

Birding in Western Yunnan



Yunnan belongs to the three Chinese South-west Provinces and borders Tibet and Sichuan (north), Myanmar (west), Laos and Vietnam (south). Therefore it features various habitats, from high alpine meadows and boreal forests near Tibet down to subtropical and tropical in its west and far-south. This trip is focusing on the western part with its rich and diverse avifauna. The route begins in the ancient town Lijiang and follows first south to Dali before we cross the Gaoligong Mountain Range to the west. From here we head towards the border area with Myanmar.

Winters in East Asia are dry and dominated by continental climate due to drifts from Central Asia. The weather in Yunnan is clear and fresh in its northern parts and higher elevations, but is becoming much hotter south- and westwards. Rain and wind is not common but possible, especially as we approach Myanmar.

The birding hotspots are of high diversity but still face human impact such as poaching, trapping, logging, farming or husbandry. However, in many places bird watching and photography has recently become a well developed industry which fosters protection and is rewarded with an abundance of birds.

Lijiang (LJG) has a good number of flights from bigger cities in China. The first target bird of this trip is the globally threatened Biet's Laughingthrush which can still be found here, despite of being subject of severe trapping for the local pet market. Apart from the Laughingthrush we are also looking for other residents such as Yunnan Nuthatch, Crested Finchbill or Black-headed Greenfinch which are fairly common in the huge pine and rhododendron forests of Lijiang.

The next birding destination is **Dali** and its Lake Erhai where we can see Purple Swamp Hen and, with a little bit of *Bird Luck*, we might be able to scope the rare Scaly-sided Merganser. Just beyond the Ancient City of Dali the 4000m high Cang Shan is rising to the west. Along the forested mountain foot we have good chances to see Lady Amherst's Pheasant, Giant Nuthatch and smaller passerines such as Black-browed Tit, Rufous-vented Yuhina, Spectacled, White-browed and Rusty-capped Fulvetta.

From Dali the road turns westward onto and across the **Gaoligong Mountain** Range. This mountain range is the longest and westernmost extension of the Hengduan Mountains. It serves as climatic and biological barrier between the Yunnan Plateau and the lowlands of Myanmar. Its subtropical forest belt along the foothills features a high variety of Old World Babblers including Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler, Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler, Shrike-babblers, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Rusty-fronted and Streak-throated Barwing as



well as a high number of Laughingthrushes. The rare Hume's Pheasant also has been recorded here. A thrilling but difficult attempt would be the search for the Sclater's Monal. It is found only on the windy ridge of this mountain range with most of the time hiding in an extremely dense carpet of low-growing bamboo. Access to this area will be given on the mountain pass to Pianma Town. Other important birding sites on Gaoligong are Baihualing Forest Station and Xiao Hei Shan.

We leave the Gaoligong Range by crossing its southernmost spur (Xiao Hei Shan) where we have one more chance to catch up with some species we possibly could have missed before, and head towards **Tengchong**, an old volcanic area. Here we roam the city park hill for an unexpectedly high number of birds – despite its location in the middle of town. Birds of interest are Black-breasted Thrush, Brown-winged Parrotbill, Scarlet-faced Liocichla, Slender-billed Oriole, and Crimson-breasted Woodpecker.

The way to **Yingjiang** leads through paddy fields and farmland. Many migratory birds find a chance to rest and feed here. Cultural features as well as rising temperatures indicate that we get closer towards Myanmar. Along the river as well as on the surrounding hills of this county town we can find Collared Falconet, Great Slaty Woodpecker, Black-tailed Crake, Collared Myna and many more.

From Yingjiang it is a three hours drive to **Nabang**, a small but busy border town. Here we have access to various sites of the Tongbiguan Nature Reserve and some wetland along the border river. Due to warmer weather there are found many tropical birds and with a bit of '*Bird Luck*' we even might see a Wreathed Hornbill or even better Purple and Green Cochoa. However, main focus will be on both of the Scimitar-babblers (Red-billed and Coral-billed), on White-crested Laughingthrush, White-hooded Babbler Collared Treepie and Black-browed Parrotbill.

Back to Yingjiang we turn south onto a major highway which brings us straight to **Ruili**. There are a few birding spots close to town, however more pristine and well preserved habitat can be found along the border with Myanmar and in the Moli Waterfall Park. In about 2.5 days we have time to look for Red Jungle Fowl, Chinese Francolin, White-browed Piculet, Ward's Trogon, Spot-bellied Eagle Owl, Long-billed Thush, Rufous-headed Parrotbill, Rufous-necked Laughingthrush, Red-faced Liocichla or Yellow-vented Warbler. The closest airport is approx. 2h drive away, near the capital of Dehong Prefecture Mangshi (LUM) from where there are flights to an international airport (Kunming or Chengdu).

Accommodation will be in 3-star hotels where available. However many birding sites are far away from bigger cities and thus might slightly lack comfort. Costs for this trip depend on number of participants and duration. If following the above birding spots the recommended duration will be 18 to 20 days. However, it is also possible to customize the itinerary and adjust it to personal preferences in terms of target birds as well as the degree of accommodation standards.

Below is an incomplete list of which birds occur in which area/site. Note that some of the birds are rare and difficult to find. Therefore this list shall just give an idea of what birds to look after rather than a precise amount of species which will be seen.

<p>Lijiang 1Day+</p> <p>Biet's Laughingthrush Moustached Laughingthrush Brown-winged Parrotbill Yunnan Nuthatch Crested Finchbill Black-headed Greenfinch Chestnut-eared Bunting</p>	<p>Dali 1Day+</p> <p>Purple Swamphen Scaly-sided Merganser Lady Amherst's Pheasant Black-browed Tit Black-streaked Scimitar-babbler White-browed Fulvetta Giant Nuthatch Black-shouldered Kite</p>		
<p>Gaoligong 6days</p> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tbody> <tr> <td> <p>Baihualing</p> <p>Mrs. Humes Pheasant Common Hill Partridge Black Eagle Chinese Thrush Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler Fire-tailed Sunbird Red-tailed, Blue-winged, Assam, Laughingthrush Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler Grey-bellied Wren-Babbler Streak-throated Barwing Black-eared Shrike-Babbler Beautiful Sibia Silver-eared Mesia Rufous-winged Fulvetta</p> </td> <td> <p>Pianma</p> <p>Sclater's Monal Bay Woodpecker Black-faced Warbler Fire-tailed Myzornis Striated Laughingthrush Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler Brown-throated Treecreeper Rusty-fronted Barwing Grey Sibia Gold-naped Finch</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		<p>Baihualing</p> <p>Mrs. Humes Pheasant Common Hill Partridge Black Eagle Chinese Thrush Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler Fire-tailed Sunbird Red-tailed, Blue-winged, Assam, Laughingthrush Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler Grey-bellied Wren-Babbler Streak-throated Barwing Black-eared Shrike-Babbler Beautiful Sibia Silver-eared Mesia Rufous-winged Fulvetta</p>	<p>Pianma</p> <p>Sclater's Monal Bay Woodpecker Black-faced Warbler Fire-tailed Myzornis Striated Laughingthrush Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler Brown-throated Treecreeper Rusty-fronted Barwing Grey Sibia Gold-naped Finch</p>
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<p>Tengchong 1Day+</p> <p>Brown-winged Parrotbill Scarlet-faced Liocichla Crimson-breasted Woodpecker Black-breasted Thrush Slender-billed Oriole Maroon Oriole Large Cuckoo-shrike</p>	<p>Yingjiang 2Day+</p> <p>Great Slaty Woodpecker Collared Falconet Ward's Trogon Green-billed Malkoha Black-tailed Crake Pale-headed Woodpecker Collared Myna Red-wattled Lapwing Grey-headed Lapwing Rufous-bellied Eagle</p>		

Nabang	3days	Ruili	2days+
Emerald Dove		Red Jungle Fowl	
Little Green Bee-Eater		Chinese Francolin	
Blue-bearded Bee-eater		Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl	
Long-tailed Broadbill		White-browed Piculet	
Purple Cochoa		Ward's Trogon	
White-crested Laughingthrush		Silver-breasted Broadbill	
White-hooded Babbler		Black-backed Forktail	
Coral-billed Scimitar-babbler		Little Pied Flycatcher	
Red-billed Scimitar-babbler		Grey-bellied Tesia	
Spot-necked Babbler		Broad-billed Warbler	
Grey-throated Babbler		Yellow-vented Warbler	
Black-browed Parrotbill		Red-faced Liocichla	
		Rufous-necked Laughingthrush	
		Rufous-headed Parrotbill (<i>Paradoxornis bakeri</i>)	
		Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	

