

# China

## Beidaihe

9–24 May 2017

### Participants

Jonathan Bowley

John Garr

Stuart Hodson

David and Janet Kingman

Adrian Lyszkowski

Kim and Janet Matts

Maurice and Lynsey McCann

Christopher Needham

David Ousey

Martin Quinlan

John and Kay Shillitoe

Barbara Thomas

Carole White



**White-bellied Redstart**

### Leaders Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby

In September 2016, whilst I was birding at Spurn, a couple of friends of mine Martin Quinlan and Stuart Hodson casually said, “Bet it would be great to go to China and see a lot of the birds that are really rare in Britain”. Within a couple of weeks a trip was planned and the rest as they say is history. We booked the trip with “Birdfinders”, as none of us had been on a guided tour we didn’t know quite what to expect, what we got was a trip that ran like clockwork. Apart from tips, insurance, visas and some money for a beer in the evening the tour was completely fully inclusive. Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby are the owners of “Birdfinders” and do a brilliant job at planning and actually finding the birds for the entire group to see. We all seemed to have the same field guide, *Birds of East Asia* by Mark Brazil that really was all we needed to use as it is fairly up to date. Birdfinders issued us all with a bird list of the birds we were likely to see well prior to our departure, so a little bit of “swotting” was undertaken (it really did help).

**Day 1** The big day arrived as we boarded an Austrian Airways plane bound for Vienna, as it was cheaper to stop in Europe before carrying on to Beijing. Airport duty in British airports is beyond comprehension. We utilised the few hours stop over by meeting and getting to know our other party members. We all seemed to be of a similar age group (you know what I mean) and came from all parts of England. The 9½ hour journey to Beijing was taken up with watching some films and a bit of reading.

**Day 2** We arrived in Beijing and were all impressed by the sheer size of the airport; it was built in 2008 for the Olympics. We were met by Kevin and June who were our Chinese organiser and interpreter; both did an excellent job throughout the tour. After passing through the great metropolis that Beijing has become we

arrived at the Exhibition Centre Hotel for our one-night stay. Vaughan was there to meet and greet us and he said, "Put your suitcases in your rooms and meet in reception in 20 minutes" These words became quite familiar to us all as not many daylight hours were wasted on anything other than birdwatching! We boarded our bus, expertly driven by Mr Lee all the trip; he must have the patience of a saint that man! We arrived in Tiananmen Square with the sun shining and a temperature of around 30 degrees, after security checks we all stayed together and checked out the world's biggest square. The Great Hall of the People, Chairman Mao's Memorial Hall and Mausoleum were very impressive, but as we entered the Forbidden City I don't think we were all prepared for what was to come. It was very impressive in all the palaces the artwork and various courts was quite stunning. After around an hour's sightseeing we managed to see some birds: Eurasian Magpie, Large-billed Crow, Spotted Dove, Eurasian Tree Sparrows and lots of Common Swift, Barn and Red-rumped Swallows. These species were seen in most low-level areas with the amount of Eurasian Tree Sparrows seen being quite amazing. A short ride to Yuyuantan Park to catch up with more of the "local" birds namely Black-crowned Night-heron, Mandarin Duck (real ones) Mallard, Common Kingfisher, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Light-vented Bulbul, Chinese Blackbird, Pallas's Leaf Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Taiga Flycatcher, Japanese Tit, Azure-winged Magpie, White-cheeked Starling, Crested Myna and Yellow-billed (Chinese) Grosbeak. After our first Chinese meal near the hotel and a beer, followed by the bird log we all retired to bed after a very long day.

**Day 3** Early breakfast and a 5-hour coach ride passing through mainly farming land with next to no birdlife to speak of. We arrived at one of China's best migration hot spots, Beidaihe on the Gulf of Bohai and our base, The Friendship Hotel. It is situated a few hundred metres from the coastline and has plenty of trees and bushes for tired migrants to feed and rest in. That is of course if they can avoid being eaten by the local Eurasian Magpies that sit licking their lips in the various look outs. After putting our cases into our rooms we got back on the bus and headed out to the sand flats. This is a nature reserve that is fenced off to the tideline and that can be viewed from a large bridge next to the main road out of Beidaihe. Various egrets, ducks, wagtails and regularly seen Eurasian Hobby, Common Kestrel and Amur Falcon were nearly always seen on our six visits to the sandflats. The main reason for visiting was the waders that included Little Ringed and Kentish Plovers and Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, Ruff, Pacific Golden-plover, Black-bellied (Grey) Plover, Grey-headed Lapwing, Great Knot, Red-necked Stint, Temminck's Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Curlew and Broad-billed Sandpipers, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew, Spotted Redshank, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper and Ruddy Turnstone. The hoped for Long-toed Stint had been reported from here but was not located by us. Various gull and tern species were also recorded including Saunders Gull, Black-headed Gull, Black-tailed Gull, Common and Vega Gull, Little, Gull-billed, Caspian, Common, Whiskered and White-winged Terns. Along with a few varieties of Eastern Yellow Wagtail and White Wagtails made this area worthy of our six visits. It is not a place with a great amount of tidal movement and some of the birds can be a little distant, but what a place. We went back to The Friendship Hotel and had a good walk around to familiarise ourselves. News of a Dusky Thrush had us heading towards an area that seemed to be particularly good at having good migrants in it. The chained up sleeping dog woke up a few early morning birders also! The Dusky Thrush performed very well as it fed on the ground oblivious of all its admirers, Also seen in the grounds were Eurasian Hoopoe, Grey-headed and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Asian House-martin, recently split Chinese Blackbird, Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warblers, Asian Brown and Taiga Flycatchers, Japanese Tit, Brown Shrike, Red-billed Bluemagpie, Azure-winged and Eurasian Magpies, Red-billed Starling, Large-billed Crow, Crested Myna. The hotel grounds had real promise of finding some of our "wish list" of Siberian Rubythroat, Siberian Thrush, Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler and Lanceolated Warbler. Vaughan had told us that this visit would have *Phylloscopus* warblers in the first week and *Acrocephalus* warblers in the second week, was he right? A good evening Chinese meal, beer and the bird log had most of us in bed by 9.30pm.

**Day 4** Up at 4.30am for a 5.15am birdwatch around the hotel with Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby (this was the norm on every morning) Oriental Turtle-dove, Spotted Dove, Eurasian Collared-dove and Feral / Rock Doves serenaded our early start. It didn't take long for the first "biggy" to be found, Martin Q. had earlier seen Siberian Blue Robin, Olive-backed Pipit, Eyebrowed Thrush and a Rufous-tailed or Swinhoe's Robin,

what a start to the day, to say he was elated would be an understatement. What happened next was that my dream bird, a male Siberian Rubythroat, had been glimpsed not far from the hotel outer wall. None of us ran (like you would in Britain for such a bird) and we all walked to the area and began searching the bushes. After a couple of minutes the bird's bright ruby-coloured throat could be seen through the tangle of bushes. It took a little while longer until the plump robin-like rubythroat emerged and give everyone a good look at it. A bird I have always wanted to see only 30 yards away, what an absolute gem of a bird! A Siberian Blue Robin was later seen in the Jinshan Hotel grounds. Black-browed Reed Warbler was found in a rather unusual area and along with Brown Shrike's, Dusky Warbler, Dark-sided Flycatcher made up a very interesting pre-breakfast birdwatch. On to the coach to visit the area around the Yang River. We soon found various buntings namely, Black-faced, Chestnut-eared, Little and Pallas's (which was a real stunner) all the buntings seemed to be in very good plumage. Black Drongo was also present in this scrubby area. Our next stop was near what looked like a golf course where a stunning Blue-and-white Flycatcher was found. I, foolishly, forgot to wear my hat; I did pay for it during the night that followed! The area also had a couple of pools were Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Bluethroat, Green Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt, Zitting Cisticola, Vinous-throated Parrotbill, but the real star was the finding of a nest of a Chinese Penduline-tit, that called and duly showed quite well for us all. At this point it is fair to mention about the crazy amount of habitat destruction that has gone on since Birdfinders last visited this area, only last year. The Chinese seem to be hell bent on building anything really and the need for gravel etc., means a sad loss of various breeding areas (rant over). After lunch another walk around the Friendship Hotel and another "twitch", news of an Eyebrowed Thrush kindly reached us from Peter Wragg and John Grist of Spurn Point fame, who have been staying at the hotel (we got a fair bit of news from these very experienced birders during our stay) The Eyebrowed Thrush showed really well for us all. Black-naped Oriole's seemed to have arrived in numbers overnight. Then Martin, Stuart and myself were treated to a Radde's Warbler that seemed so tame that it came to within a metre of us all, it had been flushed from a drainage channel that later became "The Radde's Gully". A drive down to the Jinshan Hotel, only around 500 metres away, to check out the grounds. It was the hotel that other Birdfinders trips had stayed at and was currently undergoing a major facelift. We managed to see a Siberian Blue Robin on one of the paths that lead around the hotel. A Yellow-legged Buttonquail was flushed from the overgrown area near to the disused swimming pool. Vaughan had to use his skills to rescue the bird from under a stairway; it then flew past us and disappeared into cover. Korean or Yellow-rumped Flycatcher was also seen near the tennis courts. A walk down to Lighthouse Point to gaze over the sea revealed very little in the way of new birds. A nice evening meal followed by the bird log. I had a rather uncomfortable night's sleep due to over exposure to the sun but, after seeing my first Siberian Rubythroat I didn't really care.

**Day 5** An early start of 5.15am was far from ideal for me after spending most of the night awake, but the show must go on. So, after a slow walk around the hotel grounds with not much difference in birds seen it was time for breakfast. We boarded the coach and stopped at the sand flats with a Red-breasted Merganser being the best bird with three Terek Sandpipers a close second. Next stop was the area known as Stone River. Having read the reports about this area we all expected a little more than we got. It soon became apparent that we were not allowed to cross the causeway into the best birding area; the caretaker was a real jobsworth. More habitat destruction had been carried out as well; we did return on a later visit and had a little more joy. We headed off to visit the Great Wall of China, an area called Hebei Jiaoshan; it was a bit awe inspiring as the wall zig-zagged upwards as far as we could see. We also hoped to catch up with a few bird species. The first one, Pere David's (Plain) Laughingthrush, was first heard by Svetlana. We all got low down to the ground as the birds began to move about, they gave brief views to us all, but then one kept really still and was seen in the open, nice bird with a lovely song. The more intrepid in the group walked right to the top of the wall, we meanwhile, were enjoying Grey-faced Buzzard, Meadow Bunting, Spotted Dove and Beijing Babbler (Chinese Hill Warbler) we all managed to get good views of the babbler, eventually, another really special bird of this area. This part of the Great Wall is very impressive and as such, is a tourist area, so the earlier you visit is best. A return visit to the sand flats, with the hoped for incoming tide, revealed a cracking Eastern Yellow Wagtail (Green headed or *taivana*) Back at the hotel an evening meal, bird log and an early night for me.

**Day 6** A 5.15am start with a walk around the Friendship Hotel grounds with my second Siberian Rubythroat, this time a female. Rufous-tailed Robin, Olive-backed Pipit, Siberian Blue Robin, Yellow-throated or Elegant Bunting made up a nice morning's birdwatch. After breakfast we went down to the Jinshan Hotel where, near the tennis courts an Ashy Minivet and a Grey-chinned Minivet were seen along with Grey-streaked Flycatcher, Mugimaki Flycatcher, Korean Flycatcher, Chestnut-flanked White-eye, White-cheeked Starling, Eyebrowed Thrush and various warblers, Black-browed Reed Warbler, Eastern Crowned, Hume's, Radde's, Dusky, Arctic, Two-barred, Pallas's and Yellow-browed. There must have been an overnight fall of birds we all thought. After a call at the hotel shop for refreshment we made our way back to our hotel for lunch. After lunch we headed off to the Dongshan Hotel, this seems to be a collection of different buildings widely scattered about in well cared for gardens. It is big and we were told to stick together as you could easily get lost, very wise. Firstly Little Bunting was seen, then a real stake out and wait for a Tristram's Bunting, which gave us all the run around, until it gave up and sat in a low bush. Overhead Eurasian Hobby, Oriental Pratincole, Amur Falcon and Pacific Swift kept us entertained during the wait for the bunting. Oriental Greenfinch and then a perched up White-throated Rock-thrush, Marsh and Japanese Tits made up the final bird tally. It had been a real "hotel bashing" day for us all with some really good birds seen. Evening meal, beer and bird log then packing ready for our few days on Happy Island.

**Day 7** An early start with a bit of birding around the hotel and after breakfast we headed off towards Happy Island (Bu Ti Dao) calling at Dapu River firstly. Great Cormorant, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Grey-headed Lapwing, Great Knot, Red-necked Stint and a few Dunlin of the *sakhalina* race, very smart birds! At the Seven Mile Sea the hoped for Chinese or Swinhoe's Egret was soon found by Vaughan with a record count, for him of eight birds. The tide was out and there were plenty of fishing vessels (Junks) in the harbour to admire. The birds to look at where a Far Eastern Curlew being the main find. Saunders's Gull, Intermediate Egret, Herring (Mongolian) Gull and Whiskered Tern made up a good supporting cast. Vaughan had an idea to visit a small raised section in another part of the Wan River estuary. This proved to be a great idea with three Relict Gulls close into the shoreline, Asian Short-toed Lark, Grey, Eastern Yellow, Amur and East Siberian Wagtail's present also. After lunch we went over the short causeway and onto Happy Island. A good count of Pacific Swifts with a total of 30 birds being seen. Bit of a hard place to describe really so I won't waste time by trying to! We checked out the mud flats for Asiatic Dowitcher, without any joy but plenty of waders kept us entertained. Next stop was Big Wood with a nice Mugimaki Flycatcher to start proceedings, in the wood is a large area that the herons and egrets breed in with Chinese Pond-heron, Black-crowned Night-heron, Grey Heron, Little, Cattle and Great Egrets being present, White-throated Rock-thrush, Bank Swallow (Sand Martin), Common Rosefinch and lots of the more "common" warblers made up a fine afternoon's birdwatch on this very unusual island. We then went to our latest hotel the new, Jinshi Shangwu Hotel in Jintanggang near Tangshan City (I think), which was very nice, we went into town, about 5 miles away, to have our evening meal, did the bird log and went back to have a good night's sleep, before what was to be a rather special day.

**Day 8** The day dawned with a trip through a building site, managing to see Chestnut Bunting on the way, to an area that looks a little like Beacon Lane (you all know where that is) we called it, "The Avenue" with watery pools on either side of it. There must have been a "fall" of birds overnight as the bushes/ trees all seemed to be supporting some "avian delights". A Rufous-bellied Woodpecker showed itself very well, then a hide and seek Rufous-tailed Robin was found by Svetlana. A Blue Rock-thrush of the *philippensis* race then the best bird of the early morning walk was an Orange-headed Thrush. This bird was in very good condition and showed well to the admiring crowd. A nice assortment of warblers were also seen with Thick-billed, Pale-legged Leaf, Eastern Crowned, Arctic, Radde's and Dusky. After breakfast we headed off onto Happy Island, arrangements for our visits had been made months in advance as the island is not open to the general public. We checked out the mud flats around the causeway and found Pied Avocet, 10 Far Eastern Curlews, seven Saunders's Gulls, Black tailed Gull and lots of the more "common" stuff. On the ex-golf driving range four Richards Pipits, three Olive-backed Pipits, Common Cuckoo, Asian Short-toed Lark and a pair of Eastern Marsh-harriers. A small pool nearby had Common Tern of the *longipennis* race, Gull-billed and Little Terns also. A few Siberian Stonechat's, Black-faced, Chestnut-eared, Little, Tristram's, Chestnut and a cracking Pallas's Bunting rounded of a splendid morning. Lunch followed and what happened next was rather special. We all boarded an electric car and were driven to an

area called “Temple Wood”, a quiet stroll along a boardwalk with a few warblers and a showy Olive-backed Pipit for company. We reached a small rest area and left our telescopes and tripods in June’s capable care and headed for a small bridge, over what can only be described as a dried-up stream bed surrounded by trees with a small pool and lots of piles of wood. This area was alive with birds as we arrived; a male Siberian Thrush was sat out on a perch in full view, what a cracker (another one of the wish list) along with a female. We all sat down and watched in awe as, 20 Rufous-tailed Robins, 20 Siberian Blue Robins, three Siberian Rubythroats, two Red-flanked Bluetails, over 20 Eyebrowed Thrushes, Pale Thrush, Dusky Thrush, two White-throated Rock-thrushes, two Blue Rock-thrushes, Mugimaki Flycatcher, Eastern Crowned, Pale-Legged Leaf, Arctic, Two-barred, Hume’s, Dusky and Radde’s Warblers had us all spellbound with what we were watching. An hour passed by so quickly that we had to move on from this spectacle with a promise of a return later. One word for that was “wow”. In the scrub area 30 Siberian Stonechats were noted. A nice look over the mud flats finally revealed 35 Asian Dowitchers that had flown in ahead of the incoming tide, really smart birds they were. The later return to “Temple Woods” could never have been the same as before and that proved to be correct with only Tristram’s Bunting and Red-flanked Bluetail for company. We all returned to our hotel to freshen up and had a nice evening meal, again about five miles away in the town, did the bird log and all congratulated each other after the day we had all enjoyed.

**Day 9** Early start with a walk down to “The Avenue” and we all realised why this area had not been built on, it was because it was the Chinese equivalent of a burial ground, with large piles of earth all adorned with ribbons etc. Quite a few waders were around but not the hoped for Long-toed Stint. Rufous-tailed Robin was the first good bird that we saw, and then along with Eastern Spot-billed Duck and Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, it became apparent that not as many migrants had arrived in the area overnight. Siberian Blue Robin, Siberian Rubythroat (female) were also seen on the walk. An Oriental Reed Warbler showed really well for us all, along with a little bit of song. A Thick-billed Warbler and a few of the regular warblers made up a nice early-morning walk. After breakfast we made another visit to Happy Island, will it be as good as yesterday? We checked out the mud flats and admired Red Knot, Terek Sandpiper, Far Eastern Curlew, Pacific Golden-plover, Grey Plover and Lesser Sand-plovers and lots of others waders. Three Saunders’s Gulls, Black-tailed and Black-headed Gulls also seen. We had a walk towards the sea into an area of sandy scrub where we found Siberian Stonechat, Eastern Marsh-harrier, Pallas’s and lots of Yellow-browed Warblers, Richard’s Pipit, Eurasian Hoopoe, Olive-backed Pipit, Zitting Cisticola, Common Rosefinch and Tristram’s Bunting, Black-faced and Pallas’s Bunting. After a nice meal at lunchtime we headed off towards Temple Wood. It was not as good as yesterday but still held Eyebrowed Thrush, Eastern Crowned, Pale-legged Leaf, Arctic, Two-barred, Hume’s, Dusky and Radde’s Warbler’s, Chinese Penduline-tits, Mugimaki Flycatcher, Korean Flycatcher, Chestnut-flanked White-eye, Siberian Thrush (male and female) so not too bad! We had a walk around the temples on Happy Island then one of our team caught a glimpse of what she thought was a Lanceolated Warbler. You could have cut the atmosphere with a knife as she gave us directions to see the bird. It was creeping through the grass about 10 feet in front of us all, Vaughan used all his skill to get close to the bird and was nearly standing on it, when suddenly, it flew, but landed in an area where we could all get a view of it, albeit very brief. That was another of the “wish list” sorted out, only one to go now, and much better views of Lanceolated Warbler were to follow. It really was a “Happy Island” for all of us. We returned to our hotel, the Jinshi Shangwu, which was really nice, out for evening meal, bird log then, bedtime and yes, I did have a dream about Lanceolated Warblers.

**Day 10** An early morning stroll along “The Avenue” held, Siberian Blue Robin, Siberian Rubythroat, Rufous-tailed Robin, Bluethroat, Red-flanked Bluetail, Black-browed Reed Warbler, Thick-billed, Pale-legged Leaf, Radde’s, Pallas’s and Yellow-browed Warblers. The flycatcher’s seen were Dark-sided, Grey-streaked, Asian Brown, Korean and Taiga. Svetlana then saw a Lanceolated Warbler crawling through the grass; luckily I was quite close to her. I then looked in amazement as this tiny warbler ran just like a mouse through the grass, only a couple of feet in front of me, don’t think I will see one better than that. Vaughan then said, “If you find a Lanceolated Warbler it will probably run away from you, then fly low to the ground and drop into the grass again. If you find a Pallas’s Grasshopper-warbler it will flush, eventually, and fly up in a tree with its head held upwards trying to hide”, I did remember his experienced words. After breakfast

we left the hotel for the final time and headed back towards Beidaihe. We checked out Big Wood and managed to see a snipe flying past, but we could not see enough of it to really be sure what it was. The bird had flown into the centre of Big Wood so we walked from one end to the other all strung out in Spurn Point fashion, no snipe but another Lanceolated Warbler that also showed itself really well. One of the group had seen a rufous-coloured bittern-type bird in another part of the wood. Again we strung out and lucky for me, I managed to watch a Schrenck's Bittern walk up a short stick and fly only a short distance to disappear out of sight. We called in at "Seven Mile Sea" but the tide was really well in, so we headed out to a place to have lunch, an area Birdfinders have been to before, an area of sandy grass fields near the shore. The Japanese Quail we had come to see seemed to be flushing from a few places as we followed the path to the sea. A couple of Little Grebes were the only birds we saw in the waves. After some nice sandwiches and a drink of coffee we were off again. Next stop was the Dapu Estuary where Great and Intermediate Egrets, Common Shelduck, Eurasian Kestrel, Amur Falcon, Red-necked Stint's, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone and Terek Sandpiper were seen. Little, Common and Whiskered Terns also. We arrived back at The Friendship Hotel having had a truly remarkable time on the "Happy Island" trip. There was a little time to catch up with the birds of the hotel grounds before evening meal and to listen to the Oriental Scops-owls calling, bird log followed, then bedtime.

**Day 11** The 5.15am walk around the Friendship Hotel revealed Eurasian Hoopoe, Grey-headed and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Light-vented Bulbul, Rufous-tailed and Siberian Blue Robin, Siberian Thrush, Chinese Blackbird, Asian Brown and Korean Flycatcher, Black-naped Oriole, Red-billed Blue-magpie, Eurasian Magpie, White-cheeked and Red-billed Starling and Oriental Greenfinch. As we walked towards the restaurant for breakfast Kevin said, "I have got something interesting here, probably a Lancy", we joined him up some hotel front steps and found what he was looking at. A *Locustella* warbler about 20 feet away sat out almost in full view. As others joined us, the bird flew up into a small tree. Could it be a Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler if Vaughan's jiz statement was true? Lots of pictures were taken of the bird as it sat motionless with its head in the air. It was declared a Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler and it was well received by us all. After watching the bird at around 20 feet away for about five minutes we were joined by some Chinese photographers. Vaughan thought it wise to move away and leave the bird in peace before they stuffed their cameras up its "rear end". Breakfast time was a happy event with the last of our "wish list" finally fulfilled. The single Pallas's Grasshopper-warbler was the only one we saw, I think we had a bit of luck on our side and Kevin; of course he was duly thanked. As we were about to get on the coach to take us to the Sand Flats, I casually brushed my hand along a small hedge and guess what? A Lanceolated Warbler popped out, ran a little way and flew down into the grass; I had found my own Lancy! We called at the Sand Flats twice today still hoping to see Long-toed Stint, again we didn't manage it, but it wasn't through lack of trying by Vaughan. We did see Eastern Marsh-harrier, Eurasian Hobby, Eurasian Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Amur Falcon, Grey-headed Lapwing and a record count of 53 Red-necked Stints, most of which were in full breeding plumage, very smart birds! 11 Broad-billed Sandpipers were also seen along with a Caspian Tern, Common, Little, Gull-billed, White-Winged and 12 Whiskered Terns. A single *vegae* Herring Gull had Black-tailed and Black-headed for company. A single Pacific Swift flew over with a small group of Common Swifts, I never tire of watching them. On the reservoir across the main road Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Mallard, Moorhen and Common Kingfisher were seen. From the walk on the boardwalk we saw Richard's Pipit, Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*taivana*), Siberian Stonechat, Vinous-throated Parrotbill, Japanese Tit (*Parus minor*) Chinese Penduline-tit, Chestnut-flanked White-eye, Yellow-billed (Chinese) Grosbeak. Our driver Mr Lee knew of a place where he had taken another group of birdwatchers a while ago. We gave it a go and called it the "Strawberry River" we managed to see two Dollarbirds (really smart), female Siberian Blue Robin, Common Kingfisher. A great evening meal, whilst talking about having completed our "wish list", bird log and a good night's sleep followed ready for our last day at The Friendship Hotel.

**Day 12** A nice walk around the hotel grounds at 5.15am revealed Eurasian Hoopoe, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Rufous-tailed Robin, Thick-billed, Radde's, Dusky and Pallas's Warblers and Vaughan found another Lanceolated Warbler. The bird just sat on the hotel perimeter wall, not exactly showing well but enough for a poor picture! After breakfast we headed for the Sand Flats, with nothing new being seen apart from a pair of Chinese Sparrowhawks. We headed for the Stony River and the jobsworth was even more adamant that we should not be on "his" road. At this point a police car arrived and promptly ignored

us all and nearly ran jobsworth over, that would have taken a bit of explaining. Martin then found a Grey-tailed Tattler, but it was a bit distant, so we crossed the road bridge and Vaughan found another two tattler's and we had better views of them along with a Striated Heron. We returned to our hotel for lunch and afterwards, headed to the Jinshan Hotel to see what has arrived. Black Drongo, Crested Myna and the now more "regular" warblers were seen. A walk along the sea front towards Lighthouse Point and looking at the museum about Mao Tse Tung, who always spent his summers in Beidaihe, was interesting but not very many birds to see. Back at the Friendship Hotel, whilst we were going for evening meal, Vaughan had found two Oriental Scops-owls, and illuminated by a handy torch so that we all could see them, nice birds! Meal, bird log and bed.

**Day 13** After packing up to leave the Friendship we had a look around prior to breakfast and saw Eurasian Hoopoe, Great Spotted, Grey-headed and Grey-capped Woodpeckers, Siberian Rubythroat, Chinese Blackbird, Arctic, Lanceolated, Yellow-browed and Dusky Warblers, Dark-sided, Grey-streaked and Asian Brown Flycatchers. We also had time to re-visit where we had seen our first Siberian Rubythroat (yes I know that's sad). After breakfast we headed away from Beidaihe on route to "Old Peak" or Zhushan Forest Park in the mountains. It was a fairly long journey but we called at a few places for comfort and birding breaks. The best one being Quinlong River where we saw Little Grebe, Striated Heron, Grey and Purple Heron, various egrets. We searched a few of these river beds for an Ibisbill without any success; major disturbance seemed to be the problem with huge amounts of gravel being extracted. At another site we managed to see a couple of Long-billed Plovers, that are breeding there. A Crested Kingfisher entertained us all with his fancy plumage as he sat on wires waiting for his next meal. Common Sandpiper and Meadow Bunting also seen. We had lunch at a small café near to the river and a Red-billed Chough flew over. After another journey we finally arrived at the base of "Old Peak", we had to have our luggage taken up by a minibus as our coach would not manage to get up the twisty, steep road. We also had to travel up by minibus; Mr Lee could have a couple of days off. We arrived at the Zushan Tengxin Hotel, which was small, in need of repair but very comfortable and met outside for an hour's birding whilst the light lasted. We were in what felt like an alpine forest with lots of great views and temples. We managed to see Indian Cuckoo, and Common and Oriental were heard. Daurian Redstart's seemed to be quite numerous, Manchurian Bush Warbler, Claudia's Leaf Warbler (with its curious display of lifting each wing separately) Arctic, Yellow-browed and Dusky Warblers, Snowy-browed Nuthatch, Hair-crested Drongo, Carrion Crow, Oriental Greenfinch and Godlewski's Bunting made up a good end to the day, or was it? As I was getting changed one of our group made a "cuckoo" noise outside my room (This was used by all the group to alert the others of a good bird having been found) as I went to the window she pointed to a small bird perched in the half light. I took a few pictures and realised that it was a White-bellied Redstart, a rare bird in these parts. A nice evening meal around 100 yards from our hotel and the bird log ended another busy day.

**Day 14** Up at 5am today in the fresh mountain air at Zushan, well almost as it was quite misty. Last night's White-bellied Redstart was perched out in full view of nearly all our party and singing like its life depended on it, what a cracking little bird. We had a mini-bus trip up to the summit and peered over the view point, it was quite spectacular being able to see The Great Wall snaking its way over the various mountains and hills way below us. Northern Hawk-cuckoo and Oriental Cuckoo calling and in flight was nice. It felt like being home when a Eurasian Wren began its scolding call, and then sat there watching us. Other birds seen were White-throated Rock-thrush, Daurian Redstart, Grey-sided Thrush, Chinese Thrush, Claudia's Leaf Warbler (what a curious display) Chinese Leaf Warbler, Hume's Warbler in full song, Yellow-streaked Warbler, Willow (Songar) and Yellow-bellied Tits, Eurasian Jay, Carrion and Large-billed Crows, Common Raven. After breakfast we again explored the various good areas around the summit and also went a little lower towards the more open parts. Manchurian Bush Warbler, Blunt-winged Warbler, Godlewski's and Meadow Bunting. A few Eurasian Hobbies patrolled the skies and a couple of really scruffy Carrion Crows looked like they had been in a fight! After lunch we had a walk from the summit back to the hotel seeing Common Cuckoo, Grey-headed and Great Spotted Woodpecker, White (Amur) Wagtail, Light-vented Bulbul, Grey-sided Thrush (feeding at side of road, you have to be very quiet to see them), Dark-sided, Asian Brown and Korean Flycatchers, Willow (Songar) Tit, Snowy-browed Nuthatch, Brown Shrike, Black Drongo, Oriental Greenfinch, seven Japanese Grosbeak's and finally, Yellow-throated and Yellow-browed Buntings. A few Siberian Chipmunks were also seen with lots of different butterflies. A really memorable day's birding in a spectacular place. Evening meal and the bird log followed by bedtime.



**Day 15** Well the final day of birdwatching in China was upon us, but we again wasted no time by being out birding at 5.15am. A very showy Japanese Grosbeak was on display at the back of our hotel and quite a few pictures were taken by us all. We had a walk through the forest area and saw White-bellied and Daurian Redstarts, Grey-sided and Pale Thrush (as we all crept along the road as quietly as possible) The real star of the morning was Asian Stubtail (or Turbocharged Wren, named by Martin) It took us around 20 minutes to all get a really good view of this species. It seemed to be on the move constantly until its “battery” ran out and had to pause to re-charge. What a really nice species to observe! Other birds seen were Claudia’s, Chinese Leaf, Hume’s, Yellow-streaked Warblers, Dark-sided and Korean Flycatcher’s. A new bird in the form of a Green-backed Flycatcher was a good find by Svetlana. Various tit species, Snowy-browed Nuthatch, Godlewski’s, Meadow and Yellow-throated Bunting made up a cracking end to our birdwatching holiday. The journey back to Beijing was quite long with a stop at the “Old Wall” to search for Hill Pigeon, without any joy, calling at a Chinese motorway services for lunch. By now it was raining pretty hard, which made it feel like we were back in England. We checked into The Exhibition Centre in Beijing, did our final packing and all went out for our last evening meal together, followed by the log. We all ended up seeing 206 species, with my personal new bird count standing at 89. We made a collection for June and Mr Lee after their sterling efforts to make the tour as smooth success.

**Day 16** A breakfast at 7am and onto the coach to the airport by 8am, the usual heavy traffic on the way still had us in plenty of time to catch our flight to Vienna. The flight was without incident and so was the flight to Heathrow.

**CONCLUSION:** I have never been on an “organised” bird watching tour before, so I did not know what to expect. From the day I booked the “China – Beidaihe 2017” tour with Birdfinders, I could not say one wrong thing about the organisational skills of all its members (this not an advertisement) I would thoroughly recommend going with Birdfinders on any of their tours. Thank you, Vaughan and Svetlana Ashby, for a great bird-filled holiday.

**DAVID OUSEY** - A personal account





**Red-billed Blue-magpie**



**Siberian Rubythroat “Twitch”**





**Vinous-throated Parrotbill**



**Chinese Pond-heron and Little Egret**



**Spotted Dove**



**Light-vented Bulbul**





**Brown Shrike**



**Eyebrowed Thrush**





**Siberian Thrush**



**Green-backed Flycatcher**





**Japanese Grosbeak**



**White-bellied Redstart**





**Claudia`s Leaf Warbler**



**Lanceolated Warbler**





**Pallas`s Grasshopper-warbler**



**Chinese Temple**





**The Great Wall of China**



**Bridge at The Sand Flats in Beidaihe**