China
Winter Birding
Siberian Crane & Remote Asian Specialities
7th to 21st January 2019 (15 days)

White-naped Cranes by Rich Lindie
Winter in south-east China offers a rich kaleidoscope of impressive and localised bird specialities, including several of the world’s most spectacular cranes. Foremost among these cranes, poetically referred to as ‘the birds of heaven’, will be the elegant Siberian Crane, one of the rarest cranes on earth. During this tour, we will also be looking for an impressive supporting cast of exciting birds that include the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, which has recently been found to winter in this area, the rare Scaly-sided Merganser, thousands of Swan Geese, Falcated Duck, Baikal Teal, Oriental Stork, Saunders's Gull, Reed Parrotbill, Pied Falconet, Elliot’s Pheasant and possibly even the rare Swinhoe’s Crane!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

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Day 1: Arrival in Shanghai and drive to Yancheng. Upon arriving in the bustling metropolis of Shanghai, you will be met by your Rockjumper and local tour leaders and transferred north to Yancheng. We will stop along the way to explore a known site for the very scarce Relict Gull. Classified as vulnerable by the IUCN, this species is in serious decline and not often seen on any regular bird tour elsewhere in its range. Reaching our comfortable hotel in the city of Yancheng (Salt City), we will all meet up for a welcome dinner with time to discuss the exciting birding ahead over the next few weeks!
**Days 2 & 3: Yancheng area.** We have two full days to explore the vast complex of reedbeds, salt pans and lagoons. Surprisingly, birders have only recently been attracted to this area despite it hosting hundreds of Red-crowned Cranes. Silt carried by the Yangtze River is adding to the coastline, while numerous fish ponds have been created by the locals. The combination of two environmental problems has turned out well for the birds at least. While we can certainly expect to see a number of Red-crowned and Common Cranes, we have a chance of finding a straggling Hooded or Sandhill amongst them. Should we be particularly lucky, we may come across an over-wintering Saunders’s Gull.

Turning our attention to the large reedbeds, we shall diligently search for the cryptic Eurasian Bittern, but we shall pay particular attention to finding the decorated Reed Parrotbill (which often give their location away by the sound of their hefty mandibles cracking the dry reed stems!). Pallas’s Reed Bunting can be numerous, while small numbers of Ochr-rumped Bunting should also make an appearance. As one might expect, wildfowl make up the majority of the bird mass present, with huge numbers wintering in this slightly warmer region. We have plenty of time to scope through flocks of Tundra Bean Goose, the ever-popular and undeniably beautiful Falcated Duck, the rare Baikal Teal, Chinese Spot-billed Duck, the outrageous Smew and Common Merganser.

While targeting some of the very impressive and desirable species mentioned above, we shall also rack up a list of commoner, but no less interesting species such as Eastern Marsh and Hen Harriers, Japanese Buzzard, Kentish Plover, Green Sandpiper, Red-flanked Bluetail, Daurian Redstart, Chinese Blackbird, near-endemic Chinese Grey Shrike, White-cheeked Starling and both Black-faced and Chestnut-eared Buntings.

**Day 4: Yancheng to Shanghai and flight to Fuzhou.** We depart Yancheng today and drive back to Shanghai. A short flight will deliver us to the city of Fuzhou in south-east China’s Fujian Province, one of the largest cities in the region with a population of nearly 7 million people. Upon arrival, we shall drive the short distance to Fuzhou Forest Park and our well-positioned lodgings. Depending on the time of our arrival, we shall make an initial investigation of the park this afternoon.

**Day 5: Fuzhou Forest Park and drive to Minjiang Estuary.** We have a full day to visit the Fuzhou Forest Park. This park, with its myriad of...
stone pathways and beautiful forested gorges, houses an impressive suite of interesting species, including the localised White-necklaced Partridge, Chestnut Bulbul, busy flocks of Indo-Chinese Yuhina, Great Barbet, Slaty-backed Forktail, Scarlet and Grey-chinned Minivets, Fork-tailed Sunbird, Collared Finchbill, Pale-headed Woodpecker and the Chinese endemic Yellow-bellied Tit.

Day 6: Minjiang Estuary to Emei Feng. This morning we shall head to the small island of Shanyutan in the Minjiang Estuary, perhaps the most reliable site on earth for the increasingly rare Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This enigmatic species reliably overwinters here on the inter-tidal mud flats with up to ten individual birds being recorded in recent years. We’ll also spend time in other areas of the reserve searching for specialities such as the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill, Dalmatian Pelican and Saunders’s Gull, one of the world’s rarest gulls. Although these species will be the primary focus during our visit, there is also a wide variety of gulls, terns, and other migrant waders to keep us entertained during our visit.

After what promises to be one of the highlights of the tour, we shall depart Fuzhou and embark on the fairly lengthy drive to Emei Feng in the Wuyishan Mountain Range that straddles the Jiangxi and the Fujian border. Listed by the United Nations as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this reserve is well known for its high mountain peaks. Apart from being an area of outstanding natural beauty, it also contains probably the only remaining large tract of pristine forest in southern China. If time allows, this afternoon, we will do some initial birding before settling into our accommodation for a three-night stay.

Days 7 & 8: Emei Feng & surrounds. We have the next two full days to explore the winter birding opportunities of Emei Fang, part of the Wuyishan Mountain Range. At the park entrance, a river flows through a narrow valley towards the headquarters and we will scan this waterway for the very attractive Crested Kingfisher and sprightly Brown Dipper. The hills are covered with pristine forest supporting the impressive Red-billed Blue Magpie, Barred Cuckoo-Dove, Asian Drongo-Cuckoo, migrant Crested Buntings in overgrown areas, the sneaky Lesser Shortwing, Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush and Collared Finchbill. An imitation of Asian Barred Owlet should attract this often diurnal species, as well as mobbing flock species such as the Chinese endemic Yellow-bellied Tit, Coal Tit, Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, Eurasian Jay and Chestnut-vented Nuthatch. The delightful Little Forktail is also possible along the forest streams and we will watch overhead for raptors that include Mountain Hawk-Eagle and the sleek Besra. This will also be our best opportunity for the
scarce Elliot’s Pheasant. From the reserve headquarters, the road continues winding steeply upwards past a variety of cultivated areas and large stands of mature bamboo towards the top of the forested mountaintop, reaching a height of over 2,000 meters in elevation.

Mixed flocks should produce species such as Ferruginous Flycatcher, Green Shrike-Babbler, Yellow-browed Tit, Grey-chinned Minivet and Brown Bullfinch. The endangered Stump-tailed Macaque also resides in the reserve as does the agile Tufted Deer. Silver Pheasant can sometimes be seen feeding along the forest edge, while further time birding in the bamboo zone should produce Chinese Bamboo Partridge, the vocal but inconspicuous Rufous-faced Warbler, Chestnut Bulbul and active groups of Vinous-throated Parrotbill.

Near the summit Rosy Pipit, Buff-throated Warbler, Streak-throated Fulvetta, White-browed Shrike-Babbler, Yellow-cheeked Tit and Russet Bush Warbler are regular, while Asian Martins are often seen near the cliff faces along the track. Pygmy Wren-Babbler and Spotted Elachura are two furtive but vocal species that will likely take some persistence to actually see. Other birds we should encounter here include Small Niltava, Grey Treepie, Mountain Bulbul, Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Black-chinned Yuhina, Rufus-capped Babbler and several other warbler species including Blyth’s Leaf, Chestnut-crowned, Bianchi’s and White-spectacled Warblers. We will scan tall trees to locate the vocal Great Barbet and Bay Woodpecker, but it will take a great dose of luck to see the poorly-known White-necklaced Partridge.

**Day 9: Emei Feng to Wuyuan.** We shall spend a few hours around Emei Feng, if required, this morning before embarking on the drive to Wuyuan. We continue our journey westward to Wuyuan, a picturesque small town in the north-eastern corner of Jiangxi Province. Here we will take some time staking out the tiny Pied Falconet, a localised but strikingly patterned raptor, before continuing our afternoon birding for specialties that include the ornately patterned Mandarin Duck, Masked Laughingthrush, Red-billed Starling and migrant thrushes such as Dusky, Neumann’s, Pale and Grey-backed. Several species of migratory buntings are possible in this area, including Yellow-throated, Yellow-browed, Meadow and the scarce Tristram’s.
Day 10: Wuyuan & surrounds. Following the serene Le An River through the forest-covered mountains of Wuyuan, our primary target will be to locate the critically endangered Scaly-sided Merganser. Up to sixty birds overwinter in this area, feeding in the calm water areas along the gravel banks. Wintering populations of Long-billed Plover, White-crowned Forktail and confiding Brown Crakes will also be on the agenda. Additional birding through the dense bamboo and steep forested slopes dotted with local villages allow us chances for Dusky Fulvetta, Greater Necklaced and White-browed Laughingthrushes, the retiring Spot-breasted Scimitar Babbler, Rufous-capped Babbler, Fork-tailed Sunbird, Crested Serpent Eagle, responsive Red-billed Leiothrix, and both Grey-headed and the elusive Short-tailed Parrotbill.

Day 11: Wuyuan to Po Yang Hu. We have some time to bird around Wuyuan for any specialities we may still need this morning. Migrant congregations of Yellow-billed Grosbeak are regular in this area, as are groups of Black-collared Starling, Hwamei, with their amazing melodic song, and with some luck on our side, perhaps a flock of Japanese Waxwings. Satisfied with our birding exploits around Wuyuan, we shall continue our journey to the vast complex of lakes and marshes of Po Yang Hu. This is one of the world’s greatest wetland reserves, hosting critical populations of some of Asia’s rarest migrants. Foremost among these are several species of elegant cranes, as well as hundreds of thousands of individual waterfowl, waders and passerines escaping the harsh winter conditions further north.

Days 12 & 13: Po Yang Hu & surrounds. Even before we have finished our packed breakfast we might have already seen our first Hooded, Common and majestic White-naped Cranes along the roadside wetlands! Exploring the surroundings by boat through a series of canals, we will be amongst large congregations of geese that include Greylag, Greater and infrequent Lesser White-fronted, Tundra and the scarcer Taiga Bean Goose. We will also listen for the unique bill clapping of Oriental Stork and could potentially find well over half the world’s population of this endangered species during our visit! The
incessant honking from skeins of Tundra Swans can be heard as they feed in shallow pools and along the mudflats, while we’ll also scan for the range-restricted Swan Goose that can sometimes be present in good numbers.

Watching the cormorant fisherman here with their anxious birds perched on the edge of their wooden boats awaiting their next catch can be quite a thrill; this ancient fishing technique is now genuinely rare as modern netting methods have all but exterminated this tradition.

Mammals are another target here, and whilst boating along the waterways of Poyang Hu, we will look out for Yangtze Finless Porpoises breaking the water’s surface. We will also keep an eye out for the ‘vampire’ Chinese Water Deer, a bizarre ungulate that grows fang-like tusks up to three inches long and has facial muscles allowing them to withdraw these tusks while feeding or to thrust them outwards when fighting!

Of course, the highlight of our visit to this region will be spending time with the elegant Siberian Crane, one of the rarest cranes on earth and now known from only a small handful of remote sites. We will try to locate this beautiful species by their poignant calls across the grasslands and mudflats and then carefully approach to a respectable distance, where congregations and small family groups of sleek white adults occasionally open their wings in display and feed alongside mottled juveniles.

**Day 14: Poyang Hu to Nanchang, flight to Shanghai.** This morning we will visit the wetlands of Nanjishan National Nature Reserve in another area of the greater Po Yang Hu reserve system. Here we will specifically target the secretive Marsh Grassbird and rare Swinhoe’s Crane. Pallas’s and Common Reed Bunting are regularly found in the tall grasses, while other birds include swirling flocks of Spotted Redshank and Pied Avocet, Chinese Penduline Tit and Japanese Quail, which can sometimes be seen huddled on the ground. Eurasian Bittern is common here, although well camouflaged, and with diligent scanning, we will search for other goodies such as Baikal Teal, Falcated Duck and the lovely Smew, including fluffy white-headed males.

We’ll then head to Nanchang and take a flight back to Shanghai, arriving in time to visit a nearby wetland for the decorated Reed Parrotbill, which give themselves away by the sound of a loose flock cracking stems with their hefty mandibles! Tonight we will enjoy a
hearty farewell dinner in the pulsating city of Shanghai.

**Day 15: Departure from Shanghai.** The tour concludes this morning after breakfast with a transfer to Shanghai International Airport where we will catch our departing flights back home.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**
Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

**This includes:**
- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 15;
- A soft drink at meals;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- Extra activities as mentioned in the itinerary; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

**The tour fee does not include:**
- Visa fees;
- ANY airfares (see above);
- Any additional drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

**IMPORTANT NOTES:**
a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.
b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.
c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

**Tipping:**
As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.
Please Note:

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+/-18kg) for hand luggage.
- This tour does require a good level of fitness and participants should be in good general health as much of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. At times we will experience physical difficulty when walking up some steep trails and off trails. Should you have any physical limitations or medical conditions, please notify us in advance of departure. Please note that we will be in remote areas well away from modern medical facilities.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:
This tour does not include any airfares. The tour starts on day 1 with an afternoon transfer from Shanghai to Yancheng, please make sure to arrive in Shanghai before 14:00 on this day. The tour will conclude in Shanghai after breakfast on day 15.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:
Shanghai Pudong International Airport, Shanghai (IATA: PVG) is the main port of entry for this tour and is well serviced by many of the world’s major airlines. Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.

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