we walked along the river seeing a good selection of birds; these included Eastern Spot-billed Ducks, two Grey-faced Buzzards, handsome Daurian Redstarts, Vinous-throated Parrotbills, Songar and Long-tailed Tits (the latter a possible split as Silver-throated Tit), garrulous Red-billed Magpies, Red-billed Choughs, Common Raven, Russet Sparrow for some, Oriental Greenfinches plus Black-faced, Godlewski's, Meadow, Yellow-throated and Little Buntings. A singing Chinese Hill Warbler responded to playback and we all had exceptionally close views of this usually rather skulking Chinese near-endemic. Mike was fortunate to have brief views of a Brown-cheeked Rail (Eastern Water Rail) here. We eventually located our main quarry when Simon spotted an Ibisbill on a small island in the river; closer inspection revealed a pair with three small chicks. As we left the area a Golden Eagle flew over being mobbed by two Large-billed Crows. Further up river we checked likely looking spots for Long-billed Plover; stopping at a good looking area of shingle Peter found a stunning male 'grey-backed' Citrine Wagtail but the only plovers we could find were Little Ringed Plovers. Also seen here were a Striated Heron, a Common Snipe and a Rosy Pipit coming into summer plumage. It was an uneventful drive back into Beijing; we had dinner at the same restaurant as last night and called the bird log in the hotel.

Day 4: Whilst we were at breakfast Mr Lee loaded up the coach; an Eastern Marsh-harrier and a Grey-headed Lapwing were flyovers at the hotel before leaving. We departed for Beidaihe, a summer seaside 'resort' some four hours east of Beijing on the Gulf of Bohai, itself an arm of the Yellow Sea. June entertained us on the journey with a couple of songs over the microphone and kept us supplied with water and nibbles. Beidaihe is supposedly the place that inspired Mao Zedong to write poetry but to birders it is a place that plays host to many thousands of Eastern Palearctic migrants heading north in the spring to breed or south in the autumn to wintering quarters. Arriving in town we headed straight to the Jin Shan Hotel, our home for the next four nights; June checked us all in and after freshening up we had lunch in the hotel restaurant. Our coach took us to an area called the Sand Flats where waders were much in evidence, most of which were in smart summer dress; Kentish Plovers, a couple of Greater Sandpipers, Red Knots, Sanderlings, Red-necked Stints, a single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpipers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Whimbrels, Common Redshanks, Common Greenshanks, Wood and Terek Sandpipers were all seen. Other birds included Little and Great Egrets, a single Eurasian Spoonbill and a fine male Chinese Goshawk plus a dozen Black-tailed Gulls in various plumages and a single Common (Kamchatka) Gull. White Wagtails were represented by both '*ocularis*' (Swinhoe's) and '*leucopsis*' (Amur) forms. On the other side of the road a pair of Falcated Ducks and some feeding Whiskered Terns were on the reservoir plus some showy Eastern Yellow Wagtails. We then drove to the Friendship Hotel where the extensive wooded grounds offer food and shelter for a mix of tired migrants; it can be particularly good for thrushes. We were not disappointed as within 10 minutes of getting off the bus most people had seen superb males of Siberian Blue Robin, Siberian Rubythroat and Eye-browed Thrush lurking under a bush and the huge grin on one person's face stayed for the rest of the day. Other birds seen included at least three Scaly Thrushes, a Chinese Blackbird, a female Dusky Thrush and two Chinese Thrushes, Taiga and Korean Flycatchers, Rufous-bellied Woodpecker and Oriental Turtle-dove. An Oriental Scops-owl betrayed its presence by calling and was found roosting in the top of a Pine tree; a flighty Northern Boobook proved less obliging and a small passage of Pacific Swifts was noted. We had a very tasty dinner in the hotel restaurant, washed down with a cold beer for some and called the bird log.

Day 5: This morning was an early start and we did a pre-breakfast walk to Lighthouse Point, a 5-minute stroll from the Jin Shan. It soon became apparent that some migration was happening with birds still coming in off the sea at the point. Another Grey-headed Lapwing, a calling flyover Richard's Pipit, Siberian Stonechats and cuckoo species were in off the sea. Most were moving on inland fairly swiftly but the trees and bushes behind the point were filling up with Brown Shrikes and Radde's Warblers plus fewer Black-browed Reed-warblers, Pallas's Leaf-warbler, Yellow-browed and Dusky Warblers with single of Pale-legged Leaf-warbler and Arctic Warbler. Asian Brown, Taiga and Korean Flycatchers were also seen plus Siberian Blue Robins and Siberian Rubythroats. Walking back to the Jin Shan for breakfast Vaughan picked out an immature Japanese Waxwing in the tall trees at the hotels back gate which gave good but brief scope views. After breakfast we visited the Friendship Hotel again, the grounds held good numbers of Siberian Blue Robins and Siberian Rubythroats plus two Rufous-tailed Robins and a Bluethroat. Eye-browed and Scaly Thrush numbers were up;

Common Cuckoos were fresh in calling. Grey-faced Woodpecker, a Grey-backed Thrush, Thick-billed Warbler and Hume's Leaf-warbler were also new for the trip list. After lunch, acting on news received from a Dutch birder staying at the Jin Shan, we checked out Lighthouse Point again as a roosting Northern Boobook was seen but unfortunately it had gone. We did however find a second-summer Relict Gull on the sea, initially it caused some confusion as we were looking into the sun but it eventually flew onto the beach giving excellent views allowing the photographers in the group to indulge themselves. Our next venue was the Dong Shan Hotel which has even more extensive grounds and cover than the Friendship. It too held good numbers of Siberian Blue Robins and Siberian Rubythroats, another Pale-legged Leaf-warbler and a flighty flock of Eye-browed Thrushes plus a Scaly Thrush or two and a White-throated Rock-thrush. Another Grey-headed Lapwing flew over calling and more Common Cuckoos were heard. Another flighty Northern Boobook proved elusive and a Grey Nightjar was seen in flight and at roost. Other new birds were Grey-streaked Flycatcher, Eurasian Siskins and a Tristram's Bunting whilst flocks of white-eyes flew over calling. Dinner in the hotel was followed by the bird log.

Day 6: Our pre-breakfast walk to Lighthouse Point proved productive; the second-summer Relict Gull was still on the beach and there were four Pied Avocets on a sand bar and a near adult Caspian (Mongolian) Gull was picked out amongst some Black-tailed Gulls on another sandbar. An Oriental Reed-warbler was found in a tangle of vegetation on the beach and a flock of nine Common Sandpipers and a Common Kingfisher were on rocks by the 'harbour' whilst small numbers of Common Terns were passing the point out to sea. At last we found a roosting Northern Boobook behind the security fence of the military base, its fierce yellow eyes staring out at us whilst also keeping an eye on the ever present Eurasian Magpies; sadly the magpies do take a heavy toll on tired and exhausted migrants. Also lurking in the trees and bushes were a Siberian Blue Robin, Olive-backed Pipits and single Yellow-throated and Tristram's Buntings. Rob investigated some scratching noises in the leaf litter by the security fence and found a Lanceolated Warbler hiding there, then another and then another; most people managed to get at least some kind of views. The most unusual bird was a Eurasian Coot that flew low across the beach then off through the trees as we returned for breakfast. A Siberian Blue Robin was seen to fly into our restaurant window; fortunately it was only stunned and was picked up and put under a bush to recuperate out of sight from the prying eyes of the magpies. For the rest of the day we took the coach north to a couple of sites away from Beidaihe. First we visited the Great Wall at Jiao Shan, north of the port city of Qinhuangdao. Our target species here was Pere David's (Plain) Laughingthrush, a Chinese endemic; a pair were seen fairly soon after we arrived and eventually showed well to all. The group took the opportunity to walk along part of the Great Wall and take photographs. As the day warmed there was a noticeable northward movement involving 10 Purple Herons, a Eurasian and three Japanese Sparrowhawks, some Eurasian Hobbies and an Amur Falcon. Flocks of white-eyes were also moving, their rather sad calls betraying their presence; overhead we had good views of a flock of Chestnut-flanked White-eyes as they fed frantically in some trees before the urge to go north proved too strong and they moved on calling as they went. A female Common Rosefinch was also seen and, in a more open area, we had more good views of another Chinese Hill Warbler, another pair of Plain Laughingthrushes and a singing Meadow Bunting. Today we had lunch in a KFC in the city of Qinhuangdao and spent the afternoon at Shi He (Stone River). The stony-bedded estuary contains small islands attractive to roosting shorebirds, the tide was high and it was mostly mixed herons, Whimbrel and Common Greenshanks on show. An easy to drive track continues along the south side for about 2 km, ending at the sea wall. Sharp eyes in the back of the bus spotted a Baillon's Crake as it scurried around a reedy pool. Getting off the bus a pipit was seen; it was our only Pechora Pipit of the trip and showed well for this normally skulking species as it fed around the edge of a pool. We then walked along the sea wall, around some pools then across some flat, sheep-grazed grassland dotted with small plantations of pine and poplar trees. A couple of Japanese Quails flushed and the sea wall produced a confiding Yellow-breasted Bunting that posed for photographs. The pools held Eastern Yellow Wagtails, Siberian Stonechats plus a couple of Arctic Warblers that called as they fed. The trees held a selection of commoner warblers plus Asian Brown Flycatcher, Oriental Turtle-doves, a roosting Grey Nightjar and a handsome Black-naped Oriole. We found some pools with a good selection of waders on and amongst the Spotted Redshanks, Sharp-tailed, Marsh, Green, Wood and Terek Sandpipers we found at least three Grey-tailed Tattlers; back to the Jin Shan for dinner and the day's bird log.

Day 7: Our pre-breakfast walk again started with the second-summer Relict Gull still in residence on the beach. Lighthouse Point was rather empty compared to previous mornings with just a few leaf-warblers but there were noisy flocks of Chinese Penduline-tits flitting through, their rather plaintive, reed bunting-like calls

being a common sound this morning. We walked up to the Friendship Hotel; it too was equally quiet although we did see a Thick-billed Warbler close to the entrance. After breakfast we visited the Sand Flats and Heng He Reservoir. The trees and reed beds around the edge of the sand flats offer tired migrants a chance to rest and refuel before moving on and can be easily viewed from a boardwalk. Two Oriental Honey-buzzards flew over as we arrived and a Peregrine kept the waders on the alert. From the boardwalk we had good looks at two Eastern Crowned Leaf-warblers, several Black-browed Reed-warblers, Taiga Flycatchers and more Vinous-throated Parrotbills. Vaughan had brief views of a Pallas's Bunting; unfortunately it dived into a reed bed before anyone else could get good views. At the reservoir amongst a nice selection of commoner species new birds were a well camouflaged Yellow Bittern and a pair of Garganey. Falcated Ducks had increased to two pairs, we found two Amur Falcon nests, a brief Baillon's Crake, singles of Tristram's and Yellow-breasted Buntings and there was a small passage of Whiskered Terns. A wary Swan Goose with one gosling was seen, this being the second year running they have bred here; a Musk Rat from a small feral population was also seen. Lunch at the hotel was a leisurely affair as it was now very hot so we decided to let the heat subside before going out to the Friendship. Before leaving Simon found a roosting Grey Nightjar in the Jin Shan gardens. We re-located the Oriental Scops-owl in the same area but in a different tree and a couple of Rufous-tailed Robins meant everyone had now had good views of this little skulker; walking gently through a small area of long grass yielded three Lanceolated Warblers.

Day 8: Our pre-breakfast walk started at the beach again as there were now two second-summer Relict Gulls and yet another Grey-headed Lapwing calling noisily as it flew around. We decided to split the group this morning to cover more ground; some came with me to Lighthouse Point and some went with Vaughan to the Friendship. The point was very quiet but Vaughan came up trumps with five Daurian Starlings in the tree tops at Suzy Wongs and a Siberian Thrush close to the entrance of the Friendship. Also of note was a late female Red-flanked Bluetail, most of which pass through here in late April and early May. After breakfast we loaded up our coach as it was a moving day today, we travelled south for a 3-night stay in Laoting checking various roadside pools and estuaries for waders on the way. Heading towards Nandaihe a flock of 17 small waders were noted on a sandbar, they were Common Sandpipers! At Nandaihe we checked out some roadside pools, not an easy task as the road was being rebuilt. We found a single Pacific Golden-plover and single White-winged Tern both in summer plumage but not the hoped for stints and dowitchers. A little further on at Da Pu He we found more Pacific Golden-plovers, a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and a Black-capped Kingfisher. Next was Qi Li Hi (Seven Mile Lagoon) where the tide was just about right and we had time to check through a good mix of waders. New here were 25 Lesser (Mongolian) Sandpipers, Dunlin (the race '*sakhalina*') and Far Eastern Curlew amongst Grey Plovers, Red-necked Stints, 80+ Sharp-tailed Sandpipers, Eurasian Curlew and Grey-tailed Tattlers nearly all in summer plumage. Another Eurasian Spoonbill foraged in the shallows and small numbers of Sand Martins were passing northwards; with them was a single house martin, but not the expected Asian, its large white rump, clean face and pale underwing coverts revealed it to be a Common House-martin. At the Luan He estuary we had a packed lunch whilst checking through the 17 species of wader present. Three Eurasian Oystercatchers were new as were a couple of Lesser (Asian) Short-toed Larks. A sub-adult gull caused some confusion initially but once seen well it was identified as our first Saunders' Gull of the trip. Gull-billed and White-winged Terns were also present. We drove to our hotel in Laoting, checked in and freshened up before going out again; picking up our local guide, Snow, we headed to Big Wood (confusingly the Chinese name means Little Wood). The entrance to the wood was buzzing with leaf-warblers and flycatchers and we made slow progress into the wood. New birds here were a splendid Large-billed Leaf-warbler, Dark-sided and Mugimaki Flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Tit and Black Drongo. Other birds included at least 10 White-throated Rock-thrushes, Siberian and Eye-browed Thrushes, Rufous-tailed Robin, Eastern Crowned, Pale-legged and Hume's Leaf-warblers, Grey-streaked, Asian Brown, Taiga and Korean Flycatchers. Further into the wood we found a couple of magnificent Dollarbirds posing on branches above the track. The wood has a heronry that holds a mix of Black-crowned Night-herons, Chinese Pond-herons, Cattle, Little and Great Egrets all in their summer finery. We had dinner at a restaurant a short drive from our hotel and called a very busy bird log back at the hotel. Our first day south of Beidaihe had been bird-filled and had really whetted people's appetites for tomorrow.

Day 9: This morning we returned to Big Wood pre-breakfast for another excellent spell of birding. Most of last evening's birds were still around the woods entrance but the White-throated Rock-thrushes had all gone. We had great scope views of a pair of Siberian Thrushes feeding in a ditch with an Eye-browed Thrush that were occasionally dive-bombed by the ubiquitous Eurasian Magpies. New birds this morning were two Forest

Wagtails, three Bramblings, six Hawfinches and three magnificent Japanese Grosbeaks. We had breakfast at a western style restaurant in Laoting and then drove to Lao Yu Jian to take a boat across to Happy Island (Bu Ti Dao). We stopped just before the harbour to check for waders but the tide was too far out and we were looking into the sun. All we could see were distant silhouettes at least two of which were Great Knot but we would have to return for better views. We boarded a boat in the harbour, the tide was fairly low, so our boat followed the meanderings of the channel but we were soon ashore on Happy Island. Much work is being done on the island and parts of it resembled a building site. A golf course and driving range is one of the islands projects and we walked to this area first; the short grass was good habitat for pipits and we found one Richard's and three Blyth's Pipits. The tide was well out so rather than spend time looking at distant waders we made our way to a Temple and wooded area in the centre of the island, aptly known as Temple Wood. It was fairly quiet with assorted leaf-warblers and flycatchers but we did find a mixed group of thrushes feeding in a ditch. With a little patience we had good views of at least 20 Eye-browed, three Siberian, a Chinese and a cracking male Grey-backed Thrush, with Rufous-tailed and Siberian Blue Robins too. We had arranged for electric carts to pick us up and take us to the islands new restaurant for lunch. Having eaten we made our way back out to Temple Wood but it was still relatively quiet so we moved out to check the 'fields' and ditches. Buntings became the focus of our attentions and we all eventually had good looks at male Yellow-browed and Chestnut Buntings, both new for the tour, plus more Black-faced, Yellow-breasted and Little Buntings and good numbers of Brown Shrikes. At the sea wall the waders were still distant; another Grey-headed Lapwing flew over calling and five Saunders Gulls, two of which were splendid full summer adults, were searching for crabs on the mud. It was time to return to the mainland and once back at Lao Yu Jian we went to another, smaller wood, known as Magic Wood. It was however rather quiet, the highlights being Rufous-tailed Robin, Zitting Cisticola, Eastern Crowned-warbler and Asian Brown Flycatcher. Dinner was at last night's restaurant: who will ever forget mashed potato with plum jam topped with hundreds and thousands – quite bizarre! That aside the rest of the meal was excellent. We called the log back at the hotel.

Day 10: An early breakfast this morning so that we could get the first boat across to Happy Island. We had time to stop at the 'corner' before Lao Yu Jian to check for waders, this time the tide and light were perfect and we had great views of 30 or so full summer-plumaged Great Knots. Having landed on Happy Island we walked out past the driving range seeing a fine male Blue Rock-thrush of the red-bellied '*phillipensis*' race and a Chestnut-eared Bunting, both new birds for the tour. From the sea wall we checked through the waders again still looking for Asiatic Dowitcher and Chinese Egret but no sign of either; some pools behind the sea wall held breeding Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets, Little Ringed and Kentish Plovers. Two Ruddy Turnstones, another new bird for the tour, flew along the sea wall and the five Saunders' Gulls were seen again. Buddhist monks (rather incongruous to see some using mobile phones) were converging on the island today for a festival to bestow a blessing on the Temple so the island was busy with visitors. Due to the fine settled conditions Temple Wood was fairly quiet with no apparent influx of new birds except cuckoos which were much in evidence today and a hepatic female Oriental Cuckoo was well seen in the wood. Rob and Liz gave an excellent description of what was undoubtedly the tour's first Yellow-streaked Warbler. White-eyes flew over in noisy flocks and a pair of Eurasian Hoopoes was seen feeding a well grown youngster. Lunch at the restaurant was rather later today than normal due to the pressure of visitors but it was voted the best lunch of the whole tour by some. Walking slowly towards the quay we checked the promenade for waders, with more Great Knots on show, then in various patches of trees and bushes, an Eastern Crowned-warbler and a Hawfinch were the pick of the birds seen. Several Tolai Hares were seen about the island. Back on the mainland we checked various roadside pools around Lao Yu Jian for Long-toed Stints without success and ended the day at Big Wood again. Once more there was no apparent influx of new birds but Oriental Cuckoo, Siberian Rubythroat, Siberian Blue Robin, Siberian Thrush, Pale-legged and Large-billed Leaf-warblers, two Japanese Grosbeaks, two Hawfinches and a Tristram's Bunting would have been a great list at the start of the tour. We also saw an Amur Hedgehog rummaging around on the woodland floor, a rather pale animal compared to our hedgehog. Dinner was at our breakfast restaurant, western style sizzling steak or chicken, before the bird log again in rooms at the hotel with coffee kindly served by June and Snow.

Day 11: Pre-breakfast found us back in Big Wood where once again a fine selection of migrants kept us on our toes; pick of the bunch was a Pale Thrush found feeding in a ditch with an Eye-browed Thrush close to the entrance. Some of the supporting cast consisted of Large-billed, Pale-legged and Eastern Crowned Leaf-warblers, Dusky Warblers, three Black Drongos, Olive-backed Pipits, two Japanese Waxwings, a Eurasian Siskin, eight Common Rosefinch, six Hawfinches, five Japanese and three Chinese Grosbeaks; the last two

species perched together in the top of a leafless tree allowing direct comparison of these spectacular finches. Another Amur Hedgehog was also seen. Breakfast was at our usual restaurant before returning to our hotel to pack for the return journey to Beidaihe. With Asiatic Dowitcher, Long-toed Stint and Chinese Egret still on the wanted list we decided to check an area called Qian Shui Wan or Shallow Water Bay. The causeway pools and beaches held a good selection of waders that included numbers of Sharp-tailed and Terek Sandpipers and over 100 Great Knots but not the hoped for waders. Other birds seen in the area included Japanese Quail, White-winged Tern, Black-capped Kingfisher, Lesser (Asian) Short-toed Lark, Richard's Pipit, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Oriental Reed-warbler, Thick-billed and Lanceolated Warblers, Chestnut-eared, Yellow-browed and Chestnut Buntings. Aiming to retrace our southward journey from Wednesday we travelled to the Luan He estuary and ate a packed lunch whilst watching the many waders. An Eastern Marsh-harrier for everyone to see was the pick of the birds here. Our next stop should have been Qi Li Hi but half way there we found that, due to road works, the road had been closed to larger vehicles so we aborted plan A and switched to plan B. This meant an early return to Beidaihe where we checked back into the Jin Shan Hotel for a three-night stay and spent the early evening in the Friendship Hotel grounds. It was however very quiet and little of note was seen.

Day 12: The day dawned cold and windy with low, grey cloud but Lighthouse Point was quiet; a small passage of Pacific Swifts was noted plus a Siberian Blue Robin and an uncooperative *Locustella* warbler; the biggest surprise was a Eurasian Wren however. Walking back for breakfast some raucous calls attracted our attention, the culprits were found to be a couple of Masked Laughingthrushes, presumably from the small feral population around Beidaihe. After breakfast we spent the morning at the Sand Flats and the Reservoir. The best bird at the Sand Flats and bird of the morning was a flyover Black-shouldered Kite, another write-in. A rare visitor from the south it has apparently become more regular in recent years. Vaughan found a male Narcissus (Green-backed) Flycatcher in the poplars but it too was uncooperative and disappeared before all of the group could see it and was one of seven species of flycatcher seen today. Black-browed and Oriental Reed-warblers and Thick-billed Warblers were all in song. At the Reservoir two Oriental Honey-buzzards and a Grey-faced Buzzard were flyovers and Simon saw another Yellow Bittern. A Forest Wagtail on the ground with a Tristram's Bunting was a good find but then we had to cut short our visit as some local dignitaries were about to visit so we were asked to leave; we took an early lunch at our hotel restaurant. We spent the afternoon back on plan A, rechecking the estuaries to the south starting at Nandaihe where the only real thing of note was the colour of the sky, almost black. It did start to rain but it lasted less than 10 minutes; this was to be the only rain we encountered on the whole tour. At Da Pu He our persistence finally paid off. Whilst most walked down to the pools on the south side of the river Rob, Vince, Simon and I checked some suitable looking habitat on the north side. Two Red-necked Stints could be seen distantly and on closer inspection we found a superb summer-plumaged Long-toed Stint. I radioed Vaughan and soon everyone was enjoying this charismatic little gem with its peculiar jizz, like a miniature Sharpie; even the extra long middle toe could be clearly seen. As we walked out to view the exposed mud at Qi Li Hi two Chinese Egrets flew past us, unfortunately they did not stop and flew some distance inland; some in the group then realised they had seen Chinese Egret yesterday without knowing. Also of note here were 17 summer-plumaged Lesser Sandplovers and a good count of 12 Grey-tailed Tattlers. We looked inland for the egrets but came up empty; it was however a happy coach that returned for another excellent dinner and the bird log.

Day 13: Lighthouse Point was again very quiet; a Black-capped Kingfisher, three more uncooperative *Locustella* warblers plus yesterdays Masked Laughingthrushes were seen and a Bar-headed Goose flew along the beach. The goose had some damage to its secondaries and is the presumed escaped bird that has been in the area for a while. After breakfast we were to return to Stone River and despite the Qinhuangdao traffic we arrived in good time. Apparently the area was a massive quarrying enterprise fuelling the local construction industry, but the leftover ponds, channels and depressions provide all manner of habitats for water birds and migrants. The state of the tide was good and the stony islands held three Grey-tailed Tattlers. Walking out towards the sea wall two Grey-headed Lapwings and at least one Richard's Pipit were seen. Vince then came up with the goods – not one, but two Little Curlews feeding in some rough grass with a single Whimbrel. The latter did a disappearing act but the Little Curlews stayed and we all had prolonged close-up views of this elusive and hard to see species; it is more often seen as a flyover in amongst flocks of Whimbrels or Pacific Golden-plovers. The photographers in the group were kept busy as these two birds showed exceptionally well. Next Dick picked out two Saker Falcons quite low down over the marsh, we were able to watch them through telescopes as they gradually gained height showing off the dark tips to their underwing coverts. That really

was a magic half hour for everyone. People gradually spilled out to cover the area and a nice mix of waders and passerines were seen and the Sakers put in another brief reappearance. Pick of the passerines was another male Narcissus (Green-backed) Flycatcher that stayed for all to see plus Lanceolated, Large-billed and Pale-legged Leaf-warblers and a Scaly Thrush. Also new for the tour was a Reed Bunting. It was hard to tear ourselves away but we headed back into the city for lunch at a 'barbecue' restaurant Chinese style. Help yourself buffet to noodles, rice etc., and waiters came round with a selection of various barbecued meats, very filling but we still had room for ice-cream. Back at Beidaihe we visited Heng He Reservoir again; two Yellow Bitterns and a female Tufted Duck (another write-in) were seen on the reservoir but for most people bird of the afternoon was the superb male Siberian Thrush perched out in the open, very close and seemingly frozen to its perch before melting back into cover. Just as we were leaving a White-breasted Waterhen was found; it skulked and did its best to hide in the undergrowth and most had to make do with flight views when it finally broke cover to disappear for good. At the Sand Flats five Red-necked Stints, some summer-plumaged Sanderlings and a marauding Peregrine were noteworthy. It was our final dinner at the Jin Shan restaurant, Kevin bought beers for those that wanted and Dick was in for a big surprise, June had found out it was his birthday. First she presented Dick with a bowl of noodles, traditional in China, to represent long life; then came a present, a big cake and some candles that played happy birthday when lit. Dick opened his present, the cake was cut and passed around and the candles were lit and began to play – they played and played and played. It was a nice touch from June and Dick looked suitably touched. Eventually the candles went into a cupboard but they could still be heard. Mysteriously the candles were later found in a cupboard in Dick's room – still playing!

Day 14: We split the group again to cover Lighthouse Point and the Friendship. The Point was very quiet with a Thick-billed and two Dusky Warblers, three Black-browed Reed-warblers plus two Taiga Flycatcher being the only birds of note. The Friendship came up trumps again with a Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler giving reasonable views to everyone as it skulked under bushes near the entrance. The Jin Shan gardens held another Thick-billed and a Lanceolated Warbler and three Grey-headed Lapwings flew over calling. After breakfast, with the coach loaded, we left the Jin Shan for the last time, once again we negotiated the Qinhuangdao traffic heading north out of the city into the Yin Mountains to Zu Shan Forest Park (Old Peak); for part of the journey we followed the Shi He valley and were able to pull-in to a safe place on this narrow road for a leg stretch. Here the Stone River is a boulder and pebble strewn river channel, checking out the riverbed we found a Grey-capped Woodpecker (a species only heard at Beidaihe) plus Daurian Redstart, Blue Rock-thrush, Godlewski's and Meadow Buntings all in song and a couple of Black Drongos. Further up the valley we were able to pull in again; a small plover on the riverbed was unfortunately only a Little Ringed. The cliffs above the river held two Hill Pigeons and a Eurasian Crag-martin was investigating a rock overhang; a little further up another Dollarbird was perched on some overhead wires. On reaching the village at the bottom of the mountain we transferred from our coach to smaller minibuses for the drive up the mountain stopping at the North Gate entrance to investigate the area. Manchurian Bush-warbler and Blunt-winged Warbler were searched for here but neither species responded to play back; we did see a Thick-billed Warbler which seemed to be responding to Blunt-winged Warbler song. Two Hair-crested Drongos were new for the tour here but Northern Hawk-cuckoo was only heard. Also seen was an Eastern Crowned Leaf-warbler in song plus Yellow-bellied Tits. Pere David's Laughing Thrush was heard and a couple of Pere David's Rock Squirrels were seen. Climbing back into the minibuses we continued up the mountain and checked into our small but clean and comfortable hotel for an overnight stay. At the front of the hotel we had good views of a vocal Snowy-browed Nuthatch and a stunning male Daurian Redstart on a short walk to a restaurant lunch. After lunch we boarded the minibuses again to go to the highest driveable point; scenically this is the best part of the holiday and on clear days there are spectacular views of wooded hills and valleys and ancient watchtowers can be seen as the Great Wall snakes across distant hills. It was fairly warm on top with only a light breeze; we spent the afternoon on the forested peak but it proved to be rather frustrating as, despite the lack of wind, some of the key species here were rather uncooperative. We had tantalizing views of Grey-sided Thrush, Claudia's and Chinese Leaf-warblers, all new for the tour, but none really perched long enough for satisfactory views. Northern Hawk-cuckoo and Oriental Cuckoos were heard but refused to show themselves and a distant Koklass Pheasant could also be heard calling; an Indian Cuckoo and a single Goldcrest were new for the tour. We tried to lure White-bellied Redstart into view where we had seen them before but this ace skulker failed to respond. Also seen were more Snowy-browed Nuthatches plus Chinese Goshawk, Eye-browed Thrush, Long-tailed (Silver-throated) Tit, Oriental Greenfinch and Godlewski's Buntings. We took minibuses back down part of the mountain and walked the rest of the way back to our hotel; on the way we tried for White-bellied Redstart at

another site but again the response was negative. We enjoyed dinner in the restaurant, which included 'toffee apples Chinese style', where we also called the bird log, much to the amusement of the giggling staff.

Day 15: Our last full day started early with minibuses back up the mountain for a rather chilly pre-breakfast walk. Our driver drove slowly so it would be easy to stop if we saw any pheasants on the road but we had no such luck. At the top we tried again for White-bellied Redstart but we drew a blank. We did have better views of Claudia's and Chinese Leaf-warblers, the former quite comical with its wing flicking antics, but Grey-sided Thrush still refused to pose nicely for everyone. Once again we heard Koklass Pheasant calling across the valley but the only pheasants we saw were of the Common variety. A Yellow-streaked Warbler gave good scope views when it responded to play back and a Lesser Cuckoo was also seen, it too responded immediately to play back; also new for the tour was Eurasian Jay. We bussed back down to the restaurant where three Bramblings were seen. After breakfast we decided to drive back up the mountain and walk down; this paid off as we all had excellent views of various Grey-sided Thrushes feeding at the side of the road plus at least two delightful Yellow-throated Buntings. Also seen was another Pale Thrush plus an Eye-browed and two Chinese Thrushes, more Claudia's, Chinese and Hume's Leaf-warblers, Eurasian Wren, Siberian Blue Robins, Daurian Redstarts, Brown, Taiga and Korean Flycatchers, Yellow-bellied Tits and a Hair-crested Drongo. All too soon we returned to the hotel to pack, have lunch and begin the journey back to Beijing. Our return to Beijing was via a new expressway but first we drove through the Qinglong River valley passing some good looking habitat. We did see Mandarin Ducks, Eurasian Hoopoe and Black Drongos and Harry saw what could only have been an Ibisbill but sadly we could not stop. Arriving back at the Exhibition Hotel in Beijing we had dinner at the western style restaurant across the road before retiring after a long day.

Day 16: We took our luggage down to the coach before breakfast so Mr Lee could load up whilst we had breakfast. An Indian Cuckoo could be heard calling a short distance away but failed to show itself. Mr Lee negotiated the Beijing traffic with his usual calm and coolness. At the airport Vaughan gave a short speech as we presented June and Mr Lee with their collections. We said our farewells to them and to Kevin; they had all done a great job for us on the tour helping it run smoothly and added a lot of fun too. It was a rather tearful June that said goodbye.

The group total for the tour was 220 species seen plus two species that we only heard – Koklass Pheasant and Northern Hawk-cuckoo. My thanks go to Vaughan for his organisational skills and his ceaseless sense of humour, to Harry for his sharp ears and eyes and to 'the China team' of June, Kevin and Mr Lee for helping the tour run smoothly. My special thanks go to the group themselves for their camaraderie, sense of humour, birding skills and patience. So if the lure of Far Eastern/Siberian waders, chats, thrushes, warblers, flycatchers and buntings get your juices flowing Birdfinders will be returning next year, don't leave it too long though as next year's tour is already starting to fill up.

Bill Blake on behalf of **Birdfinders**