

# China

## Beidaihe

6–21 May 2009

**Participants:**

Alan and Chris Amery

Peter Carr

Janice Flatt

Ian and Sylvia Kirk

Chris and Helen Padley

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David and Kay Ryves

Brian and Chris Shaw

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**Mugimaki Flycatcher**

**Leaders:** Bill Blake and Vaughan Ashby

**Day 1:** Bill accompanied the group from London on an overnight flight to via Helsinki to Beijing as I (Vaughan) was already in Beijing making the final tour preparations.

**Day 2:** The flight was early and I met the group with June our interpreter, who proved to be our little angel throughout the tour. Boarding the bus, we set off through the hectic Beijing traffic (not much sign of bicycles these days!) to our hotel for a two-night stay.

After freshening up, we took an early lunch and departed for Tianamen Square and the Forbidden City on a hot and sunny afternoon. Our cultural guide (Mr Lucky!) led us across the square and into the Forbidden City giving us all an excellent running commentary. Unfortunately, not everyone was paying full attention, as eyes were often 'to the skies' with flocks of *pekinensis* Common Swifts, a few Red-rumped Swallows, Large-billed Crows on the temple roofs and Azure-winged Magpies in the trees! Walking back to the bus after our cultural experience a nice male Oriental Greenfinch was found singing from a tree.

Our next stop was at Yuanyantan Park where we were able to relax away from the hustle and bustle of the city. There was no real evidence of migration but over the course of a couple of hours we found several very nice birds amongst the ubiquitous Eurasian Tree Sparrows. Spotted Doves strolled around the lawns and Eurasian Hoopoes fed, oblivious to our presence. Great Spotted Woodpeckers outnumbered Grey-headed Woodpeckers and were far easier to see! Several White-cheeked Starlings were seen together with Crested Mynas and Chinese Bulbuls but the real surprise was a hybrid Dusky x Naumann's Thrush. A bit of a disappointment for some! Our first Daurian Redstart, Taiga Flycatchers and Little Bunting of the tour were seen before we headed back to the hotel for a well-deserved rest.

**Day 3:** An early start because we wanted to escape from the city before the rush hour traffic built up. It was around a two-hour drive north of the city to a beautiful river valley that we were heading and after leaving the built up area we managed good time on the motorway until we got into the hills. Progress was then slow because of road building, but we were able to admire our first views of part of the Great Wall. A brief comfort stop yielded Little Bunting before we dropped down into the river valley. It didn't take us long to find our main target species here with superb views of a pair of the much-wanted Ibisbill. Next on the list was Crested Kingfisher and again, that was found very quickly and three different birds were admired by all. The third specialty bird, Long-billed Plover, didn't take much longer to find so we had plenty of time on our hands to further explore the area. The only Black Stork of the tour circled over the river whilst a pair of real wild Mandarin Ducks sat on rocks in the middle. A single Marsh Sandpiper was picked out midstream whilst wagtails were represented by both eastern and western forms of Yellow Wagtail together with Grey and *ocularis* form of White Wagtail. Another Daurian Redstart was found together with our first Siberian Stonechats of the tour. Three Vinous-throated Parrotbills put on a good show in some brushwood together with three Brown Shrikes and a Black Drongo. We recorded our only Russet Sparrow of the tour (a nice male) together with small numbers of migrant buntings including Godlewski's, Meadow and Yellow-throated and a single Olive-backed Pipit.

After an early relaxed picnic lunch, we headed back to the city and this time to Kunming Lake in the Summer Palace. Again, there was little evidence of migration but we did see Black-crowned Night-herons, Chinese Pond-herons, Grey Heron and Great Egret together with Common and Green Sandpipers. After an excellent first full day we headed back to the hotel to wash, change, make our choice of food and do the bird log.

**Day 4:** Up early again to beat the traffic and we were soon heading east towards Beidaihe. The journey time is now dramatically reduced as it is motorway all the way and even after making a comfort stop, we arrived late morning. En-route we recorded our first Amur Falcons. After checking into our comfortable rooms complete with TV and internet connection, we headed down to Lighthouse Point for our first introduction to this mythical place. It is in fact a very small area to work and we were soon adding new birds with Oriental Turtle-dove and Red-billed Blue Magpie seen even before we left the hotel grounds. Both Rufous-breasted and Grey-capped Woodpeckers were quickly seen, as were our first Dusky and Yellow-browed Warblers. Returning for lunch, we stopped off at the Jin Shan Field where in a relatively short time we added Richard's Pipit, Black-faced, Chestnut-eared and Yellow-breasted Buntings. The great thing about our hotel in Beidaihe is that several of the waitresses speak English and they are very willing to cater for all food tastes.

After lunch we headed the short distance to an area known as the sandflats. The tides here are totally unpredictable and as was the case in most of our subsequent visits, it was well out when we arrived. Nevertheless, we set about scanning the shoreline firstly paying attention to the gulls where amongst the relatively abundant immature Black-tailed Gulls we found a few Mongolian and Vega Gulls and best of all, a superb adult Common Gull of the *heini* race, also known as Short-billed Gull. Both Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns were seen together with a party of five Common Shelducks before we paid our attention to the waders. Little Ringed Plovers were on the dryer areas at the head of the beach whilst Black-winged Stilts were in the channels. Two each of Kentish Plovers and Greater Sandpipers were found but the best bird of all was a Great Knot on the tideline. Other waders included Whimbrel, a single Eurasian Curlew, ten Common Greenshank and a couple of Common Sandpipers. At the end of another good day we headed back to our hotel for an excellent dinner and the bird log.

**Day 5:** It is customary to go out for a pre-breakfast walk on this tour and with Lighthouse Point being only ten minutes away and the Jin Shan Field less than five minutes, participants didn't need much encouragement! On arrival at Lighthouse Point a thrush could be heard singing and it didn't take us long to all be enjoying good views of the uncommon Chinese Song Thrush. The wood was full of warblers this morning and in amongst the numerous Yellow-browed Warblers were good numbers of Pallas's Warblers and a single Eastern Crowned Warbler. Dusky Warblers were also in good numbers 'tacking' everywhere and we recorded our first Asian

Brown Flycatchers of the tour. Good numbers of Chestnut-flanked White-eyes were also on the move. Part of Lighthouse Point is a military (naval submarine) base and one of the guards was taking a keen interest in us and started shouting 'no parking, no parking'! We knew what he meant but our laughing didn't help the situation! Fortunately, other groups had the same problem and Jean Wang spoke to the town mayor who in turn spoke to the commanding officer so we had no problems on future visits.

After breakfast, we headed to the Lotus Hills. Walking up the path it was very quiet with just the occasional Yellow-browed Warbler. At the viewpoint at the top we settled down for some raptor watching but we were the centre of attention for the locals who all wanted to be photographed with us! As it happened, the interruptions didn't matter, as there was very little going through with just regular sightings of several Eurasian Hobby, a nice Oriental Honey-buzzard and Eastern Marsh-harrier. We could hear Common Pheasants calling all the time and eventually most people managed to see one. A Large Hawk-cuckoo called but remained unseen but a pair of Willow Tits showed nicely. Eventually we got down to a small derelict zoo and it was here that we found four laughingthrushes. It took a while to get good enough views to identify them but eventually we established that they were Lesser-necklaced Laughingthrushes. They are certainly out of range here and with a small zoo formerly here there must be the possibility that they are escaped but that's up to the individuals' consciences! On the last leg down to the exit four Common Rosefinches were found together with a couple of Little Buntings. After lunch we headed to the reservoir, a site famous for a number of rarities in past years. Access is now a major problem as it is totally fenced off (for no apparent reason) but eventually we managed to get in. Our first Common Moorhens of the tour were seen but unfortunately, there was no sign of any crakes, rails or bitterns. It was a very enjoyable walk however, and we added Wood Sandpiper and Common Snipe in the adjacent fields together with Spot-billed Duck and a couple of flyover Purple Herons. As we left the reservoir we met another group who had just seen a Chinese Egret and we enjoyed good views of this rare bird on the sandflats. Whilst scanning, we also added several new species of waders including Grey Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Terek Sandpiper, Dunlin and a single Black-tailed Godwit, whilst a small flock of Pacific Golden-plovers flew over. Heading over to the marshy area we searched unsuccessfully for Pallas's Bunting but were rewarded with nice views of Chinese Penduline-tit, four Black-faced and a single Chestnut-eared Bunting at the end of a good day.

**Day 6:** Our pre-breakfast walk was again to Lighthouse Point where virtually the first bird we saw was a singing male Japanese Grosbeak at the top of a tree, superb! The usual Yellow-browed Warblers were in the wood but another excellent find was our first Mugimaki Flycatcher, two excellent birds before breakfast! After breakfast, we headed south to the Yang He Estuary. Stopping on the main bridge across the estuary we carefully scanned the area and were rewarded with our only Grey-tailed tattler of the tour. Moving closer, we all enjoyed excellent views of this difficult wader before heading on to a nearby wood. Walking slowly around the wood it first appeared to be rather quiet but soon we were enjoying a cracking Dusky Thrush. Just reward for the hybrid Dusky/Naumann's Thrush seen on the first day of the tour! Next a flycatcher was found and leading us for a brief chase was identified as our first Grey-streaked Flycatcher of the tour. By now it was evident that there were quite a few leaf-warblers moving around and by scrutinizing them carefully we picked out our first Blyth's Leaf-warbler (Claudia's) and Chinese Leaf-warbler of the tour amongst the Yellow-browed Warblers. Several more Eastern Crowned Warblers were seen as well as further Mugimaki Flycatchers. Black-naped Oriole turned from a heard-only yesterday to seen well today and six Olive-backed Pipit crept around the leaf litter. Finally, a flock of buntings comprised seven Black-faced and around 20 Little Buntings before we headed back to lunch in high spirits.

During lunch, we heard reports of good birds at the Friendship Hotel so of course this was our first port of call in the afternoon! We were not disappointed as shortly after arrival we saw our first White-throated Rock-thrush of the tour, and a superb male at that. Next on our list was Siberian Thrush but those searching for it hadn't seen it for a while. Moving further into the grounds, we went to look for a roosting Oriental Scops-owl. Despite looking in the correct tree it must have taken us 15 minutes to eventually pick it out hidden in the upper branches, absolutely amazing camouflage! Just a few meters away, another Siberian Thrush had been report so

from a distance we patiently and quietly waiting and watched. Sure enough, after about ten minutes thrushes started dropping to the ground. First Eye-browed Thrush then a Chinese Song Thrush. Eventually there were four Eye-browed thrushes before and prayers were finally answered, the holy grail of birds, a male Siberian Thrush, dropped to the ground. Fortunately, the gasps of excitement and appreciation didn't frighten the bird off! We spent a little while checking other spots in the hotel grounds and were rewarded with our first Radde's Warbler of the tour before deciding to head for the sandflats again. It was actually quite cold and windy at the sandflats so checking through the waders was somewhat difficult. A lone Ruddy Shelduck was a nice find before someone spotted a falcon sat on the sand quite a distance away. There was some debate as to what it was as it was hunched down against the wind but eventually it decided to take flight and turned out to be an Amur Falcon. As we had only had brief views on our way to Beidaihe from Beijing, these were our first good views further enhanced when a second bird flew in. Heading back to the hotel we stopped briefly at the Jin Shan Field and were rewarded for our effort with good views of our first Fork-tailed Swifts of the tour, a fine end to a superb day.

**Day 7:** Today was a day of mixed fortunes. Our early morning walk to Lighthouse Point started pretty well with three Yellow-billed Grosbeaks flying over. Yellow-browed Warblers were present in good numbers together with a couple of Pallas's Leaf-warblers, several Radde's Warblers, a single Dusky Warbler and our only Striated Herons of the tour. A mystery bush-warbler refused to show well to all although several people did get good enough views to clinch it as a Manchurian Bush-warbler. After breakfast, we headed north to Jiaoshan Mountain only to find that roadworks were preventing us from getting to the cable car station. No matter, because of the wind we were told that the cable car wouldn't be operating anyway so we resigned ourselves to changing plans. A few words from our driver (who had strategically placed the bus in the middle of the road to stop traffic so he could ask about an alternative route!) and we were winding our way along impossibly small tracks and through villages which had never seen a bus trying to get through it before! We arrive at the base station and were planning to just walk around when miraculously we were told that the cable car would be operating after all! Hurriedly, we grabbed our things and got the cable car to the top with one lucky member of the group seeing a Pere David's Laughingthrush from the chair. Assembling at the top station, we slowly walked up towards the summit seeing very little. It wasn't through lack of effort but everything was strangely quiet. Playing recordings of the laughingthrush and White-browed Chinese Warbler didn't lead to any response and the only 'highlight' was a couple of Long-tailed Tits and Godlewski's Buntings. We reached the highest viewpoint, admired the scenery, enjoyed nice views of a Grey-faced Buzzard and were about to walk down again when a Pere David's Laughingthrush briefly flashed across the path. Over the course of the next half hour everyone eventually saw the bird but boy was it hard work! Dropping back down the hill we had one last try for White-browed Chinese Warbler but again, no response. Admiring parts of the Great Wall as we descended we tried again in the gardens at the bottom but a Radde's Warbler was our only reward.

Boarding the bus, we headed into town for a quick look at the Great Wall where it reaches the sea before enjoying an excellent buffet lunch. After lunch we returned to Beidaihe and decided to stop at the sandflats again. The usual birds were present when one sharp-eyed member of the group spotted a Black-capped Kingfisher, which eventually showed to all. Turning round to return to the bus a strange bird appeared in the bushes. Knowing what it could be, and having the recording ready from this morning's efforts, a quick play elicited an immediate response and there we were watching a beautifully-marked White-browed Chinese Warbler in totally atypical habitat! We walked back to the bus on a high, taking our time to look for other birds but finding nothing to match what we had just seen. The Black-capped Kingfisher showed again and just as we were about to board the bus we refound the (or a second bird) White-browed Chinese Warbler. With an excellent end to the birding day we were shocked to arrive back at the hotel to find a number of police cars and be told that another of the birding groups had been quarantined. Unfortunately, some of them had been on a flight from the US with someone who came down with Swine Flu and that prevented them from going to Happy Island as they were confined to the hotel grounds for five days. We were, of course, very sorry from them but mightily relieved that there were no restrictions on us.

**Day 8:** Our pre-breakfast walk took us to the extensive grounds of a hotel we affectionately christened the Dom Perignon Hotel! A slow walk along the entrance road was relatively uneventful with just the usual common resident and migrant species including several Olive-backed Pipits and good numbers of Brown Shrikes. Just as we were about to turn back however, a nice male Korean Flycatcher was found in tall trees by one of the side entrances. Several of the group then found a male Siberian Thrush whilst an extremely confiding Arctic Warbler put on a great show for everyone. Bluethroat was added to the list and a small flock of Daurian Starlings was seen flying over before heading back to the hotel for breakfast. Immediately after breakfast, we left for the drive north to Old Peak. The journey was uneventful and after transferring from our bus to smaller minibuses for the drive up the mountain, we checked into the hotel for our overnight stay. From the rear of the hotel, we enjoyed excellent views of Daurian Redstarts before lunch whilst some in the group saw a Grey-sided Thrush.

Immediately after lunch, we boarded minibuses again to go to the highest drivable point of the mountain. The view was spectacular from here with the great wall and many of its watch towers visible in the distance, further enhanced by wonderful views of singing male Daurian Redstarts and Godlewski's Buntings. We walked along the road towards the distant pergola with our progress only interrupted by excellent views of our first Yellow-bellied Tits, good number of Blyth's (Claudia's) Leaf-warblers, a single Chinese Leaf-warbler and the electric golf carts transporting people too lazy to walk! A Chinese Nuthatch was then found and despite playing 'cat and mouse' with us for quite some time, most people managed to get good views of it. An interesting feature of this mountain is the presence of rather tame escaped Silver Foxes (a morph of Red Fox). They normally inhabit Arctic Alaska, Canada and Russia but had probably escaped from a fur farm. Our second Grey-faced Buzzard of the tour soared over the ridge before we headed back down to the hotel. A pre-dinner stroll by several of the group resulted in much better views of Chinese Nuthatch as well as brief views of an Oriental Cuckoo and a calling Indian Cuckoo.

**Day 9:** We had arranged an early morning pre-breakfast visit back up the mountain before the crowds arrived and the strategy worked as we were soon enjoying excellent views of Grey-sided Thrushes singing from the tops of trees. Blyth's (Claudia's) and Chinese Leaf-warblers were both in song with several Yellow-bellied Tits. Another Chinese Song Thrush was seen and a couple of Eurasian Sparrowhawks soared over the forested peaks. Daurian Redstarts again sang from the treetops and three species of cuckoo could be heard calling. Two pairs of Yellow-streaked Warblers were found and eventually an Oriental Cuckoo sat on an open bush to be watched. A couple of Eurasian Jays were added to the list but unfortunately, because of disturbance from building work, there was no sign of Koklass Pheasants and because of the late spring, no sign of White-bellied Redstarts. Nevertheless, it was a wonderful (if slightly chilly!) morning crowned by everyone getting good views of a pair of Chinese Nuthatches.

Returning to the hotel for breakfast, we packed our bags and headed back down the mountain. We searched around the entrance station for Manchurian Bush-warbler but could only find a nice singing male Daurian Redstart. Putting plan B into action, we headed up a nearby track and despite the windy conditions were rewarded with not only point-blank views of a singing male Godlewski's Bunting but excellent prolonged views of a singing male Manchurian Bush-warbler for our efforts. Completing our journey down the mountain to our bus, we were soon aboard and heading back to Beidaihe. The afternoon was spent on the sandflats with great success as by scouring the adjacent marshes and woods we added several new birds. Firstly, two Common Snipe and a Pintail Snipe flushed out of the edge of the marsh then we found that ace mouse-like skulker, Lanceolated Warbler. By carefully positioning the group, we were able to make sure that everyone enjoyed superb 'scope views of this much-wanted species. In fact, we found no less than four birds in the area. Dusky Warblers were 'tacking' everywhere and a Japanese Quail flushed whilst we were looking for buntings. There were in fact, buntings aplenty but all of them were Black-faced Buntings. The Black-capped Kingfisher put in another appearance and shortly afterwards, our first Oriental Reed-warbler of the tour was found as we walked back to the bus. Another excellent day.

**Day ten:** Lighthouse Point had plenty of Yellow-browed Warblers and Pallas's Leaf-warblers this morning so it was with eager anticipation that we visited the 'Dom Perignon' Hotel after breakfast. Walking along the roads and paths at first it was relatively quiet although there were good numbers of Black-naped Orioles. On reaching a small orchard we noticed quite a lot of activity. A couple of Olive-backed Pipits, Asian Brown, Grey-streaked and Taiga Flycatchers then a nightjar was found roosting on a small branch virtually in the open. It was a Grey Nightjar and was extremely confiding allowing us not only to 'scope it but to photograph it at close range. Unfortunately, Eurasian Magpies take quite a toll on tired migrants (two dead Scaly Thrushes seen during the tour) so it was actually quite a relief when it finally decided that we were too close and flew up into the pines. Completing a circuit, we found our second Oriental Reed-warbler in some path-side bushes before reaching an area with plenty of cover where a Siberian Blue Robin had been reported. After some time of scanning the area we finally found what we had been looking for, a fabulous male Siberian Blue Robin. It took a while for everyone to see it but it did perform well in the end. Amazingly, a Siberian Rubythroat was also found and it turned out that there had been a small fall of them with a total of four being seen in the hotel grounds. Whilst looking for the Siberian Blue Robin, a pair of (escaped?) Red-billed Leiothrix were found skulking in the bushes whilst in the trees an amazing five species of flycatchers were present including gaudy male Korean and Mugimaki Flycatchers. Keeping up our 'pressure' on the area, a small flock of Eye-browed Thrushes was found and some of the group managed views of a Scaly Thrush and a Rufous-tailed Robin. Warblers included a couple of two Arctic Warblers and a single Eastern Crowned Warbler. Four members of the group found an Asian Stubtail but try as we may, we couldn't coax it into view for all to see. A further report of the White's Thrush being seen again resulted in us finding a second Asian Stubtailed but that proved equally uncooperative! Spreading out again, a Tristram's Bunting showed briefly to some but promptly disappeared. That was the catalyst to head back for lunch after which due to many of us having eyestrain and backache from the morning's endeavours, we decided to head for the sandflats in the afternoon! The Chinese Egret was present again and a couple of White-winged Scoters were watched distantly on the water. Heading around to the marshes and reedbeds, we conducted another search for Pallas's Bunting but had to make due with a fine male Bluethroat. A flock of small waders wheeled around on the shoreline and although quite distant were clearly Red-necked Stints. Two Japanese Quails flushed from the grass together with another Lanceolated Warbler before our first Thick-billed Warbler of the tour was found. It wasn't particularly cooperative but another superb male Siberian Rubythroat was found, a splendid end to the day.

**Day 11:** Our pre-breakfast visit to Lighthouse Point was relatively unproductive so after breakfast we loaded the bus and headed south for our three-night stay in Jingtang to allow us to access Happy Island. Our first stop was on an old bridge overlooking a wide river where Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was new for the tour. Shortly afterwards, we stopped at some roadside pools which seemed to have a lot of waders on them. Unfortunately, most of them were Black-winged Stilts but there was something else in the middle, a splendid summer-plumaged Asiatic Dowitcher. The three Garganeys on the pool were virtually ignored in the excitement, as was our only Northern Lapwing of the tour! Our first Black-browed Reed-warbler of the tour fortunately performed long enough for everyone to divert their attention from the dowitcher for a while! With several target waders still left, this was certainly a good start. Moving on, we drove down the military road alongside the estuary where several Far Eastern Curlews showed well, another target wader safely in the bag. An Asian Short-toed Lark was found in the sand dunes and several Little Terns and a single Pied Avocet were added to the list. Returning to the main road, we carefully scanned all the fields with short/no vegetation. A couple of false stops were made for Eurasian Whimbrels but then one of the group with amazingly sharp eyes spotted a smaller wader amongst a group of distant Eurasian Whimbrels. We stopped and reversed up to watch what is probably the most sought-after wader of this tour, a Little Whimbrel. Unfortunately, it was frightened off by a couple of cyclists but we followed it and walked along the edge of a field for excellent views of this difficult bird.

Eventually reaching Jingtang, we checked into the hotel had lunch then headed towards the legendary Magic Wood. The journey through the back lanes was interesting to say the least. Everything is changing so quickly that you never know what to expect from one year to the next. White-winged Terns were seen on some pools as we drove along. Missing the track to Magic Wood, we ended up at the mudflats by the ferry terminal to Happy

Island. This error however, was very fortuitous as the tide was quite high and had brought in four wonderful Great Knot and several Lesser Sandplovers, all in fine breeding plumage, as well as many Bar-tailed Godwits. Better still, a quick scan through the gulls produced a second year Relict Gull, wow! We returned to Magic Wood and enjoyed the fine spectacle of a mixed breeding colony of Black-crowned Night-herons, Cattle Egrets, Chinese Pond-herons and Little Egrets. Better still, two more Siberian Rubythroats were found on the edge of the wood as well as another Lanceolated Warbler and two Black Drongos. White-cheeked Starlings were also quite common in the wood. As it was getting dusk now we headed back to the hotel for dinner and to sort ourselves out for the morning.

**Day 12:** The boat was at 08.00 so we decided not to risk stopping at Magic Wood and missing it! The drive was extremely interesting as we were obviously going counter-flow to rush hour traffic on a track barely wide enough for our bus let alone cars, lorries and numerous motorbikes! We were a little worried about the wind and the tide when we arrived at the jetty but all turned out well and we soon arrived on the island. We traveled by electric carts from the jetty to the temple where we had a quick look around the wood. It seemed rather quiet however, so following up a lead on a Mongolian Lark we headed to the southernmost tip of the island. Despite a great deal of work however, all we got for our efforts were a couple of Little Buntings in the near gale force winds and brief views of a male Siberian Blue Robin. A Red-billed Starling which had been present on the island for several days gave us several fly pasts before a message then came across about an Oriental Stork seen flying over Magic Wood heading our way. We scanned the skies but could only find Eastern Marsh-harrier. A nice male Blue Rock-thrush of the eastern red-bellied form was seen by some as we headed along the seawall and as we started heading back towards Temple Wood we found another new bird in the form of a nice Blyth's Pipit. It was by now time for the buffet lunch in the brand new excellent restaurant.

After lunch we followed up a lead for Ochre-rumped Buntings but only succeeded in finding Black-faced Buntings whilst a few managed three Chestnut Buntings. Next, we headed back to Temple Wood, but it was still relatively quiet. A small flock of Yellow-breasted Buntings was found and we were shown a couple of Japanese Grosbeaks by another group. Our first Pale-legged Leaf-warbler of the tour together with an Arctic Warbler, good numbers of Yellow-browed warblers and singles of Pallas's Leaf-warbler and Dusky Warbler rewarded our efforts. Another Tristram's Bunting proved elusive and several in the group found a couple of Yellow-browed Buntings. It had proved a relatively frustrating day on the island due to a combination of the weather and lack of migrants but we had another day to look forward to. Heading back to the jetty early, we had some time to spare so we scanned the mudflats and were delighted to see a couple of Saunders's Gull on the far side. Far Eastern Curlews were also present in good numbers. Boarding our boat, we headed slowly along the channel back to the mainland on a rising tide and as we scanned the waders, we were pleased to see three Asiatic Dowitchers on a mudbank. Arriving back on the mainland we headed straight to the reservoirs. Walking across bare ground towards the reservoir wall, we found Asian Short-toed Larks displaying, but we didn't dwell long as we were determined to check what waders were present. As we peered through the wall, we were delighted to find four Long-toed Stints close in, accompanied by Red-necked Stints for comparison. A single Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, ten Curlew Sandpipers and a pair of Greater Sandplovers made up an excellent supporting cast. A nice male Citrine Wagtail close to the reservoir wall was our first of the tour. Pleased with our efforts, we returned to the hotel for dinner and the log.

**Day 13:** We made a brief stop at Magic Wood en-route to the ferry and were pleased to find a Grey Nightjar. Arriving at the ferry terminal, we boarded the boat and headed towards Happy Island hoping that the overnight conditions had been favourable. We were still in suspense as we boarded the electric carts but as soon as we arrived at Temple Wood we knew that there was far more about than yesterday. In fact, the whole day was quite a blur as we moved from bird to bird and location to location within the wood. Yellow-browed and Radde's Warblers, and Pallas's Leaf-warblers were literally everywhere, with lesser numbers of other warblers including Arctic, Dusky and Eastern Crowned Warblers, and Blyth's and Pale-legged Leaf-warblers. Six species of flycatchers were present including a stunning male Blue-and-white Flycatcher. A few thrushes had arrived overnight with three Siberian Thrushes, two White-throated Rock-thrushes and a single Eye-browed

Thrush. The best thrush however, was a male Grey-backed Thrush although it took a little patience to see it with the reward being a Rufous-tailed Robin almost alongside it! An Oriental Scops-owl was flushed and proceeded to sit in the open for photographers to enjoy the moment, whilst up to a further three Grey Nightjars were seen. Chats were represented by an incredible double figure count of Siberian Blue Robins (pick your own!) with smaller numbers of Siberian Rubythroats and Bluethroats. Buntings also put on a good show with Tristram's Bunting finally showing well to everyone as well as a couple of nice Yellow-throated Buntings, single Yellow-browed and Little Buntings and two Yellow-breasted Buntings made up the supporting cast. Cuckoos called throughout the wood but mostly refused to show themselves properly but a sad sight was a couple of dead accipiters, which we understand had been thrown out of nets by birdcatchers. Fortunately, a live Japanese Sparrowhawk was added to the group list and some Danish birders did find a net, which they dutifully destroyed. The day absolutely flew by such was the excitement and even the brief break for lunch at the restaurant was hastened by summoning electric carts to take us there so as not to waste time! Most birds were seen by everyone although the Forest Wagtail seen by a few eluded the rest of us. With some reluctance we left the wood and headed back to the jetty where we allowed the cleaning staff to join us on our boat to get back to the mainland. We had problems with the tides and it took us a long time but nobody really minded after the day we had enjoyed.

Back on the mainland, we revisited both Magic Wood and the Reservoir with similar results to yesterday. At Magic Wood the highlight was up to three Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers and singles of Lanceolated and Thick-billed Warblers and Oriental Reed-warbler whilst at the Reservoir, more Asian Short-toed Larks were seen and all the waders were still present with greater numbers of Red-necked Stints and Greater and Lesser Sandplovers stood side by side for a nice comparison. A day to celebrate!

**Day 14:** Although there wasn't time to return to Happy Island, we did revisit Magic Wood and the Reservoir. The most noticeable feature of the wood this morning was the number of Thick-billed Warblers present so that everyone could finally enjoy good views. A single Siberian Blue Robin was probably a leftover from yesterday's fall. There was a noticeable fall off of *Phylloscopus* warblers but an increase in *Acrocephalus* warblers, with Black-browed Reed-warbler numbers increasing. A single Eurasian Wryneck was a nice find as the previous bird had only been seen by a leader. At the Reservoir, Asian Short-toed Lark numbers had increased to six whilst most of the waders from two days ago were still present, with both Greater and Lesser Sandplovers side by side, Red-necked Stint numbers up to an impressive 50, good numbers of Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and the four Long-toed Stints still present. Whilst checking the waders a pratincole was heard and as we turned our heads to the skies an Oriental Pratincole flew over, albeit distantly. It was time to return to Beidaihe and we took the short motorway route back arriving in good time for lunch to be greeted with the grounds awash in Dusky Warblers and Black-browed Reed-warblers!

After lunch, we made a tour of the grounds but a calling Lesser Cuckoo refused to show itself. Driving to the sandflats, we scanned the waders with just a couple of Far Eastern Curlews being noteworthy. The gulls were pretty much as before but a nice addition to list was three Caspian Terns. Turning our attention to the marshes and reedbeds we continued our search for Pallas's Bunting but were astounded to find a beautiful male Ochre-rumped Bunting instead, a much nicer bird! So we headed back to our hotel to change and go out for a celebration meal for June's birthday at a local restaurant. Singing Happy Birthday and cutting a birthday cake was a rather surreal experience in a real Chinese Restaurant!

**Day 15:** Our last morning in Beidaihe and a pre-breakfast walk to Lighthouse Point was quite productive. A Black-winged Cuckoo-shrike was seen briefly at the top of the trees and a flock of Ashy Minivets flew north. On the sea, four White-winged Scoters also headed north. Our target bird however, was a Spotted Bush-warbler, which had taken up residence in the scrub in the naval base. To say that it was elusive is an understatement and only some of the group managed brief views. After breakfast, we decided to return to the 'Dom Perignon' Hotel as we had been banned from the Friendship Hotel grounds as they thought that it was us who had Swine Flu! We slowly walked around the hotel grounds gradually accumulating a list of many of the

birds we had seen before. We saw our last Siberian Rubythroat and Siberian Blue Robin of the tour and a superb Oriental Honey-buzzard drifted overhead but the highlight was two Narcissus Flycatchers of the *elisae* race. The taxonomy of the species is rather confused but the mainland China race (the other races breed on offshore islands from Sakhalin south right through Japan) also known as Chinese or Green-backed Flycatcher, is surely a good candidate for splitting. We returned to the hotel for our last lunch, packed up and were on the road early afternoon for the return journey to Beijing. Nothing eventful happened en-route and we were able to check into our Beijing hotel in time to wash and change for dinner and do our last log of the tour.

**Day 16:** With the flight at a sensible time, we didn't have to get up too early, leaving after breakfast. We arrived at the airport in plenty of time to find however, that our flight was going to be delayed by around four hours and that we were going to miss the connection in Helsinki. This meant that Finnair would have to put us up for the night in Helsinki, the cost of which prompted them to transfer us to the British Airways direct flight back to London! Our re-arranged flight went smoothly and we arrived by in London at the end of the tour earlier than scheduled.