



CHINA BIRD TOUR: QINGHAI AND TIBETAN PLATEAU BIRDING TOUR

29 MAY – 10 JUNE 2027



Blood Pheasant is one of our stunning targets on this amazing trip.

Qinghai offers a truly wild and remote birding experience, set amidst the sweeping high-altitude landscapes of the vast Tibetan Plateau. Much of the province lies above 9,800 feet (3,000 meters), a stark and stunning expanse of semi-desert plains, high mountains, alpine grasslands, deep gorges, and glittering lakes. The plateau supports an exceptional range of birds found nowhere else, with many beautiful, elusive, and highly localized species rarely seen by international birders. This two-week Chinese birding tour begins in the capital, Xining, then loops west past the immense Qinghai Lake to the high-elevation desert ranges of Chaka, before heading east and south across towering mountains to Yushu and the dramatic canyons, river valleys, and forested slopes nearby. The scenery along this route is as varied as it is spectacular. We target a number of exceptionally exciting high-elevation specialists, many birds endemic to the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and often rarely seen by global birdwatchers. These include highly sought-after, brilliantly colorful, truly unique, and impressive species, featuring an exceptional diversity of gamebirds, redstarts, snowfinches, and rosetfinches. During the tour we hope to encounter some excellent mammals too, such as the bizarre **Tibetan Fox**. Away from the crowds of the eastern provinces, this is a peaceful and rewarding journey through one of China's most isolated and awe-inspiring regions, with warm hospitality and comfortable accommodations throughout.



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

The tour begins in Xining, where we start our birding in the local hills, and ancient conifer woods of Dongxia Forest Park to the north of Xining, for Przevalski's Partridge, the beautiful White-browed Tit-warbler, and Crested Tit-warbler, Przevalski's Nuthatch, endemic thrushes, leaf warblers, and vivid Qilian Bluetail (recently split and now a breeding endemic). Leaving the capital, we drive to our next hotel located on the shores of the vast and spectacular Qinghai Lake. Against a breathtaking mountainous backdrop we will bird the wetlands around the lake, targeting

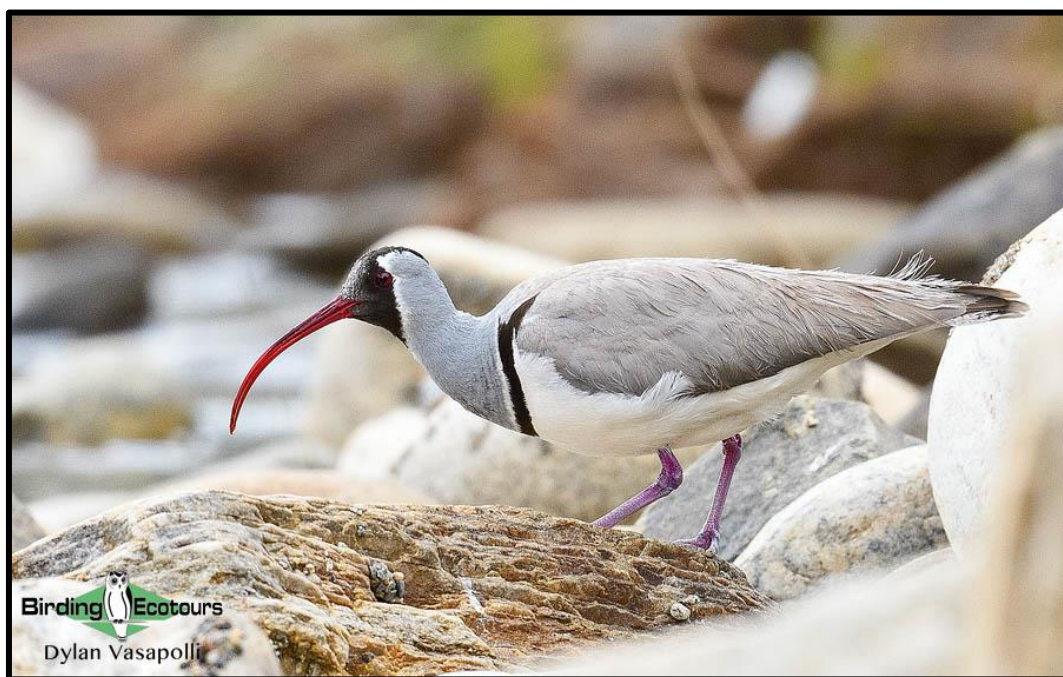
Black-necked Crane, **Bar-headed Goose**, the unique **Ground Tit**, and range-restricted **Tibetan Lark**. Following our wetland bird watching, we head south, bound for Chaka, but stopping at around 12,500 feet (3,800 meters) on the **Rubber Mountain** on route, we enjoy our first mountain birding of the tour, targeting a top-tier of Chinese endemics. These major targets include the prized monotypic **Przevalski's Finch** (formerly Pink-tailed Rosefinch), **White-browed Tit**, the dazzling **Przevalski's Redstart** (Ala Shan Redstart), and highly-localized **Tibetan Snowfinch**, all rarely seen by international birders.



*We hope to encounter the unique square-faced **Tibetan Fox** while exploring the plateau (photo P. He).*

We then have two days exploring the striking, starkly beautiful desert and rugged mountain ranges of Chaka, searching for plateau and desert species such as **Tibetan Snowcock**, **Pallas's Sandgrouse**, brilliant **Mongolian Ground Jay**, **Pere David's Snowfinch**, and **Blanford's Snowfinch**, and a whole host of larks and pipits. In the nearby valleys of bush fallows, meadows, and woodland patches, we will search for **Wallcreeper** and the specialized **Tarim Babbler**, alongside many others. We then start our journey first east, then south down through Qinghai towards the massive province of Tibet. We stop at the breathtaking **Longyangxia Canyon**, likely the best spot in the world to find the delicate **Pale Rosefinch**, before birding the impressive **Ela Mountain Pass** on the way to Yushu. The pass is spectacular, and here we will look for the highly range-restricted and rare **Tibetan Rosefinch**. We also have our best opportunity for **Tibetan Sandgrouse**, possibly **Himalayan Snowcock**, plus a high diversity of accentors, snowfinches, and mountain finches, such as the attractive **White-rumped Snowfinch** and **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**. While travelling to Yushu, along the rivers that wind across this dramatic landscape, we hope to find the iconic **Ibisbill**, and some impressive mammals, such as **Tibetan Fox**.

From Yushu, we first target the spectacular **Chinese Rubythroat** and **White-capped Redstart**, before continuing to the excellent **Kanda Shan Pass**, where we will continue our quest to see the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau specialists. Top targets in the scrub-covered slopes and open alpine meadows include **Tibetan Babax**, and **Tibetan Bunting**, along with **Snow Pigeon**, **Pink-rumped Rosefinch**, and **Red-fronted Rosefinch**. Our final birding of the tour will be at our southernmost point, at **Baizha Forest**. Arriving here early, we target the endemic **Buff-throated Monal-Partridge**, **White Eared Pheasant**, **Tibetan Partridge**, **Blood Pheasant**, then, amongst the quiet forest trails and alpine meadows, we will look for localized species such as **Chinese Fulvetta**, **Giant Laughingthrush**, **Three-banded Rosefinch**, and **Tibetan Serin**, along with woodpeckers, tits, warblers, rosefinches and many more. We then board an internal flight to Xining, where the tour ends.



*Iconic **Ibisbill** can be found wading through rivers across the Tibetan Plateau.*

This tour can be combined with our two preceding Chinese tours, **China Bird Tour: Spring Specials Yunnan Birding Tour** (before) or with our **China Bird Tour: Sichuan Birding Tour – The Best of Chinese Birding**, creating a mind-boggling 40-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 (13 days/12 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Xining

Today is a travel day, and you may arrive at your leisure at Xining Caojiabao International Airport in Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. We recommend either arriving the previous night or booking a flight that lands before noon, as we will meet at the airport at 12:00 PM and transfer to our hotel for a welcome lunch and time to settle in. Those arriving early may wish to visit Kumbum Monastery, one of the most important Tibetan Buddhist monasteries outside Tibet, or explore Xining's bustling markets.

In the afternoon, we will bird the nearby Xining hills, where our major target will be the endemic **Przevalski's Partridge**, along with **Common Pheasant**, **Daurian Partridge**, **Hill Pigeon**, **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**, **Little Owl**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, **Black-rumped Magpie**, **Red-billed Chough**, **Plain Laughingthrush**, **Hodgson's Redstart**, **Pied Wheatear**, **Rufous-breasted Accentor**, **Brown Accentor**, **Meadow Bunting**, and gorgeous **Godlewski's Bunting**. This is also one of the best places in the world to see the range-restricted and subtly beautiful **Pale Rosefinch**.

Overnight: Boli Yabu Hotel, or similar, Xining



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

Day 2. Birding at Dongxia Forest Park and Qinghai Lake

With an early start, we drive north from Xining to the ancient conifer woods of Dongxia Forest Park. Our major targets here include the beautiful **White-browed Tit-warbler** and **Crested Tit-warbler**, the endemic **Przevalski's Nuthatch**, **Chinese Thrush**, **White-backed Thrush**, and the stunning **Qilian Bluetail**. Alongside **Himalayan Bluetail** which we also target in these forests, **Qilian Bluetail** was recently split from Red-flanked Bluetail, and the Dongxia forests are one of the few locations in China where you can reliably see this characterful breeding endemic. We also have several important leaf warbler targets here, including the localized breeding **Gansu Leaf Warbler**, as well as **Chinese Leaf Warbler** and **Yellow-streaked Warbler**, amongst others. The lush forest understory vegetation supports a high diversity of birds, and we will also be on the lookout for **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Elliot's Laughingthrush**, **Plain Laughingthrush**, **Chinese Nuthatch**, **Chestnut Thrush**, **White-bellied Redstart**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **White-throated Redstart**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **Grey-headed Bullfinch**, **Black-faced Bunting**, and the stunning **Chinese White-browed Rosefinch**.



Black-necked Crane is a beautiful member of the family and we will look for them along the shores of Qinghai Lake.

After lunch at a local restaurant, we will drive northwest of Xining towards Gancha. Along the way, we will pass the massive Qinghai Lake, a saltwater lake the size of Rhode Island and the largest lake in China, famed for its breathtaking setting against a vast mountainous backdrop. Our hotel for the night is on the shore of this impressive lake. On our journey, will stop at wetlands on the lake's shore for some birding, with **Black-necked Crane** as our major target, along with a variety of waterfowl, grebes, waders, and gulls including **Bar-headed Goose**, **Ferruginous Duck**, **Tibetan Sand Plover**, and **Pallas's Gull**. In the lakeside grasslands, we will search for the unique

Ground Tit, the range-restricted **Tibetan Lark**, as well as **Hume's Short-toed Lark**, **Mongolian Lark**, **Asian Short-toed Lark**, **Pale Martin**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **White-rumped Snowfinch**, **Twite**, and maybe even a **Saker Falcon** out hunting the abundance of prey. This will be a superb first day of the tour, with a high diversity of species and habitats, a delicious introduction to Qinghai cuisine, and some of the region's most spectacular landscapes.

Overnight: Plateau Sapphire Hotel, or similar, Gangcha



Przevalski's Redstart is one of the many stunning localized species we target (photo P. He).

Day 3. Birding at Qinghai Lake and Rubber Mountain

We will spend the morning birding the shores of Qinghai Lake for more of our targets listed for the afternoon of Day 2, likely in a different area of this vast lake. From here we head south toward Chaka, stopping to bird the Rubber Mountain. Being at a high elevation of around 12,500 feet (3,800 meters), we will have our first opportunity to see some truly high-quality targets on the tour, including the monotypic **Przevalski's Finch** (formerly Pink-tailed Rosefinch, also known as Przevalski's Pinktail), **Tibetan Partridge** and the beautiful endemic **White-browed Tit**. The surrounding steppe habitat is particularly good for redstarts and snowfinches, with possibilities including **Blue-fronted Redstart**, **White-throated Redstart**, **Güldenstädt's Redstart**, **Black-winged Snowfinch**, **White-rumped Snowfinch**, **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**, and two star endemics, the stunning **Przevalski's Redstart** and the localized **Tibetan Snowfinch**, both rarely seen by international birders. Many other exciting species inhabit the mixed scrub, meadows, and mountain slopes, including **Hill Pigeon**, **Salim Ali's Swift**, **Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier), **Himalayan Vulture**, **Upland Buzzard**, **Grey-backed Shrike**, the shy **Ground Tit**, **Tickell's**

Leaf Warbler, Smoky Warbler, Rufous-breasted Accentor, Brown Accentor, the attractive Robin Accentor, Streaked Rosefinch, and the aptly named Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch.

Overnight: Sky Mirror Grand Hotel, or similar, Chaka

Days 4 - 5. 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 Salt Lake, Chaka Flats, and the nearby Lake Xiligou. We will spend time birding the striking, starkly beautiful desert and rugged mountain ranges of Chaka, searching for plateau and desert species. These are some of the most remote and evocative landscapes of the tour. We have two full days to ensure we have a good chance of connecting with our special targets here, as some require a lot of patience to see, being well camouflaged in these vast and unforgiving surroundings. Our main targets include the gorgeous high-altitude desert specialist, **Pallas's Sandgrouse**, which is perfectly adapted to the desert steppe it thrives in. Other major targets include the brilliant **Mongolian Ground Jay**, **Pere David's Snowfinch**, **Blanford's Snowfinch**, and a whole host of special gamebirds such as **Tibetan Partridge**, **Daurian Partridge**, **Przevalski's Partridge**, the amazing **Tibetan Snowcock**, and with luck, **Himalayan Snowcock**. Other ground-based desert and mountain specialists include a long list of larks, pipits, and their allies, likely to include **Isabelline Shrike**, **Chinese Grey Shrike**, **Ground Tit**, **Horned Lark**, **Hume's Short-toed Lark**, **Mongolian Lark**, **Tibetan Lark**, **Asian Short-toed Lark**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Eastern Yellow Wagtail**, **Citrine Wagtail**, **Rosy Pipit**, and **Mongolian Finch**.



Pallas's Sandgrouse can be found in the Chaka area (photo P. He).

We will spend time in nearby valleys of bush fallows, meadows, and woodland patches, focusing on a different set of species. We will put time into searching for the elusive **Wallcreeper** and the habitat specialist **Tarim Babbler**, a globally restricted species endemic to northwest China, dependent on tamarisk and scrub within desert landscapes. Other birds likely in these habitats include **Common Cuckoo**, **Golden Eagle**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **Amur Falcon**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, **White-browed Tit**, **Bearded Reedling**, **White-backed Thrush**, **Przevalski's Redstart**, **White-throated Redstart**, **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**, **Przevalski's Finch**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **Great Rosefinch**, **Twite**, and **Pine Bunting**. Around the lakes, rivers, and waterbodies, we may encounter **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Red-crested Pochard**, **Common Merganser** (Goosander), **Black-necked Crane**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Black-necked Stilt**, **Pied Avocet**, **Tibetan Sand Plover**, **Kentish Plover**, **Common Redshank**, and **Common Tern**.

Overnight (two nights): Sky Mirror Grand Hotel, or similar, Chaka



*We will be in the realm of **Mongolian 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).*

Day 6. Longyangxia Canyon

We will spend the morning in Chaka, continuing to target species listed for Days 4 and 5, before driving east to Gonghe in the afternoon. After checking in to our comfortable hotel, we will visit the nearby Longyangxia Canyon, a truly breathtaking sight where steep, rugged mountain slopes drop dramatically to the turquoise waters of the river below. Our main target here is the delicate **Pale Rosefinch**, which we have a good chance of seeing. Other possibilities include **Przevalski's Partridge**, **Himalayan Vulture**, **Black-rumped Magpie**, **Eurasian Crag Martin**, **Lesser**

Whitethroat, Common Rock Thrush, White-rumped Snowfinch, Mongolian Finch, Oriental Greenfinch, Godlewski's Bunting, and possibly Chinese Rubythroat.

Overnight: Hainan Shenghu Yuelan International Hotel, or similar, Gonghe



Rufous-necked Snowfinch is one of six beautiful snowfinches that we will target on this tour (photo P. He).

Day 7. Birding Ela Mountain

With an early start we drive south, then spend the morning around Ela Mountain Pass at around 14,100 feet (4,300 meters), focusing on the alpine screes in search of high-altitude specialists. The pass is spectacularly impressive, with snow-capped peaks towering above vast, sweeping landscapes that seem to stretch endlessly in all directions. Here we will look for the highly range-restricted and rare **Tibetan Rosefinch**. Although scarce, we have a good chance for it at this site. We also have our best opportunity for **Tibetan Sandgrouse** and will dedicate time to searching for this striking species. As we slowly hike up the slopes, we will scan the mountain for **Bearded Vulture**, **Himalayan Vulture**, **Tibetan Lark**, **Wallcreeper**, **White-throated Dipper**, **Güldenstädt's Redstart**, **Robin Accentor**, and a brilliant diversity of snowfinches and mountain finches, with **White-rumped Snowfinch**, **Tibetan Snowfinch**, **Black-winged Snowfinch**, **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**, **Brandt's Mountain Finch**, and **Plain Mountain Finch** all possible.

Afterwards, we descend to a lower elevation, where we will search for a different suite of species among alpine pastures and stony ridges. This area offers further chances for rare and iconic birds, including both **Tibetan Snowcock** and **Himalayan Snowcock**. It is also particularly good for gamebirds, and we will look for **Tibetan Partridge** and **Przevalski's Partridge**, along with other

key species such as **Chinese Grey Shrike**, **Streaked Rosefinch**, and **Great Rosefinch**. Following our birding here, we will continue the journey south to Xinghai.

Overnight: HanTing Hotel, or similar, Xinghai

Day 8. Xinghai to Yushu

Today is mostly dedicated to a long drive southwest, through a vast and dramatic landscape of high-altitude grasslands, wide-open valleys, and snow-capped mountain ranges. As we journey towards Yushu, we climb to elevations exceeding 13,100 feet (4,000 meters), with scenery that is both remote and spectacular. Along the way, a few well-timed stops may reward us with exciting plateau species such as **Snow Pigeon**, the highly sought **Ibisbill**, and the striking **White-capped Redstart**, along with mammals including **Tibetan Gazelle**, **Kiang** (Tibetan Wild Ass), and **Tibetan Fox**.

Overnight: Sun Lake Holiday Hotel, or similar, Yushu



*The gorgeous **Chinese Rubythroat** is always a highly desired species (Photo P. He).*

Day 9. Birding the Kanda Shan Pass

We have an early start to make the most of the time we have in this special landscape and begin by birding the thickets and scrub in valleys surrounding Yushu. This is primarily to improve our views of **Przewalski's Finch**, and to improve our chances for the beautiful **Chinese Rubythroat** and **White-capped Redstart**, with **White-browed Tit**, **Ground Tit**, **Brown Accentor**, and **Robin Accentor** other targets here. We will then continue our journey south to Kanda Mountain, targeting

some specials of the eastern Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The scenery here is especially striking, with sweeping views across scrub-covered slopes and open alpine meadows, which should be in bloom during our visit. The mixture of flowering pastures and dense low vegetation makes this one of the more bird-rich mountain areas of the tour.



Przevalski's Finch is a monotypic family and is always a tour highlight (photo P. He).

We will spend much of the day birding the excellent Kanda Shan Pass, where we aim to see three rare and range-restricted species: **Buff-throated Monal-Partridge** (Szechenyi's Partridge), **Tibetan Babax**, and **Tibetan Bunting**, along with the characterful **White Eared Pheasant** and **Tibetan Snowcock**. China holds an exceptional diversity of rosefinches, and the Kanda Shan Pass is no exception, with six species possible. For us, the most important are the lovely **Pink-rumped Rosefinch** and **Red-fronted Rosefinch**, which we are unlikely to have encountered before. Other targets include **Tibetan Partridge**, **Snow Pigeon**, **Golden Eagle**, **Upland Buzzard**, **Red-billed Chough**, **Alpine Chough**, **White-browed Tit-warbler**, **Yellow-streaked Warbler**, **Tickell's Leaf Warbler**, **Elliot's Laughingthrush**, **Wallcreeper**, **White-backed Thrush**, **Blue-fronted Redstart**, **Hodgson's Redstart**, **Alpine Accentor**, **Plain Mountain Finch**, and **Godlewski's Bunting**. At the foot of the mountain we will search for the iconic **Ibisbill** in the river shoals.

Overnight: Jixiang Hotel, or similar, Nangqian

Days 10 - 11. Birding at Baizha Forest

We will spend two full days birding in the brilliant Baizha Forest, the southernmost point of the tour. We will depart early each morning to explore this well-forested mountain area, using the

golden hours to search for pheasants. Alongside the endemic **Buff-throated Monal-Partridge**, we have chances for **White Eared Pheasant**, **Blood Pheasant**, **Tibetan Snowcock**, and **Tibetan Partridge**. As the day unfolds, we will walk quiet forest trails and scan alpine meadows, focusing on a wide range of woodpeckers, tits, warblers, roserfinches, and others. High-priority targets include localized species such as **Sichuan Tit**, **Chinese Fulvetta**, **Tibetan Babax**, **Przevalski's Nuthatch**, and **Tibetan Serin**, along with beautiful and impressive species like **Crested Tit-warbler**, **Giant Laughingthrush**, **Himalayan Bluetail**, **Maroon-backed Accentor**, and **Three-banded Rosefinch**.



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

With two full days in this exceptional area, we will explore a variety of forested habitats across the elevation range, up to 14,100 feet (4,300 meters). This will allow us to encounter a high diversity of species, including **Snow Pigeon**, **Salim Ali's Swift**, **Eurasian Goshawk**, **Himalayan Buzzard**, **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Black Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Rufous-vented Tit**, **Grey Crested Tit**, **Sichuan Leaf Warbler**, **Greenish Warbler**, **Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler**, **Hodgson's Treecreeper**, **Dark-sided Flycatcher**, **White-bellied Redstart**, **White-throated Redstart**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **Pink-rumped Rosefinch**, and **Red-fronted Rosefinch**.

Overnight (two nights): Jixiang Hotel, or similar, Nangqian

Day 12. Transfer to Xining

We will spend the morning birding near Nangqian, continuing our search for Qinghai and Tibetan Plateau specials. There may be another chance to enjoy species such as **Ibisbill**, **Chinese Rubythroat**, or **White-capped Redstart** before we begin the drive north to Yushu. From here, we catch a late afternoon flight back to Xining. In the evening, we will gather for our final group dinner and reflect on the many highlights of the tour.

Overnight: Haidong International Hotel, or similar, Xining.



*We have a good chance of finding **Buff-throated Monal-Partridge** on this tour (photo P. He).*

Day 13. Tour concludes, departure from Xining

After breakfast, the tour concludes with a transfer to Xining Caojiabao International Airport for your onward flight.

Overnight: Not included



*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 P. He).*

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 guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Duration: 13 days

Group Size: 4 - 8

Dates: 29 May – 10 June 2027

Start: Xining Caojiabao International Airport, Qinghai, China

End: Xining Caojiabao International Airport, Qinghai, China

Prices: US\$7,675 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants

Single Supplements: US\$690

Price includes:

Accommodation based on two sharing (from Day 1 to Day 12 as described)
Meals (from lunch on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 13)
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, and airport pick-up and drop-off

Price excludes:

Flights to and from Xining Caojiabao International Airport
Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)
Airport transfers if you arrive before the tour starts or depart after the tour ends
Visa fees if visa required (we will provide you with an ‘Invitation Letter’, usually required to obtain 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
Alcoholic, soft drinks, teas, coffees etc. unless provided as part of a meal package (e.g. with breakfast)
Personal travel insurance
Camera permits where necessary
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))