

# China

# Beidaihe

8–23 May 2015

## Participants

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**Asian Dowitcher**

**Leaders Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby**

**Day 1** Overnight flight from the UK to Beijing.

**Day 2** The group disembarked from the Amsterdam–Beijing flight in various degrees of refreshed state and were met by June, our translator for the holiday and Kevin, our ground agent. After making sure all expected names had made it through arrivals, we made our way to the coach where Mr Lee, our driver for the duration, loaded up the baggage. During the journey to the Beijing Exhibition Hotel, June introduced herself and explained the plan for the day and it quickly became apparent that not only did she have an excellent grasp of the English language, she also had a brilliant and wicked sense of humour that shone throughout the trip. We picked up our first Eurasian and Azure-winged Magpies as well as Eurasian Tree Sparrows, which replace House Sparrows here, during the bus journey before we arrived at our destination where we were met by our leaders, Vaughan and Svetlana, issued our room keys and breakfast passes and given some time to freshen up before reconvening for a hearty breakfast. Our first experience of China was to be Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City so, after being joined by Rob and Virginia who had arrived a day earlier, we headed off. Whilst June explained the history of the square, we noted our first Large-billed Crows of the trip as well as a Siberian Stonechat that seemed somewhat out of place in the well-maintained flower beds and the acrid taste of pollution that prevailed. Moving from the square and into the various courtyards of the Forbidden City, it became more critical to keep an eye on June's flag amongst the thousands of other tourists rather than looking for birds (prior trips had experienced the loss of members of the group in the throng!)

However, we did manage to add Eurasian Hobby, Spotted Dove, Red-rumped Swallow and Common Swift of the *pekinensis* race. Without losing any of the group, which was a challenge in itself in some parts, we eventually exited the city seeing a pair of proper wild Mandarin Ducks on the moat and made our way through the back streets to get back to the bus. Along the way in a small car park there were Crested Myna and more Large-billed Crows and also a pair of Willow (Songar) Tits, which seemed out of place in a busy city street. Our destination for the afternoon was the Botanical Gardens which, given the nature of the habitat, should give us a real start on the trip list. Arriving at the South Gate, the species list soon started to increase. Both magpie species were in evidence and the first of many Taiga Flycatchers and a single Oriental Greenfinch were found flitting amongst the pines. Pallas's Leaf Warbler and Yellow-browed Warblers were found within the same bush and five very distant raptors were likely Oriental Honey-buzzard and harrier sp. A Eurasian Sparrowhawk cruised over whilst a couple of Eurasian Hoopoes fed in an open area before a small group of Vinous-throated Parrotbills appeared whilst we were watching a small flock of Little Buntings in the trees. Meandering our way alongside some of the ponds and streams we added Grey Wagtail as well as more Taiga Flycatchers before the area became more broken with grassy areas interspersed with tree cover. Our first Red-billed Blue-magpie elicited a great deal of excitement although this was to become a common species in Beidaihe before Grey-headed Woodpecker drew our attention which, in contradiction to its secretive nature in Europe, would similarly become a staple of any day once we hit the coast. Less so though was Grey-capped Woodpecker, which showed well with some gentle encouragement in the trees around the bridge and would remain our single decent views. As the afternoon was waning, we started to head back in the direction of the gate with a mixed flock of Spotted and Oriental Turtle-doves feeding in the grass before an area of mixed pine gave some of us tantalising views of Chinese Nuthatch. Our first unanticipated tick though took the form of a pair of Yellow-throated Buntings feeding quietly amongst a flock of Little Bunting under the trees although most of the group agreed that their former name of Elegant Bunting was far more appropriate. Walking back alongside a pond complex with connecting streams added Little Grebe, Radde's Warbler and Chinese Bulbul and a second surprise, a pair of Collared Finchbills appearing very close to us whilst we were enjoying crippling views of Vinous-throated Parrotbills, although being this far north of their normal range conjecture about whether they were escapes had to be entertained. Our final addition for the day was an Eastern Crowned Warbler that preened in a tall willow alongside some very late Bramblings. Dinner was taken at a restaurant nearby to the exhibition centre before the log was called and details of tomorrow's plan and times dispensed.

**Day 3** Up early and spotting Crested Myna and Chinese Grosbeak whilst we boarded the bus, we headed into the hills outside of Beijing to a new site that Vaughan and Svetlana had checked out a few days before. Miyun Lake is actually a huge reservoir and as soon as we alighted from the bus we started adding good species. A couple of Meadow Buntings sung from the telephone lines whilst further along the path these wires had up to five Olive-backed Pipits perched on them. The group very quickly became distracted by the hundreds of Pallas's Buntings that showed teasingly in the scrub and grass but Vaughan wanted to get to the reservoir shore before the forecast rain arrived and scuppered any chance of Oriental Pratincoles flying about so we tried to keep moving. However singing Beijing Babblers were not to be as easily ignored and eventually we had all had reasonable views of these range-restricted birds as well as a pair of Pere David's Laughthrushes that were singing from a scrubby hillock. Siberian Stonechats were much in evidence and a couple of male Pallas's Buntings showed well perched up, which took some of the pressure off of walking past a new species, while Eurasian Kestrel and Zitting Cisticola (which has a very non-zitting song in this part of the world) padded our list. The first part of the shoreline came into view as well as our first familiar water birds: Black-winged Stilt, Black-crowned Night-heron, Grey Heron, Black headed Gulls, Great Crested Grebe, Little Ringed Plover, Eurasian Wigeon as well as less familiar species in the shape of a pair of Eastern Spot-billed Ducks, a few Black-tailed Gulls, an Eastern Marsh-harrier hunting the grassland and a possible *vegae* Herring Gull. Moving forward to gain a wider vista of the shoreline added a write in for the trip, a flock of four Bar-headed Geese, as well as waders in the form of Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Marsh Sandpiper and Whimbrel, both Little and

Great Egrets, several Eurasian Spoonbills, many Ruddy Shelducks and a few of their common cousins, whilst a flock of Hill Pigeons flushed from a field and a nice male Amur Falcon flew over. June kindly arrived with a flask of coffee but had trouble getting everyone to grab a cup as our attention was drawn ever onward along the shore by Long-toed Stints, some cracking Citrine Wagtails, a couple of Oriental Pratincoles walking around on the deck (as well as a flock of c50 that flew up distantly), a large flock of c250 Pacific Golden-plovers, c50 Greater Sand-plovers and Kentish Plovers and a perched Peregrine. The morning had flown by and, as the sky had turned greyer and we had further sites to try and do today that are weather dependent, we had to drag ourselves away adding proper wild Common Pheasant, the chestnut-bellied form of Blue Rock-thrush, a Blyth's Pipit and a Black-faced Bunting to the day's list on our return as well as some very good views of Pallas's Bunting. By the time we had returned to the bus, the rain had started so after washing our boots off to try and keep Mr Lee's new bus in as clean condition as possible, we headed off to a very local and traditional restaurant for some good food and some bad toilets. Our next site was intended to be another part of the reservoir shore but the heavy rain that had set in restricted the bus from even trying and the group decision of not to try to walk two very muddy kilometres in heavy rain was a shame but sensible even though Vaughan and Svetlana had found a couple of Little Curlews here two days before. Instead we moved onwards to a river area for Crested Kingfisher where, despite the downpours, we all had views of one flying along the river past a very bedraggled Black Stork, to shelter in the overhanging willows. Following its lead we headed back to the bus and ultimately the hotel for drying out, showers and dinner in the restaurant.

**Day 4** No pre-breakfast birding today ahead for our transfer to our new base for the next few days, the Jinshan hotel in Beidaihe, but a few of us still managed an hour or so in the park opposite the hotel in Beijing. A couple of pairs of Mandarin Ducks and Black-tailed Gulls were on the boating lake avoiding a local gentleman out for a morning swim, whilst the trees held Chinese Bulbul, Yellow-browed Warblers, ubiquitous Eurasian Tree Sparrows, a couple of Taiga Flycatchers, a Little Bunting and Crested Myna at a nest hole. Yellow-bellied Tit was a cracking new bird but Japanese Tit and a singing 'Acro' warbler remained elusive and was only heard. After breakfast we boarded the bus and headed eastwards to the migration hotspot of Beidaihe adding our first Chinese Pond-herons on the journey along the few rivers that we crossed. Several members of the tour noted how scoured the landscape was with no natural habitat or vegetation to be seen throughout almost the entire 5-hour journey; a sobering view of developing China. It had clearly been raining in Beidaihe and we were all eager to start checking out the area for grounded migrants so after checking in, finding our rooms and dumping the gear, we gathered to check out Lighthouse Point and the Friendship Hotel for the afternoon. Even while we waited we managed to find a cracking male Korean Flycatcher as well as Hume's and Yellow-browed Warblers, Red-billed Blue-magpie and Radde's Warbler in the hotel trees and gardens. Heading down to the Point, Vaughan noted development that had occurred even in the last year and was not even sure what cover the point would still have but despite the more manicured gardens on the approach and a new tarmaced road, the point itself still had some natural vegetation left. Radde's Warbler had obviously had a fall as they were much in evidence and a mixed flock of Chestnut-sided White-eyes and Japanese Tits passed through the treetops. Another Korean Flycatcher fed low down and Brown Shrike elicited excitement although Vaughan correctly noted that later in the week when there would be 100s of them we would be less attentive! A quick stop at the gates of the Jin Shan fields added two Red-billed Starlings before we reached the Friendship Hotel at the top of the hill. Our initial plan was a very slow and quiet walk amongst the shaded areas near the entrance, which were a favoured haunt of migratory thrushes but only Chinese Blackbird could be found. The Friendship Hotel is a vast complex with many gardens, hedges, grassy areas and unkempt corners so we headed around a circuit that would ultimately bring us back to the gates. The rain had actually not grounded too much in the way of birds so the circuit was not as productive as hoped. A Japanese Quail flushed from a grassy area and a flyby thrush was followed by a bone crunching bang as it collided with a window. Running to hopefully find it only stunned before the marauding Eurasian Magpies took it, we were all sickened to find a beautiful male Grey-backed Thrush, with its orange-red flanks, very much

dead on the concrete. It's worth noting at this juncture that Eurasian and to a lesser degree Red-billed Blue-magpie are a constant and very real predatory threat throughout this area and the density of population here must have a real impact on the migratory passerines, a point well illustrated later in the afternoon when another flushed Japanese Quail was almost instantly seized upon by a magpie but thankfully escaped. As our circuit took us back to the entrance, a completely unexpected flock of Japanese Waxwings were found perched up on a conifer in the grey mist. Grey-headed Woodpecker was almost our final bird of the day before a robin-like bird hiding in a hedge revealed itself as a cracking Siberian Rubythroat that showed very briefly. A couple of us hung around as the group headed back to the hotel and managed to find a very skulking Siberian Blue Robin. Dinner was in the restaurant whilst the log was called in the reception bar where a coffee of £3.50 far outweighed the cost of beers at 50p!

**Day 5** A very early start this morning, but even with this several of the group could be found wandering around the hotel grounds before we convened. Radde's Warbler, Red-billed Blue-magpie, Red-rumped Swallows and Brown Shrike could be found around the grounds and our first Pacific Swifts hawked over as we gathered. Walking up to the Friendship Hotel grounds we saw our first Chinese Grosbeak as a group perched up high at the top of a tree as Barn Swallows, Chinese Pond-heron and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk flew above us. Once again the plan was to firstly search for thrushes near the entrance before checking the grounds out for other overnight migrants. At first all seemed quiet but Rob R's eyes saw a dark shape moving at the base of some bushes, which focused our attention. As we stood quietly scanning birds started to show themselves albeit briefly in some instances. The dark shape turned out to be a male Siberian Thrush, which briefly popped up before magically disappearing into the undergrowth never to be seen again, quickly followed by a Pale Thrush in the same bush. A female Mugimaki Flycatcher drew our eyes toward a line of trees briefly but the real action was amongst the unkempt corner where the thrushes had been seen. Over the next hour we managed to see Scaly and Grey-backed Thrushes, two Rufous-tailed Robins and a very showy Siberian Blue Robin feeding in the same small area while above us Oriental Greenfinch and Japanese Tits fed in the trees. After breakfast we headed to the reservoir via a stop at the sandflats. The light wasn't great making the backlit distant gulls hard to identify well but closer in were Little, Intermediate and Great Egrets feeding on the shallows whilst Common and Wood Sandpipers, a small flock of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and many Long-toed Stints fed on the shoreline. Eastern Yellow Wagtails were represented by *taivana* and *macronyx* subspecies and a flock of eight Grey-headed Lapwing were resting before flying over us and up river. In a small reedbed, a single male Chinese Penduline-tit was found feeding on the seed heads alongside a Siberian Stonechat that used the reed perches to hawk from. Deciding to return later in the day once the sun was behind us, we moved the short distance to the reservoir, a private area of ponds and lush vegetation with winding paths and boardwalks. Both Chinese Pond-herons and Black-crowned Night-herons were continually found and a flock of Chinese Penduline-tits fed high in some willows as we traversed the area. Yellow-browed Warblers called constantly and as we scanned the reedbeds Rob D found a male Falcated Duck on the water amongst the pairs of Eastern Spot-billed Ducks, which for some reason spooked and flew up circling the lake before heading off. A call over the radio from Svetlana made us retrace our steps to watch an Asian Brown Flycatcher showing extremely well in a dryer area together with a male Mugimaki Flycatcher. As we returned to the path and continued onwards, Rob D again found a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker which, despite initially eluding some of the group by flying further up the path, eventually showed well to all. Some smaller ponds on the return path had Mandarin Duck, Brown Shrike and a single Striated Heron on them while the resident Swan Goose pair had four chicks but were very wary and quickly moved off behind the islands. A quick stop back at the sandflats added Terek Sandpiper, Bar-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Eurasian Curlew and Purple Heron. After lunch at the hotel and having three Oriental Honey-buzzards and a Eurasian Sparrowhawk flying over while we waited for the bus, we moved to the Dom Shan hotel for the afternoon to bird the grounds there. Birds were elusive to start with various brief views of species flying into trees and hedges without ID but eventually we started to add some more species to the trip list. Three Tristram's Buntings took some time for the whole group to all finally see and a circling raptor was id'd as a Grey-

faced Buzzard before one of a group of three Eye-browed Thrushes showed well in a quiet corner. Whilst waiting for June to arrive with some ice creams at a man-made water feature, we found some more Tristram's Buntings, which showed much better, although a flushed Grey-backed Thrush did less so. Rob D sharp eyes again found a cracking bird, this time in the form of a male Pied Harrier which flew over as we were searching around the various hotel blocks. Singing Pallas's Leaf Warbler and fly over Amur Falcon were the only other birds on the way back to the bus and the rest of the afternoon was spent at the Friendship Hotel with Dusky Warbler, a female White-throated Rock-thrush and an early Grey-streaked Flycatcher all being seen.

**Day 6** Starting the day at the Friendship Hotel again, the first bird we came across was a late Red-throated Thrush, which was a write in on the trip list with most individuals having headed north much earlier in the year. In the same area was an Eye-browed Thrush as well as a cuckoo sp. Post breakfast we headed off to Stony River near the city of Qinhuangdao, a coastal area with a mixture of habitats including a river mouth, reedbeds, trees, banks, pools and sand banks. Our first stop was alongside the Stony River mouth where a single Grey-headed Lapwing was found before our target species was heard calling and spotted on a distant stony island – Grey-tailed Tattler. A couple of *longipennis* Common Terns perched on the barrage as a good flock of Whimbrels fed on the rocks with a large number of Wood Sandpipers before we headed inland along the track where the habitat was made up of pools, banks and reeds. Black-winged Stilt were common and Siberian Stonechats used to tall reeds as lookouts watching the odd Amur Falcon fly over. A small crane ran along the banks of some small pools and revealed itself briefly as a Baillon's but quickly disappeared in the reeds being replaced by a Bluethroat feeding around the stems. A Black Drongo sat in a small tree while a freshly arrived Oriental Reed Warbler briefly showed close by to it before diving into the reedbed that also held newly-arrived Black-browed Reed Warblers. As would be expected, Black-crowned Night-herons frequented the pools and Pallas's Buntings seemed to be common this year with several individuals being spotted although the distantly perched Chestnut-eared Bunting was our first of the trip before David found a Red-flanked Bluetail feeding quietly on one of the banks. Moving onwards to a grove of poplars and scattered pines, the Bill Blake, leading another Birdfinders tour, had flushed a Grey Nightjar so we carefully searched through to no avail initially and only seeing Eastern Crowned Warbler before the nightjar, which could obviously see us, took umbrage with our presence and flushed again allowing for brief views before it was lost to sight. We proceeded to spot good numbers of Dusky and Yellow-browed, Warblers, Pallas's Leaf Warblers and the odd Grey-streaked Flycatcher as we headed through the stunted pines before another two new species fell in quick succession, a nicely perched Hair-crested Drongo and a Dollarbird flapping across the tree tops. As our path wove onwards, a large snipe was flushed which was initially called as likely Swinhoe's and would probably have remained only a possibility had Rob and Virginia not been standing slightly further on and saw where the bird landed. After us all peering intently at the spot and seeing nothing but grass, Allen finally saw a slight difference in the natural pattern of leaves and pinned the snipe down for the group although only various bits of its back, front and head could be seen. With all the cameras trained on the spot, Vaughan carefully approach to try and get it to move into a more alert and visible position but the bird flushed; however the clatter of shutters captured several good shots and perusal of these and post-trip expert analysis revealed it to be a definite Swinhoe's Snipe. The coastal flats gave some great views of Red-necked Stint, a few Greater Sand-plovers, Gull-billed Terns and Grey Plovers before we returned to the bus for lunch. Heading to the Great Wall close to the Lions Head, we had a good few hours to experience the wall and most of us took the opportunity to walk along this impressive structure with various members of the team doing the first, second or even the third high-positioned towers but not without seeing Amur Falcon, Pere David's Laughingthrush, Oriental Turtle-dove, Korean Flycatcher, Siberian Rubythroat and Asian Brown Flycatcher along the way. After negotiating rush hour traffic, the latter part of the afternoon was spent back at the sandflats where we found the Chinese Egret we'd had news of the evening before and as well a distant Relict Gull, found by Rob D, amongst the Black-headed and Black-tailed Gulls, as well as the other species that we'd previously noted here.

**Day 7** The standard pre-breakfast visit to the Friendship Hotel added Chinese Thrush and five Black-naped Orioles to the trip list as well as 20+ Eyebrowed Thrushes amongst the more expected fare of Siberian Rubythroat, Siberian Blue Robin, Brown Shrike, Red-billed Starling, Oriental Reed Warbler, Olive-backed Pipit, Dusky and Radde's Warbler and yesterday's Red-throated Thrush still present. Others in the group also added a flyover Schrenck's Bittern. After breakfast we ventured further afield to Yang He Estuary, a small estuary flanked by fields and trees. As we walked along the path Black-browed Reed Warblers were much in evidence now, a pair of Amur Falcons circled distantly and a Siberian Blue Robin seemed out of place flying out of the reedbeds. Cutting across the fields to chase a distant bunting the group continually flushed Japanese Quails as numerous Brown Shrike and Siberian Stonechats perched on the stems. A group of three Pallas's Buntings showed well and the stands of trees held a number of warblers: Eastern Crowned Warblers, Yellow-browed Warbler and a single Two-barred Warbler, as well as Asian Brown Flycatcher. As we returned to the bus a snipe flushed up and, based on a combination of views was noted as Swinhoe's. Next stop was unfortunately at a site that had fallen foul of the coastal development prevalent in the area and the wooded area that had previously existed was now under the foundations of a new hotel complex. We worked our way across the remaining scrub and pools which, given the advertising signs was soon to suffer the same fate, with little return for our efforts however a stroll along the new coast access road brought us to a lake which held 40+ Sharp tailed Sandpipers, 10+ Red necked Stints, 10 Marsh Sandpipers, five Common Greenshank, Common Redshank and Black-winged Stilt, not a bad haul. A probable Lanceolated Warbler eluded our efforts to surround it and a Chestnut-eared Bunting perched distantly on a small bush. Heading back across the scrub we flushed a few Japanese Quails and another couple of Pallas's Buntings before reaching the bus. Returning to our base hotel for lunch, the intent was to drive back out in the afternoon but after a very slight change in wind and a cooling of the air, it became apparent that a good fall of migrants had occurred in the hotel grounds so we stayed put. Thick-billed Warblers and Brown Shrike were much in evidence and a small patch of waste ground had held Oriental and Black-browed Reed Warblers all feeding actively. A male White-throated Rock-thrush fed in a quiet corner and the tangled corner of the car park held two Rufous-tailed Robins, a Siberian Rubythroat, a Siberian Blue Robin and a Pale-legged Leaf-warbler! A Chinese Grosbeak flew in and perched above the group, which proved fortuitous as it drew our attention to a Grey Nightjar roosting in the open on a high branch that otherwise we may well have walked straight under. Deciding that the Friendship may well have even more birds, we headed there for the remainder of the day but added little else to the day's list with the exception of two members of the group who decided to check out some gen on a Lanceolated Warbler that some Dutch birders had had earlier and were treated to crippling views as the bird skulked and preened in a tiny hedge.

**Day 8** Today we headed south to Laoting for the Happy Island leg of the trip. The pre-breakfast Friendship Hotel sortie only produced a brief Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler amongst the usual fare so after packing the bags in the coach we headed off with the first stop being the estuary at Chi Li Hi. Amongst the expected waders only four Red-necked Stints stood out so we moved onwards adding Eastern *coromandus* Cattle Egret from the bus on the way. We were heading to the estuary at Da Pu He when a large flock of White-winged Terns drew our attention to some paddyfields so we decided to stop and check them out. This proved to be a stroke of luck. The paddies themselves only held Black-winged Stilt, Common Sandpipers, Common Snipe, Little Tern and Whimbrel but as the group split up and returned via different banks, a few found a male Yellow-breasted Bunting, which thankfully stayed around long enough for most of the others to convene and get reasonable views as it fed along a far bank. Finally we moved on to Da Pu He where there were better numbers of waders. Terek Sandpiper, Greater Sand-plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Redshank, *orientalis* Eurasian Curlew, Common Greenshank, Dunlin and Kentish Plover all fed on the sandbanks and we added another Chinese Egret and Relict Gull. A distant cormorant was never going to be more than that, Temminck's being identifiable only with close views. Our final stops of the day were Big and Magic Woods, which would become repeat sites whilst we were on this part of the trip. Big Wood was probably the better of the two throughout and today seemed alive with birds as we worked along

the main track. Asian Brown, Korean, Mugimaki and Grey-streaked Flycatchers hawked from the trackside trees while Yellow-browed, Pale-legged, Pallas's Leaf Warblers and Two-barred Warblers fed in the shrubbery with a backdrop of the Chinese Pond-heron colony calling. Magic Wood by comparison was quiet but as we sat on the bus readying to leave Sean spotted a Black-capped Kingfisher perched up on some distant wires, which was an unexpected bonus.

**Day 9** We started the day pre-breakfast at the Big Wood again before moving onto the mudflats at Laoyujiancun. Apart from the same birds as yesterday, some of the group added Dark-sided Flycatcher for the trip, which not everyone had seen yesterday. Most of the birds on the mudflats were distant but we did manage to find a Great Knot closer in while a Bluethroat flitted along the sea wall. After breakfast we headed across the new causeway to Happy Island picking up a Chinese Egret as we waited at the security checkpoint. We started the day by walking along the coastal path towards the distant mudflats where we could see large numbers of waders and where we hoped to find Asian Dowitcher. However, our first tick was Far Eastern Curlew showing its barred rump and ridiculously long bill, longer even than the *orientalis* race of Eurasian Curlew. Large numbers of summer-plumaged Lesser Sand-plovers were present as well as more familiar Grey Plover and Bar-tailed Godwit, while Little and Gull-billed Terns hawked in the channels. Vaughan found a Saunders's Gull flying and perching along the mudflats showing well and over the next 15 minutes we had three separate individuals in various plumage states. Deciding that the tide was too far out to be looking for dowitchers amongst the vast numbers of Bar-tailed Godwits, we headed inland to the Temple Woods. The woods were actually quite quiet compared to prior year's trips and only held the warblers and flycatchers that we had already seen on the trip. The group split up for an hour or so and when we reconvened at the bridge, Rob D had found a pair of Chestnut Buntings nearby. We spread out and moved carefully through the area, and after flushing several Tristram's Buntings from the undergrowth, were eventually rewarded with a view as one of the Chestnut Buntings perched in a small bush. Deciding that the woods would not produce much else we broke for lunch and after that, knowing that the tide would be closer in, we headed back to our original spot and as soon as we arrived Vaughan found what was possibly a dowitcher roosting with some godwits although the light was not ideal. However for some reason the small flock spooked and flew past us landing closer and in better light to reveal not one but two summer-plumaged Asian Dowitchers. The birds showed well roosting, preening and feeding and allowed for the photographers of the group to approach carefully and get some great shots. Having had our fill, we decided on one more stroll around the interior of the island and the woods where we added a Japanese Grosbeak thanks to Virginia's sharp eyes. On the way back to the hotel we checked out Big Wood again in case of any new drop-ins but were only rewarded with the same species as earlier.

**Day 10** Today we started the day by checking out a new site christened 'Long Lane', which consisted of a long tree-lined track alongside some coastal pools from where we could cut back across into Magic Wood. The trackside bushes and trees had good numbers of warblers with Arctic, Dusky and Thick-billed Warblers as well as Siberian Blue Robin and a flushed Grey Nightjar. As we crossed the various banks and scrubland to reach the wood, we heard an Asian Short-toed Lark singing, which showed very distantly, as well as Eastern Spot-billed Duck flying past. Magic Wood itself was fairly quiet, in fact, the quietness would carry through to Happy Island where we headed after breakfast and where numbers of birds were distinctly on the low side. A female Blue-and-white Flycatcher was a good bird to start with but which disappeared all too quickly, but, for the rest of the day, species and numbers were few and far between and had to be worked hard for although a cast of Asian Brown, Grey-streaked and Dark-sided Flycatchers, Arctic and Thick billed Warblers, Pale-legged and Pallas's Leaf Warbler, Black naped Oriole, a flock of Chestnut-sided White-eyes down to a few metres away and Tristram's Bunting can hardly be described as dull. A sortie along the coast road added another couple of Chinese Egrets that seemed to be much easier this year and Far Eastern Curlew. We spent the latter end of the afternoon back on the mainland at Laoyujiancun contentedly sat watching a very productive area of mudflat where we had great views of Red-necked Stints, Great and Red Knots, Kentish Plover, Dunlin, and Curlew and Terek Sandpipers.

**Day 11** As we were heading back to Beidaihe today, we started pre-breakfast at the more productive Big Wood where we finally added some decent views of a pair of White-cheeked Starlings. The woods held Korean and Asian Brown Flycatcher, the damp ditches had a couple of Siberian Blue Robins and the field was full of Brown Shrikes far out numbering the pair of Siberian Stonechats, and single Zitting Cisticola and Common Cuckoo called. After our final breakfast here, we came back for a more thorough search before we headed back north. A Yellow-billed (Chinese) Grosbeak showed well at the top of a small tree and Thick-billed Warblers were again in evidence while a distant thrush perched through the back of the woods was a possible female Siberian. All three cuckoos – Common, Indian and Oriental – called constantly but none ever perched up while calling to facilitate ID. As we worked our way along a path Vaughan had a Tiger Shrike briefly ahead of us that promptly disappeared but as we neared the end of the cover a bird flew out and disappeared to our left. Assuming this to be our quarry the group headed off in the direction that it seemed to have flown. Thankfully Allen and David had hung back as they caught sight of the bird perched on a small branch consuming a large insect before heading into the woods and perching up further in. The group worked their way in the direction and managed to spot where it was sitting quietly with everyone getting good views through the scopes. Over the next hour we followed the bird as it moved through the understorey. Additional species on the way back to the bus were a small group of Eyebrowed Thrushes, a Grey Nightjar, flyover Eastern Cattle Egret and Rufous-tailed Robin. After the drive back from Happy Island, we checked out the Friendship Hotel for the afternoon. There was little new to report however Allen spotted a cat stalking something in a low hedge which flushed out when the predator pounced and into a small tree. Carefully approaching he found the bird in question and over the next 20 minutes or so the group had full scope and camera views of a Pallas Grasshopper-warbler quietly sat up.

**Day 12** Pre-breakfast birds of note at the Friendship Hotel were Chinese Thrush, Siberian Blue Robin, Tristram's Bunting, Pacific Swift and Black-browed Reed Warbler. Post breakfast we made a return visit to Stone River where we started at the river mouth for Grey-tailed Tattler but despite hearing one we could not see it. Changing habitat to the interior pools made from gravel extraction, a rail or crane flushed out from one reed-filled pond to into another. Given that we could walk around most of them on the raised banks, the group variously positioned themselves to either watch or search and eventually a Brown-cheeked Rail flushed back out and past, dropping down into the next pond and again out of sight in the reedbeds. A pair of Chestnut-eared Buntings showed extremely well on another raised hillock before we clambered up the seawall and scanned the estuary mouth but with little to report. Heading through the scattered pines towards the more productive shore area we variously saw Eyebrowed Thrush, Eurasian Wryneck and Taiga, Korean, Asian Brown and Grey-streaked Flycatchers before we reached the furthest low concrete seawall. The tide was wrong for any decent waders so we decided to just follow it around and back to the bus checking out the fishponds on the way. As we stopped to check out some Kentish Plovers, a couple of members of the group spotted what looked like a red-headed wader flying fast across the muddy area which proceeded to land in a very ungainly forward somersault manner and reveal itself to be a female Yellow-legged Buttonquail! The bird proceeded to walk along the bare bank allowing for good views even though slightly distant. Several members of the group decided to move closer to refind and photograph it when it disappeared into a grassy area but despite Vaughan's advice that these birds prefer to hunker down to escape detection rather than fly, this individual obviously hadn't read the text books and promptly flew over the next bank as they arrived! A couple of Amur Falcons flew overhead with Pacific Swifts hawking to and fro and a flock of 40+ Whimbrels allowed scrutiny but didn't contain anything else. As the bus passed back by the stony river mouth, we casually stopped to look through a small flock of roosting Common Greenshanks only to find, to our complete surprise, a winter-plumaged Asian Dowitcher in amongst them. Our final stop of the day was the sandflats where we spent an enjoyable time scanning through the flocks of gulls, waders and egrets. The gull flock contained a few individuals of both Mongolian and Vega Gulls amongst all the Black-headed and Black-tailed Gulls, neither distinct species but equally good to see. Deciding to check out the nearby



'reserve' area, a small female type flycatcher caught our attention and after watching it for a while the consensus was that it was a female Chinese or, as it is now renamed, Green-backed Flycatcher.

**Day 13** Our last full day at Beidaihe and it did not disappoint with a few more ticks added to the trip and life lists. As usual we started the day pre-breakfast at the Friendship Hotel but there was little to note until we flushed a thrush from one of the more undisturbed areas, which conveniently flew some distance away and sat atop a tall bare tree. Initially we expected it to be another Eyebrowed Thrush given the broad supercilium but once we had it in the scope it became clear it was actually a very late Dusky Thrush, a clean, pure individual at that with no hint of any Naumann's influence. The only other species of note were some low, hawking Pacific Swifts. After breakfast we were allowed access to the Jin Jan field, which is actually a historical archaeological site although all that remains are the low walls and layout of the ancient buildings. Essentially the area is covered in long grass and a few scrubby bushes however the small allotment and area by the entrance were initially quite productive. Crested Mynas continuously flew back and forth above the trees against a back drop of Pacific Swifts and a lone Amur Falcon whilst we had a Blyth's Pipit on the allotment and three Black-faced Buntings feeding in the shade of a small tree. The field proper only managed to provide several Chestnut-eared and Pallas's Buntings that showed very well. Moving on to the reservoir, it was clear that in just a week the species available to us had changed with more of the summer migrants having arrived. We had plenty of time here today so slowly walked the boardwalks toward the largest lake, picking up a small flock of Vinous-throated Parrotbills in the reeds and many singing Arctic Warblers in the tall trees. A small bird feeding actively in the understorey of some shrubs was confusing with brief views until it eventually gave itself up as a male Mugimaki Flycatcher. As we approached the reedbeds on the main lake, our first Yellow Bittern flew out and across before dropping back down. Positioning ourselves along the shore, the technique in seeing them again was basically a wait-and-watch process and over the next half hour we had several individuals fly across giving good but brief views. Rob and Virginia had taken another path and reported back with views of a Schrenck's Bittern so the group relocated further along the shore where at least a couple of individuals of this species gave similar flight views. It was here that, just moments after we'd collectively decided to give it 15 minutes more, Rob D caught sight of three fast moving swifts plunging down to drink and only three of us managed to get on the much-desired White-throated Needletail as they bulleted down for a drink and promptly disappeared without a trace although the white rumps of a flock of Green Sandpipers that flushed from the same area didn't help us stay on them. Scanning down the lake we could only assumed they had manoeuvred so fast that they were no longer visible. The Amur Falcons on the nest provided some great photo opportunities, especially when two males appeared to be courting the same female. Heading further along the path, Rob and Virginia had had a Forest Wagtail but it had disappeared into the vegetation by the time the main group arrived and could not be relocated. Grey and Purple Herons and Black-crowned Night-herons all flapped lazily across the lake at various times together with Little Egret. The remainder of the day was spent at the Friendship Hotel but only the usual species were seen and with an early start looming tomorrow we headed back to the hotel earlier than usual.

**Day 14** A very early start today as we were heading off trip to a newly-discovered site for Ibisbill (the prior reliable one having been turned over to white water rafting), which was somewhat off the planned route. We headed cross country towards the Qinglong River with the landscape gradually changing from flat agriculture to more rugged hilly areas and foothills. As we neared our destination, Rob R spotted a Crested Kingfisher perched up on some telephone wires so we stopped and headed down to a broad river to view. Despite the pile of rubbish we had to negotiate around this site was actually quite productive and as well as Crested Kingfisher and Black-capped Kingfisher in the same 'scope view on the wires, we had calling Oriental Cuckoos, fly by Striated Heron and Chinese Pond-heron, Black-browed Reed Warbler and Little Ringed Plover within minutes. We would have liked to have stayed longer but had to move onwards for our targets as we had a long drive after to Old Peak. Eventually we stopped in a village and cut through the houses to the river bank adding our first Daurian Redstarts as well as great views of a perched female Amur Falcon. A likely Pallas

Grasshopper-warbler was almost seen at point blank range if a large and docile snake in the grass hadn't distracted us and the warbler was no more than a fly out. Arriving at the river itself and heading upstream along its bank, it became apparent that this area was too disturbed for Ibisbills but we did manage to see our only Long-billed Plovers of the trip, a family party of four. The riparian habitat did hold all three kingfishers, White-cheeked Starling, a lone Mandarin Duck and, as it opened out, a cracking Meadow Bunting but no Ibisbill. Somehow, without preplanning, Mr Lee knew where we were going reappear on the road and thankfully our aircon coach was waiting for us as the weather was decidedly hot now. Mr Lee had information on a better, less disturbed site further upstream so we headed there with Black Stork, Chestnut Bunting and Crested Kingfisher being seen from the coach. We weren't 100% sure where we needed to be for the Ibisbill but a stroke of luck came our way as we met a minibus coming the other way containing Chinese photographers so stopped it and June asked for information. The guide kindly instructed us to turn around, waited for us and then made us follow him to a road along the other side of the river whereby he stopped and pointed out a fine male Ibisbill feeding in a tributary. The bird gave great views and when it flew to a stony spit, Allen spotted a female sat on a nest and well camouflaged amongst the boulders. Being such an enigmatic bird and high on most peoples most wanted list, we spent some time here before repaying our short-term guide's favour by having celebratory beers and lunch at his small restaurant. After a request for a group photo opportunity with him and his family, we headed off to Old Peak eventually winding higher and higher along increasingly rougher roads. On arrival at the furthest point that the coach could go, we transferred onto minibuses for the final ascent but not without first birding the area. A Godlewski's Bunting feeding on the grassy verge of the car park with a Meadow Bunting was an easy find, however the strong wind didn't fill us with hope for Manchurian Bush Warbler or Blunt-winged Warbler. Despite this we managed to find a Manchurian Bush Warbler singing from the leeward area of birch, which eventually gave good views from the bush tops,

whilst a distant Grey-faced Buzzard perched on top of a telegraph pole before soaring closer across the valley. Heading back to the minibuses we managed flight views of Blunt-winged Warbler only identifiable by the fact that it had been skulking and singing in the bushes before it flew out. A Silver-throated Tit (split from Long-tailed Tit) was altogether more accommodating though. Boarding the minibuses, we drove to our basic accommodation, checked into our rooms and then reconvened to make use of the latter end of the day. A Yellow-bellied Tit showed well in the pines outside the accommodation block and as soon as Vaughan played the call of Chinese Nuthatch, three individuals flew in with at least one showing to a few feet over our heads! Deciding to walk up to the cable car station before dinner, we found a Claudia's Leaf Warbler feeding and singing above our heads and exhibiting its strange, alternate slow wing-drooping display while Daurian Redstarts and Yellow-bellied Tits vied for our attention. A high-pitched buzzing noise drew Rob D and Allen's attention on the way up but was assumed to be an insect (but more of that shortly) so we headed up to the cable car station. We could hear Oriental Cuckoo calling distantly but for the first time we managed to actually see one calling when Virginia spotted one a long way off sat upon a large rock and through the scope we could see it calling in time with the sound arriving. Heading back down, the buzzing sound again drew Rob and Allen's attention and when they described it to Vaughan it was clear it was a singing Asian Stubtail! With a little bit of help from the tape, the bird flew closer and over the next half an hour everyone managed to get reasonably good views fairly close to the path considering what a skulker the species is. Last bird of the day before dinner was a Willow (Songar) Tit.

**Day 15** The group met early to catch a minibus up to the viewpoint in the early morning sunshine but not without already seeing Godlewski's Bunting and Daurian Redstart around the complex first. The minibus wasn't the best mobile hide for those further back so a couple of sightings of Grey-sided Thrush as we drove up the road to the peak were limited to those in the forward seats. Alighting from the bus, the weather was somewhat breezy but given that our target was the highly-sensitive White-bellied Redstart, a silent approach was the order of the day. Although this was a previous site for the

species, the building of the viewpoint and increased tourist traffic had most likely forced any pairs into the more inaccessible areas of the peak and a Eurasian Hobby was the best we could manage. Moving out of the wind, we started birding the road back down to the accommodation. A Chinese Leaf Warbler sang from the roadside bushes giving us our first tick of the day and offering some great views while in the distance across the valley we actually heard White-bellied Redstart singing but in an area which was out of reach. However, a perched up cuckoo being mobbed by another pair of Chinese Leaf Warblers called frequently and finally we had confirmed views of Indian Cuckoo. Another Yellow-bellied Tit allowed for some cracking close views but views of a Grey-sided Thrush feeding on the verge were altogether more unsatisfactory. Claudia's Leaf Warblers also sung from the woods competing with Chinese Leaf Warbler as we headed towards the car park and the more open hillsides that are the preferred habitat of Yellow-streaked Warbler. Initially we could hear one singing towards the radio mast high up on the hill but just as we started up the path another burst into song closer. Changing direction to the closer slopes, the bird initially gave us the run around, flitting around elusively and changing perches before finally it decided to play ball and gave the group good views as it settled into a couple of bushes close to the bus. We had a few minutes left before we needed to return for breakfast so we started to walk back down the road scanning ahead for Grey-sided Thrushes. Finally, Virginia spotted one feeding further down on the edge of a small passing place and this time the bird allowed for some great views as it fed unconcernedly in the grass, occasionally making a sortie onto the road itself. Eventually as we approached it flew off into the woods but by now we needed to head back for breakfast and the bus returned to pick us up. After breakfast and packing our bags ready for our final journey back to Beijing later today, we returned back up to the peak. The dawn chorus had subsided somewhat but Vaughan heard a Northern Hawk-cuckoo calling somewhere up a small track however despite careful stalking, the bird remained invisible until it flushed and flew off to another perch with only a few of the group getting any kind of view. Somewhat ironically, by turning back to the main path, we missed a Koklass Pheasant that had been hunkered down behind a rock and flew off but seen by only one of the group. We gradually worked our way down the mountain road for the next couple of hours regularly stopping to search. Another Northern Hawk-cuckoo sounded so close yet remained invisible despite a concerted effort to find it, although a female Chestnut Bunting was a little more accommodating. A pair of Green-backed Flycatchers made an appearance although the brightly-coloured male disappeared as quickly as he had appeared leaving only the female on show; another pair further down were equally elusive. Eventually we reached the accommodation where the bags were being loaded into the minibus. Hoping to get another shot at Blunt-winged Warbler, we boarded and headed back to the main car park where Mr Lee waited with our main transport. While the bags were being transferred, we headed to where we'd seen the warbler yesterday and staked it out. A flock of Silver-throated Tits flew through perching on the wires but they were quickly ignored when the Blunt-winged Warbler burst into song! This time though the bird hung around for a little longer and whilst still somewhat skulking, it did eventually climb higher up a small tree and allow some reasonable views amongst the leaves before again flying off out of sight. By now we had to start our journey back to Beijing so, with somewhat heavy feet, we noted our last Godlewski's Bunting and Grey-faced Buzzard before boarding and heading off for our final night in the Exhibition Hotel before flying back early the next morning.

**Allen Worgan**