

China 365 – Shi Jin



The challenge is for me to photograph 365 bird species during 2010. For shots to be included, they must pass the entirely subjective litmus test of being "not that bad".

Easier said than done I'm sure (as you can see from Day 1's collection, I'm already struggling to meet my own low standards)

I spent the first day of the year on top of Emei Shan in Sichuan province....

Friday 1st January; Emei Shan, Sichuan

It had been a difficult climb, but well worth it.

I had set off on the early morning of the 30th. It took me an entire day to get to Hongchun Monastery, where I spent a ridiculously cold, damp night.

The following day, the climb grew steeper and the weather colder. It was snowing heavily, and visibility was down to fewer than 50 yards. The thick ice had made the path treacherous.

Thankfully, a man in a small hut at about 2,000 metres above sea level was selling metal cleats (as well as Dove chocolate).

He tied the contraptions to my boots (my hands were far too cold to do this), and miraculously the metal spikes were able to grip the ice and I was able to trudge onwards and upwards, arriving at a small hostel near to the Greeting Gate just as the light was fading. My clothes were soaked with sweat, and there was nowhere to dry them. The food in the small restaurant next to where I was staying was appalling and the beer was far too cold to drink.

I got in to the damp bed and looked at my watch. It was 11pm: the last hour, of the last day of the last year of the decade. I fell asleep shivering, but nevertheless despite the hardship, I was happy to have got this far in two days – 50km from where I had started and 2,000 metres higher. Only another 10km and 500 vertical metres to go.

I had to wake up the receptionist to check out. I was keen to continue my walk up the mountain before sunrise. Not that I had seen any sun during the previous three days.

Then something incredible happened.

I had been walking for an hour and could sense that the sky was brightening in the east. I looked in that direction and then I saw them. The first sun rays of the year (decade!) were filtering through the low cloud.

Then, unbelievably, I saw the sun rise above the sea of low clouds. I watched in awe as the orb became brighter and freed itself completely from the clouds that seemed to be doing their best to hold it back. My heart was soaring. What an incredible experience. I looked around for someone to share my joy with, but I was on my own (no one in their right mind would have got up that early and climbed in near-darkness).

Then I realised that it was my Chinese birthday! (Every one in China ages a year on January 1st.) This New Year's Day was even more auspicious as my age has reached a round number. Another reason to celebrate.

Enthused, my pace quickened and within the hour I had reached the summit. The *jinding* [golden summit] was indeed bathed in an ethereal golden light. The views from here had to be seen to be believed.

Then they started arriving.

First a few, then a few dozen, then hundreds, then a continuous stream of people

climbing the steps to join me at the top of the mountain. The day trippers had arrived!

They hollowed, they whooped; they threw snow balls; they punched the air in delight.

Their exuberance was contagious. I found myself grinning madly as one, then two, then three people asked if they could have their photo taken with me.

"Where are you from?" I asked one of my new friends, who was in his mid-twenties.

"From Beijing!" Mr Zhou gushed. "I just had to come to Emei for New Year's Day. It's such a holy place!"

I could sense that Mr Zhou thought that a visit here, to one of if not the holiest mountains in China, was karma-boosting.

"Are you a Buddhist," I asked him half-jokingly.

"Not really," he told me, "But I don't not believe!".

I smiled at his pragmatism, otherwise known as agnosticism I suppose.

I talked some more with Mr Zhou, who simply shook his head when I told him that I had walked all the way up the mountain (taking the longer, south-eastern route).

"No one climbs all the way up," he laughed. "Didn't you know you could take a bus most of the way!?"

I played along.

"You're telling me I've taken three days to do something I could have done in two hours," I said with as earnest a face as I could muster.

Mr Zhou looked uncomfortable, thinking that he had upset me.

"I'm only joking," I laughed. Of course I knew about the bus, but I thought the walk would be more enjoyable!

"What do you do for a living," I enquired.

"I'm in IT; I'm responsible for my company's computer system".

"And what are you hoping for in 2010," I asked.

Mr Zhou thought for a moment, before telling me:

"I just want to keep moving upwards

I knew exactly what he meant.

- 1 Grey-hooded Fulvetta** (photo) c2
Slaty Bunting 2
- 2 Beavan's Bullfinch** (photo of m & f) 7
Chestnut Thrush 2
Elliot's Laughingthrush few
- 3 Hodgson's Treecreeper** (photo) 1
- 4 Grey-crested Tit (photo)** 5
"Crested" Coal Tit few
- 5 Plain Mountain-Finch** (photo) 1
- 6 Rufous-vented Tit** (photo) few











12th January; Botanical Gardens, Beijing,

"Cold. Very cold. Several degrees below zero. Windchill factor minus a silly number. And I'm talking about today's high, not lows.

But brilliant sunshine from sunrise to sunset. It was the latter that persuaded me to venture out today needless to say. And I'm pleased I did.

There were lots of birds around. In easy-to-spot, hard-to-scare flocks. The desire to find food outweighed the fear of people. For someone with a camera, this is good news. Most of the bird activity was in the young conifers on the track to Wofo temple. Even better news, most of those trees' canopies are between 4 and 6 yards off the ground.

So, it was just a matter of waiting for the bird to sit out, and turn towards the sun with a glint in its eye.

Easier said than done of course. Posing in this part of the world can be dangerous, and every Chinese-born bird has had any propensity to do so stamped out of its gene-line many centuries ago.

Today was a day of firsts:

The first time I've seen any parrotbill feeding on pine cones (let alone a flock of 30). The first time I've seen Chinese Hill Warbler feeding in conifer trees. The first time I've seen any warbler (Chinese Hill) eating snow. And the first time I've seen a spider (or at least something with lots of legs) in winter in Beijing.

Here's the list of species (not many you may think, but in this part of China at this time of year, I'm more than happy)."

.

Brambling c10

Tree Sparrow Lots

7 Yellow-bellied Tit (photo) c15

8 Chinese Nuthatch (photo) sev

Eastern Great Tit few

9 Vinous-throated Parrotbill (photo) c30

Marsh Tit 1

10 Great Spotted Woodpecker (photo) few

Grey-headed Woodpecker 1

11 Long-tailed Tit (photo) c15

12 Chinese Hill Warbler (photo) 3

(1 near Wofo; 2 in Cherry Valley)

13 Azure-winged Magpie (photo) c30
Magpie c10











20th January 2010, Beijing Botanical Gardens

Today was the first day this week that was not too misty to venture out. I toyed with the idea of dashing over to Wild Duck Lake (in the far north-west of Beijing municipality), where there have been amazing numbers of some very special birds recently:

More than 300 Pallas's Sandgrouse, 200 Mongolian Larks, and 300 Pine Buntings have presumably been pushed down from the north-west of China, where there has been a significant amount of snow lately. But with a high of minus three and a windchill factor perhaps 10 degrees colder than that, the thought of Wild Duck Lake was not an enticing one. Decided to stay much closer to home.

The Botanical Gardens held plenty of birds despite the cold. Highlights of the day were three Pere David's Laughingthrushes. As I was crawling on the snowy ground to get closer to one, I heard a "there's one here with a yellow eye-brow."

"Ssshhhh, I'm trying to get a shot of the laugher," I pleaded. It's only when I checked my photos that I found that I had inadvertently also got a shot of the "yellow-browed" bird as it fed on the ground among a flock of Brambling. It was a Siberian Accentor! I hadn't even noticed it at the time (shame, I would have tried for a better shot). Serves me right for ignoring the call.

Other highlights were 2 Chinese Hill Warblers, 4 Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers, 2 Chinese Nuthatches, and a flock of 5 Collared Finchbills. Despite being several hundred kilometres further north than they supposedly should be, the Finchbills seem to be surviving one of the coldest winters in Beijing for many years (if they were introduced here, as some suspect, then their resilience is particularly remarkable).

14 Pere David's Laughingthrush (photo) 2

15 Collared Finchbill (photo) 5

16 Brambling (photo) Two flocks (10+5)

Spotted Dove 1

17 Tree Sparrow (photo) c50

Yellow-bellied Tit c10

Chinese Nuthatch (photo) 2

Eastern Great Tit c30

Marsh Tit 1

Great Spotted Woodpecker few

Grey-headed Woodpecker 1

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker 4

Long-tailed Tit c10

Chinese Hill Warbler (photo) 2

Azure-winged Magpie c50

Magpie c10

18 Red-billed Blue Magpie (photo) 4

Siberian Accentor









Wenyu River, Chaoyang/Shunyi, Beijing

Thursday, 21st January 2010, 9am to 12.45pm

"Coldest winter for 40 years," I had read.

It may be cold, in fact very cold, but at least today was sunny. The blue sky and brilliant sunshine made me think that the pain would be worth enduring, and so I headed out for a five mile walk hoping to find something that would vindicate my decision to go where no one in his right mind had gone before - at least today: The Wenyu river and the fields and trees that skirt it.

When you have low expectations, you are not often disappointed! But, even if it had been a mild winter's day, I don't think I would have enjoyed myself as much.

Today was full of surprises: I saw far more birds than I had thought possible (20 species in all). Not only that, I managed to get okay shots of 8 species that I had not photographed before this year: a wintering Green Sandpiper (hey, do yourself a favour, fly south before it's too late); an eastern race Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta blakistoni*); a Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (3

birds); a Siberian Meadow Bunting (ssp weigoldi); a pair of Mallards (don't mock, they actually look quite good in flight against the snow); Oriental Greenfinch (2 birds), a Marsh Tit (ssp hellmayri?), and even a wren (which stretches my "not bad" photo-acceptance criterion to the limit... but it was 50 yards away, and it's the first time I've photographed that species in China).

There's talk of going to see some Pallas's Sandgrouse at the weekend. Now that would certainly warm me up. Watch this space.

19 Green Sandpiper (photo) 1

20 Water Pipit (photo) 1

21 Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (photo) 3

22 Siberian Meadow Bunting (photo) 2

Long-billed Crow c20

Eastern Buzzard 1

Magpie c30

Azure-winged magpie c30

23 Marsh Tit (photo) 1

24 Mallard (photo) c800

Gadwall 2 (a pair);

Teal c20

Great Spotted Woodpecker 2;

Grey-headed Woodpecker 1

Rufous Turtle Dove 2

Spotted Dove 4

Collared Dove 1

Tree Sparrow c200

25 Oriental Greenfinch (photo) 2

26 Wren (photo) 1











Machang Cun, Jingliang Qiao, Beijing

Saturday, 23rd January 2010, 9.30am to 3.30pm

Strange weather in Beijing today. I heard from a friend who was birding at Wild Duck Lake today that he had to throw in the towel by 11am because it was too windy. Some 30 miles south of there, in the south-west of Beijing, there was no wind whatsoever.

Not only that, it was brilliantly sunny all day and, at long last, a couple of degrees above freezing point. Ideal conditions, but would the Pallas's Sandgrouse and Mongolian Larks - birds that had been pushed here by the hard weather - have sniffed the air and flown north?

We fanned out across the open, rough ground - which a few years ago was the basin of the Yong Ding river (Beijing's only "river", which has been dry for years).

Within 50 minutes we had connected with the first of our targets - a flock of 50 Mongolian Larks flew high overhead, but continued northwards (towards Mongolia?).

Two hours later, there was still no sign of the sandgrouse, although I had seen a Saker (a scarce winter visitor and passage migrant in these parts).

A phone call from a group of Beijing birders, one mile to the north, delivered the hoped-for news. A flock of sandgrouse had been found. Alas, my dash to join them was in vain, because they had flown off "northwards" shortly before I arrived. As luck would have it, they thought better of the idea of a northward move, and the flock of 6 sandgrouse flew back to exactly the same place - literally over my head. The photos show exactly how close they were!

Then the sky was full of larks. A flock of about 600 - mostly Asian Short-toed; but with many "giant" Mongolians among them - whirled and twisted in the clear blue sky. Seeing Mongolian Larks is one thing, but getting any kind of shot of the 100 or so birds around me was far more challenging. The attached photos are the best I could muster.

My favourite shot of the day was saved to last, when a Chinese Grey Shrike decided to pose in the brilliant, low sunlight that was streaming in from behind me. I've photographed this species several times before, but the birds have been too distant, or against the light, or too distant and against the light.

As I was waiting for a taxi, a female Eurasian Sparrowhawk flew low over the road. My policy of always having my camera ready paid dividends as I was able to get my best ever shot of this usually difficult to photograph species. A great end to a wonderful day in Beijing.

- 27 Mongolian Lark** (2 photos) c150
- 28 Asian Short-toed Lark** (photo) c500
- 29 Pallas's Sandgrouse** (3 photos) 6
- Eurasian Skylark c30
- 30 Pallas's Reed Bunting** (photo) c80
- Siberian Meadow Bunting 2
- 31 Little Bunting** (photo) c50
- Large-billed Crow c20
- 32 "Oriental" Crow** (photo) c30
- Daurian Jackdaw c200
- 33 Eurasian Sparrowhawk** (photo) 1
- 34 Upland Buzzard** (2 photos) 2
- 35 Saker** (photo) 2
- Magpie c30
- Azure-winged Magpie c20
- Tree Sparrow c100
- 36 Chinese Grey Shrike** (photo) 1
- 37 Hen Harrier** (2 photos) 1





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Jianfengling, Hainan

Wednesday, 27th January 2010, 7.10am to 6pm

I woke up on Monday thinking that it would be good to fly south to escape the worst winter in Beijing for many a year. And just to prove that China is a land of possibilities as well as of extremes, the following day (yesterday) I arrived in a place 2763km from and 30 degrees warmer than the capital. Sanya, in the far south of the island province of Hainan, is popular with those who love sandy beaches, warm sea, and the night life that goes with those attractions. It's also popular with those who really do like to get away from it all:

From Sanya's airport, it's a mere two hour drive to Jianfengling, one of the best rain forest areas in China, and home to the much sought-after Hainan Peacock-Pheasant as well as an impressive supporting cast of mid-altitude southern China species, many of which are represented by sub-species that are endemic to the island.

This is my fifth visit to Hainan and my second visit to Jianfengling. Last year, I saw some very special birds, but didn't get close to seeing the Peacock-Pheasant. Would I have better luck this year I wondered as the car left the warmth and blue skies of the coastal lowlands and headed up the fog-shrouded mountain.

I arrived at 3pm, with three hours of exploring left in the day. Alas, the thick fog got even thicker and, remarkably, I only managed to actually see two species of birds - Grey Wagtail and the ubiquitous Puff-throated Bulbul.

"It will be fine tomorrow," said an old man I passed on one of the tracks. In these parts perhaps it's a case of "Thick fog at night, sheperd's delight" I mused. Sure enough, the fog had completely gone by first light and I was able to enjoy an excellent day's birding:

The Ratchet-tailed Treepie was an early-morning treat. Interestingly, I saw the same species last year in what could have been exactly the same flock - Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (2) and Lesser Yellownape (1).

This time, though, I was able to get some kind of shot of it as it flitted about in the canopy of a 1500 year-old tree.

Then, at 10am, I heard a rustle in the leaf litter about 30 yards to my right. It wasn't a "rustle, rustle, rustle" (which is usually indicative of a feeding flock of laughingthrushes), but more of a "rustle" (long silence), "rustle" (long silence), "rustle" (long silence).

Then I saw something move. I picked up my binoculars and immediately locked on to the amazing sight of the near-mythical Hainan Peacock-Pheasant.

Just as I was thinking that photography was out of the question, as very little light was reaching the forest floor, the bird started to move towards a small chink of light that had somehow broken through.

I looked through my camera, but couldn't see the bird at all, although I could see that I would be shooting hand-held at 1/20th of a second at a ridiculously high ISO (let's call it the "rain forest setting").

Nevertheless, I gave it a go, before getting back to the serious business of watching the bird (and finding another one in an even thicker tangle of undergrowth nearby).

After checking my camera later, I was amazed that I had actually got any image of the bird. On the basis that *any* shot of a Hainan Peacock-Pheasant can't be *that* bad a shot, I've included it in the day's photo highlights.

- 38 Ratchet-tailed Treepie** (photo), 1
- 39 Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, endemic ssp johni, 2
- 39 Lesser Yellownape** (photo), endemic ssp longipennis, 1
- 40 Hainan Peacock-Pheasant** (photo), endemic species, 2
- Green-billed Malkoha, endemic ssp hainanus, 1
- 41 Sultan Tit** (photo), sev
- 42 Crested Serpent Eagle** (2 photos), endemic ssp rutherfordi, 3
- White-browed Fantail, 1
- Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, endemic ssp rufescentor, c30
- White-bellied Yuhina, 2
- Hainan Leaf Warbler, endemic species, 1
- Grey Wagtail, 1
- White Wagtail, few
- Spot-necked Babbler, endemic ssp swinhoi, sev
- 43 Puff-throated Bulbul** (photo), endemic nominate ssp pallidus, c30
- 44 Mountain Bulbul** (photo), 1
- 45 Scarlet Minivet** (photo), endemic ssp fraterculus, 1
- 46 Black-throated Laughingthrush** (photo), endemic ssp monachus, few
- Little Grebe, 2
- Black Drongo, 1
- Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, endemic ssp nigrostellatus, few



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Jianfengling, Hainan

Thursday, 28th January 2010, 7.15am to 6.15pm

In all my years of birding in various leech-infested areas of China, I had never had a single one attach itself to me. That was until yesterday when I had three of the grubs from hell eat their way through my socks to feast on my blood. And then, despite my best efforts to protect what blood remained, I had two more today back at the feeding trough. (BTW If you get bitten by a leech don't google "leech infection"... there are 1.5 million listings).

At least I saw some quality birds to make up for my blood loss. It's a shame though that the photos I took today don't do justice to what was actually a very enjoyable day's birding. The problem with Jianfengling is also its advantage - the forest is particularly old and dense, with many generations of trees (some as old as 2,000 years) vying to get their canopies into the sunlight. Not that there was much of that today anyhow. Low light and big lenses don't go together - particularly not when, like me, you prefer not to carry a tripod around all day.

So not many okay shots, but at least I managed to get photos of both Lesser and Greater Yellownape, which were in the same small flock of birds that comprised several Sultan Tits, 2 Greater Racket-tailed Drongos and probably the same Ratchet-tailed Treepie as yesterday.

Also on the plus side, the Spot-necked Babbler actually sat out for all of two seconds (there are many at Jianfengling, but they usually remain in the middle of very thick bushes).

The Hainan-endemic Rusty-cheeked Laughingthrush showed itself at last (but only for a few seconds, in a particularly dark section of the forest), while the flock of 20 or so broadbills were in view for about 10 minutes but were infuriatingly difficult to photograph.

Miss of the day was the Dusky Fulvetta, which I had in my viewfinder at three yards distance, but I had neglected to turn the flash on (handheld at 1/2 second just isn't good enough - even for my website ;-)

*Crested Goshawk, 1

*Greater-necklaced Laughingthrush, endemic ssp semitorquatus, 10

47 Spot-necked Babbler (photo), endemic ssp swinhoei, c15

48 *Rufous-capped Babbler (photo), endemic ssp goodsoni, few

49 Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (photo), endemic ssp johni, 4

*Hainan Barbet (Clements = Black-browed Barbet, oorti faber), 2

*Dusky Fulvetta, endemic ssp arguta, sev

Mountain Bulbul, few

50 Hainan Leaf Warbler (2 photos), endemic species, few

Sultan Tit, 8

Lesser Yellownape (photo), endemic ssp longipennis, 1
Ratchet-tailed Treepie (2 photos), 1
51 *Greater Yellownape (2 photos), 1
52 *Asian Palm Swift (photo), c20
Chinese Bulbul, sev
Crested Serpent Eagle, endemic ssp rutherfordi, 2
White-browed Fantail, few
53 *Silver-breasted Broadbill (photo), endemic ssp polionotus, c20
*Red-flanked Bluetail, ssp cyanurus, 1
*Large Woodshrike, ssp hainanus (also Indochina), 1
Grey Wagtail, few
White Wagtail, few
*Rufous-faced Warbler, 1
*Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush, endemic species castanotis, few
Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, endemic ssp rufescens, c30
White-bellied Yuhina, 2
Puff-throated Bulbul, endemic nominate ssp pallidus, c20
Scarlet Minivet, endemic ssp fraterculus, few
Black-throated Laughingthrush, endemic ssp monachus, few
Little Grebe, 2

*Indicates first time seen on this trip















Jianfengling, Hainan

Friday, 29th January 2010, 7.10am to 5.50pm

A brighter day than yesterday, but where to go? I toyed with the idea of spending the morning in an area where Hainan Partridge has been seen in previous years. But the idea of creeping around in the dark forest just wasn't appealing (limited photo-opportunities + numerous leeches).

Decided, instead, to walk the same mountain road as I had walked last year (in February), when I had managed to get some poor shots of a small flock of the Hainan-endemic Whitehead's Magpies (I use White-winged Magpie for *xanthomelana*, which can be found on the mainland).

Whitehead's Magpie was first described by Ogilvie-Grant in 1899. He named it *whiteheadia*, in honour of John Whitehead, the English explorer and naturalist, who had discovered the species.

Alas, after contracting malaria, the 38 year-old Whitehead died on Hainan, near Haikou, the island's capital, in June 1899.

Interestingly, the IBC's verdict is: "Races well differentiated, possibly worthy of separate species". But split or no split, it would be wonderful if Whitehead's contribution to Hainan ornithology were honoured by a name-change (by more than one person). And, if you're in the mood, there's also Whitehead's Silver Pheasant that's endemic to Hainan.

This time, though, no Whitehead's or anyone else's magpies or pheasants, and not much else to be honest during the four-hour walk – other than a view of the head of a Red-headed Trogon, arguably the most impressive of the island's endemic subspecies. Feast and famine birding is most certainly a feature of Jianfengling. But just as you are thinking that the day is disappearing without much to show for it, the place throws out something that, all of a sudden, makes you stop in your tracks...

...On reaching Yulingu, and deciding to walk the circular river-edge walk, a kingfisher flew up and perched on the fence that skirts the track. Blyth's! I screamed to myself, more in hope than anything else. I chose to pick up the camera before the binoculars, which was perhaps not the best idea as I had some difficulty finding the bird in the viewfinder.

I eventually managed to get the bird in the frame and could see that it was a "common" kingfisher. But rather than being disappointed, I was actually quite thrilled to get an okay shot of it (a bird this beautiful doesn't deserve to be called "common").

But hold on a moment, are my eyes deceiving me, or does this bird have a peculiarly long and thin bill? A previously-undescribed Hainan endemic perhaps? Intriguingly, Ernst Hartert in his fascinating paper *The Birds of Hainan*, published in the 1910 *Journal of Zoology* (pp 189-254) remarks that, "All these ["common" Kingfisher] specimens have comparatively long bills". Then again, he went on to say that he found them "equally long in many Indian examples". Oh, well, dream on...

Talking of Hainan endemics (real ones this time), I managed to find another Red-headed Trogon (ssp *hainanus*), which sat out in the open, in good light, long enough for me to get a couple of shots of it.

I have to fly back to Beijing tomorrow, and I will only be able to bird for two hours before I have to leave for the airport. So, let's hope for a bright start in more ways than one.

54 *Grey-chinned Minivet (photos of m&f), 2

55 Hainan Barbet (photo), aka Black-browed Barbet, oorti faber, 8

56 *Fork-tailed Sunbird (photo), nominate endemic subspecies *christinae*, 2

57 Grey-cheeked Fulvetta (photo), endemic ssp *rufescantor*, c50

58 White-bellied Yuhina (photo), c30

*Long-tailed Shrike, ssp schach, 1

Spot-necked Babbler, endemic ssp swinhoi, c10

59 Rufous-capped Babbler (photo), endemic ssp goodsoni, few

White-browed Fantail, few

Mountain Bulbul, few

Hainan Leaf Warbler, endemic species, sev

Scarlet Minivet, endemic ssp fraterculus, 2

60 *White-capped Forktail (photo), 2

Chinese Bulbul, hainanus ssp, 2

Asian Palm Swift, c30

Grey Wagtail, few

White Wagtail, few

Puff-throated Bulbul (photo), endemic nominate ssp pallidus, c30

Scarlet Minivet, endemic ssp fraterculus, few

Little Grebe, 2

61 *Black-naped Monarch (photo), ssp styani (also on mainland)

62 *Common Kingfisher (photo), ssp bengalensis?

63 *Red-headed Trogon (photo), endemic ssp hainanus, 1

.....

*Indicates first time seen on this trip







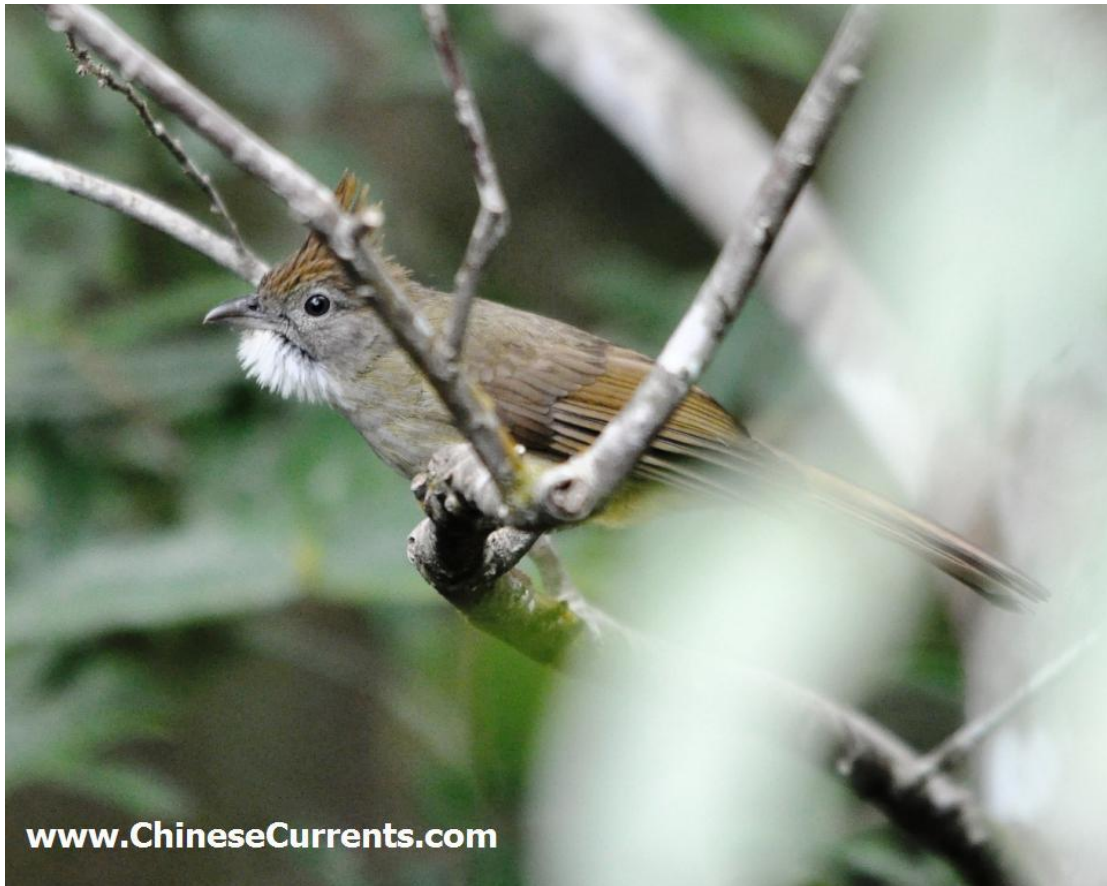








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Jianfengling, Hainan

Saturday, 30th January 2010, 7.10am to 9.30pm

After two hours of constant bird-activity – the best early-morning birding of the trip – I reluctantly got into the car that would drive me to Sanya airport.

Remarkably, within 50 yards of my accommodation, I had found two of the sub-species endemics that had eluded me for three days: Yellow-billed Nuthatch (Hainan is the only place in China this species can be found) and the Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker. In fact, I saw all of the birds listed below (except the last three) within 100 yards of my chalet.

The drive from Jianfengling to the airport is always good for a Black-shouldered Kite or two; and sure enough I was able to spot one flying parallel with the fast expressway. The driver kindly pulled over to the hard-shoulder and I was able to get out to get an okay shot.

I arrived at the airport at 11.30, two hours after leaving Jianfengling. My flight back to Beijing

was not until 1.10pm, so I decided that I could spend half an hour looking for Olive-backed Sunbirds, one of Hainan's specialities (I haven't seen it anywhere else in China). I headed towards the flowering trees, just opposite the air terminal – the same type of tree that I had seen the sunbird feeding on during my last visit to Hainan. Sure enough, as I approached them, I could hear the distinctive call of the o-b sunbird. The shots (one of which captures the bird in mid song-flight) show a male in full breeding plumage (looking far better than the blotchy males I photographed five weeks ago). As I was watching the sunbirds, a Two-barred Greenish Warbler popped into view. A nice end to a very pleasant trip to the wonderful island of Hainan.

Fork-tailed Sunbird, nominate endemic subspecies *christinae*, 2

64 *Chestnut Bulbul (photo), ssp *castanonotus* (same as n. Vietnam), 2

65 *Yellow-billed Nuthatch (photo), endemic ssp *chienfengensis*, 2

*Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (photo), endemic ssp *swinhoei*

Grey-chinned Minivet, 2

Hainan Barbet, aka Black-browed Barbet, *oorti faber*, c15

White-bellied Yuhina, c30

Mountain Bulbul (photo), few

Hainan Leaf Warbler (photo), endemic species, sev

Puff-throated Bulbul, endemic nominate ssp *pallidus*, c30

Scarlet Minivet, endemic ssp *fraterculus*, few

66 *Black-shouldered Kite (photo), ssp *vociferus*, 1

67 *Olive-backed Sunbird (2 photos), ssp *rhizophorae* (s. China), 4 (2m, 2f)

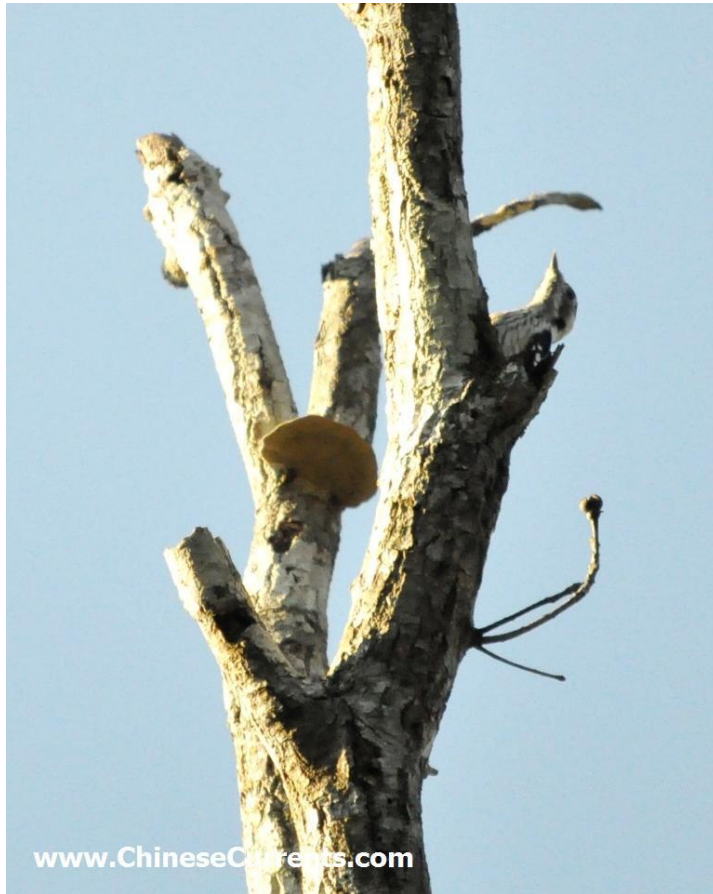




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