



CHINA: QINGHAI TOUR

07 – 21 JUNE 2023

05 – 19 JUNE 2024



Grandala is one of our stunning targets on this amazing trip (photo Summer Wong).

This small group tour focuses on the northwestern Chinese province of Qinghai, the fourth-largest province in China, but with the third-smallest population in the country. Known as the 'roof of the world', much of the province is over 9,800 feet (3,000 meters) in elevation and mostly comprised of the vast Tibetan Plateau, a magical place with an incredibly high density of interesting plateau specialist species. The highest point is Bukadaban Feng at an impressive 22,510 feet (6,860 meters). Our tour starts and ends in Xining, the capital of the province, which is also close to the huge, saline Qinghai Lake (the largest lake in China), after which the province is named.

Qinghai borders Gansu to the northeast, Xinjiang to the northwest, Sichuan to the southeast, and Tibet to the southwest. Qinghai is located on the northeastern part of the Tibetan Plateau. The Yellow River (China's second longest river) originates in the southern part of the province, while the Yangtze River (the longest river in Asia and third longest in the world) and Mekong River have their sources in the southwest of the province.

Our two-week birdwatching tour traverses some stunning landscape in pursuit of a number of exceptional birds of this high-elevation zone, the sights of this region are truly breathtaking. The birds available on this tour include some localized species, some globally threatened species, and some absolutely stunning ones. Some of the highlight birds we expect to see during our tour include **Tibetan Sandgrouse**, **Pallas's Sandgrouse**, **Tibetan Snowcock**, **Tibetan Partridge**, **Himalayan Snowcock**, **White Eared Pheasant**, **Blood Pheasant**, **Szechenyi's Monal-Partridge**, **Ibisbill**, **Crested Tit-warbler**, **White-browed Tit-warbler**, **Snow Pigeon**, **Black-necked Crane**, **Tibetan Snowfinch**, **Tibetan Rosefinch**, **Tibetan Bunting**, **Tibetan Babax**, **Tibetan Serin**, **Henderson's Ground Jay**, and **Grandala**.



*A family of **Tibetan Sandgrouse** is a delightful sight while birding on the plateau (photo Summer Wong).*

This tour can be combined with our two preceding Chinese tours, **China: Yunnan Tour** and our **China: Sichuan Tour**, creating a mind-boggling 43-day China mega tour. It is even possible to also combine this tour with our **Taiwan: Birding Extravaganza** tour, which precedes the Yunnan Tour.

Itinerary (15 days/14 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Xining

After your morning arrival at Xining Caojiabao International Airport, maybe after completing our prior **China: Sichuan Tour**, you will be met and transferred to our hotel for a welcome lunch and some rest. If you cannot arrive in Xining in the morning today, or would just prefer to anyway, please arrive the previous day. We are able to help with extra accommodation.

In the afternoon we will spend some time birding the nearby Xining hills. Possible species here may include **Pale Rosefinch**, **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**, **Red-billed Chough**, **Pied Wheatear**, **Meadow Bunting**, **Godlewski's Bunting**, **Rufous-breasted Accentor**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Himalayan Bluetail**, **Common Rock Thrush**, **Common Pheasant**, **Little Owl**, **Black-rumped Magpie**, **Sichuan Tit**, **Hill Pigeon**, **Daurian Partridge**, and **Przevalski's Partridge**.

Overnight: Xining



Przevalski's Partridge is one of our early tour targets (photo Summer Wong) and one of many interesting and localized gamebirds we can find on the tour.

Day 2. Morning birding at Dongxia Forest Park and drive to Gonghe

The morning will be spent birding in the Dongxia Forest Park, where we will look for a range of great birds, including **Gansu Leaf Warbler**, **Przevalski's Nuthatch**, **Chinese Nuthatch**, **Crested Tit-warbler**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Goldcrest**, **Chinese White-browed Rosefinch**, **Common Rosefinch**, **White-throated Redstart**, **Chinese Thrush**, **Elliot's Laughingthrush**, **Oriental Magpie**, **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Sichuan Tit**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch**, **Red (Common) Crossbill**, **Black-faced Bunting**, and **Grey-headed Bullfinch**.

After our birding we will drive approximately two hours to the southwest and the town of Gonghe, ready for the next day's birding, where we will find a different range of species.

Overnight: Gonghe

Day 3. Birding Gonghe and Ela Mountain and travel to Madoi

The morning's birding will see us in Gonghe, where we will look for **Mongolian Finch**, **Desert Finch**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Pine Bunting**, **Black-faced Bunting**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Rock Sparrow**, **Twite**, **Chinese Rubythroat**, **White-rumped Snowfinch**, and **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**.



*The gorgeous **Chinese Rubythroat** is always a highly desired species.*

Afterwards at Ela Mountain we will look for **Tibetan Rosefinch**, **Güldenstädt's Redstart**, **White-winged Snowfinch**, **Brandt's Mountain Finch**, and **Plain Mountain Finch**.

Overnight: Madoi

Day 4. Madoi to Nangqen

We will have a full day's slow drive south between Madoi and Nangqen, our base for the next few nights. There is a wide range of birds possible along the way, and we will keep our eyes peeled for some great roadside birds such as **Upland Buzzard**, **Himalayan Vulture**, **Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier), **Saker Falcon**, **Daurian Jackdaw**, **Little Owl**, **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Lesser Sand Plover**, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Common Redshank**, **Pallas's Gull**, **Brown-headed Gull**, **Common Tern**, **Tibetan Lark**, **Pale Martin**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Salim Ali's Swift**, **Eurasian Crag Martin**, **Asian House Martin**, **White-rumped Snowfinch**, **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Chinese Grey Shrike**, **Ibisbill**, **Brown Dipper**, **Hodgson's Redstart**, **Blue-fronted Redstart**, **Alpine Leaf Warbler**, and **Great Rosefinch**.

Overnight: Nangqen

Day 5. Birding the Kanda Shan Pass

We will have a full day birding at the Kanda Shan Pass, where we will target several excellent birds, like **Tibetan Bunting**, **Tibetan Snowcock**, **Tibetan Partridge**, **Sichuan Tit**, **Tibetan Babax**, **White Eared Pheasant**, **Szechenyi's Monal-Partridge**, **Snow Pigeon**, **Chinese Rubythroat**, **Grandala**, **Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch**, **Red-fronted Rosefinch**, **Streaked Rosefinch**, **White-browed Tit**, **White-capped Redstart**, **Golden Eagle**, **Plain Mountain Finch**, **White-browed Tit-warbler**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, and **Eurasian Eagle Owl**.

Overnight: Nangqen



*The beautiful **White-browed Tit-warbler** can be seen along the Kanda Shan pass (photo Summer Wong).*

Day 6. Birding at Baizha Forest

We will spend a full day birding at Baizha Forest to the south of where we were birding the previous day. Here we will look for different species, and these will include **Szechenyi's Monal-Partridge**, **Blood Pheasant**, **Giant Laughingthrush**, **White Eared Pheasant**, **Three-banded Rosefinch**, **Common Rosefinch**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Tibetan Babax**, **Hodgson's Treecreeper**, **Long-tailed Thrush**, **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, **Chinese Grey Shrike**, **Black Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Himalayan Bluetail**, **Slaty-backed Flycatcher**, **Rosy Pipit**, **Japanese Tit**, **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Grey Crested Tit**, **Tibetan Serin**, **Chinese Fulvetta**, **Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler**, **Maroon-backed Accentor**, **Salim Ali's Swift**, **Aberrant Bush Warbler**, and **Sichuan Leaf Warbler**.

Overnight: Nangqen



Blood Pheasant is often encountered at Baizha Forest.

Day 7. Travel between Nangqen and Qumalai

Today we have a long drive as we make our way northwest through gorgeous mountain landscapes between Nangqen and Qumalai, but we will be sure to bird along the way, maybe finding some raptors like **Upland Buzzard**, **Saker Falcon**, or **Bearded Vulture**.

Overnight: Qumalai

Day 8. Travel between Qumalai and Budongguan

We will travel the mountain roads between Qumalai and Budongguan, birding along the way, with our main target being **Tibetan Sandgrouse**, though we will stop if we find anything we still 'need', as we make our way towards a very special birding area.

Overnight: Budongguan (very basic accommodation)

Day 9. Travel between Budongguan and Golmud

During morning birding, we will search for **Tibetan Sandgrouse**, **Pallas's Sandgrouse**, and **Tibetan Rosefinch**. Later we will continue traveling across the stunning mountain landscapes as we make our way to Golmud, birding en route and keeping our eyes peeled for **Mongolian Finch** and **Great Rosefinch**.

Overnight: Golmud



*As we make our way through the spectacular mountains of this region, we can come across some fantastic birds, such as this **Tibetan Rosefinch** (photo Summer Wong).*

Day 10. Travel between Golmud and Dulan

We will travel between Golmud and Dulan. One of the chief targets of the day will be the interesting **Henderson's Ground Jay**, and we might also spot **Przevalski's Redstart** and **Daurian Partridge**.

Overnight: Dulan



We will be in the realm of **Henderson's Ground Jay** today and we will be on the look out for this great and highly sought-after species (photo Natural Heritage Center of Mongolia).



Przevalski's Redstart provides a great flash of color and is a delightful bird. We will look for these while within their range (photo Summer Wong).

Day 11. Birding in Dulan and travel to Chaka

We will do some birding around Dulan, where we will look for **Pallas's Sandgrouse**, **Przevalski's Redstart**, and **Daurian Partridge**, among others. Afterwards we will travel the short distance to Chaka, where we will spend the next couple of days birding.

Overnight: Chaka

Days 12 - 13. Birding at Chaka

We will enjoy two full days birding around the Chaka area. Some of the areas we might visit while here include: Chaka Valley, Chaka Marsh, and Chaka Salt Lake and flats. There are a lot of targets for us here, with some very special gamebirds being possible, such as **Tibetan Snowcock**, **Himalayan Snowcock**, **Tibetan Partridge**, **Chukar Partridge**, **Daurian Partridge**, and **Przevalski's Partridge**. While scanning the ground we will also look for **Pallas's Sandgrouse**, **Henderson's Ground Jay**, and **Ground Tit**, along with a long list of larks, pipits and relatives likely to include **Mongolian Lark**, **Horned Lark**, **Hume's Short-toed Lark**, **Asian Short-toed Lark**, **Oriental Skylark**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Brown Accentor**, and **Rosy Pipit**.



Pallas's Sandgrouse can be found in the Chaka area (photo Natural Heritage Center of Mongolia).

Other targets in this area include the highly sought-after **Wallcreeper**, plus **Chinese Grey Shrike**, **Przevalski's Redstart**, **Pine Bunting**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **Twite**, **Desert Finch**, **Rufous-naped Snowfinch**, **Blanford's Snowfinch**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Eastern Yellow Wagtail**, **White-browed Tit**, **Kessler's Thrush**, and maybe even an **Amur Falcon** or **Saker Falcon** out

hunting the abundance of prey. **Przevalski's Finch** (formerly Pink-tailed Rosefinch and also known as Przevalski's Pinktail) is a localized monotypic family and always a big target.



Wallcreeper is a monotypic family and is always a tour highlight.



Przevalski's Finch is another monotypic family and a big target (photo Summer Wong).

Around the lakes, rivers, and waterbodies we might find **Black-necked Crane, Bar-headed Goose, Greylag Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Common Merganser (Goosander), Lesser Sand Plover, Kentish Plover, Long-toed Stint, and Common Tern.**

Overnight: Chaka



Black-necked Crane is a beautiful member of the family and we will look for them in this area.

Day 14. Birding at Rubber Mountain and Qinghai Lake, followed by the drive to Xining

Our final birding of the tour will take us to Rubber Mountain, where we will look for **Blue-fronted Redstart, White-capped Redstart, Przevalski's Redstart, White-throated Redstart, Gldenstdt's Redstart, Black Redstart, White-browed Tit, Red-billed Chough, Alpine Leaf Warbler, Dusky Warbler, Smoky Warbler, White-browed Tit-warbler, White-rumped Snowfinch, Tibetan Snowfinch, and the pretty Robin Accentor.**

At Qinghai Lake we hope to find **Bar-headed Goose, Ruddy Shelduck, Common Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, Hill Pigeon, Common Cuckoo, Pallas's Gull, Black-necked Crane, Pied Avocet, Kentish Plover, Spotted Redshank, Common Redshank, Ground Tit, Mongolian Lark, Hume's Short-toed Lark, Tibetan Lark, and Pere David's Snowfinch.**

We will return to Xining where we will have our final group evening meal before choosing our 'bird of the trip', not likely to be an easy task with all of the amazing birds likely on this tour.

Overnight: Xining

Day 15. Departure

The tour will conclude with your departure from Xining Caojiabao International Airport.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 15 days

Group Size: 4 - 8

Dates: 07 - 21 June 2023
05 - 19 June 2024

Start: Xining, Qinghai

End: Xining, Qinghai

Prices: US\$6,221 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2023)
US\$6,532 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2024)

Single Supplements: US\$420 (2023)
US\$441 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation (from Day 1 to Day 14 as described, note one night is in very basic accommodation by necessity as we travel through remote Qinghai)

Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 15)

Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle

Expert tour leader

Local bird and wildlife guides fees

Birdwatching site entrance fees and travel permits

All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights

Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)

Visa fees if visa required (we will provide you with an 'Invitation Letter', usually required to get your Chinese visa)

Departure tax

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.

Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing/monument excursions

Soft/alcoholic drinks

Personal travel insurance

Camera permits

Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))