

The Birds of Yunnan's Forests & Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Arrive Kunming & transfer to Baoshan
Day 3-5	Baihualing & the Gaoligong Mountains
Day 6-7	Yingjiang
Day 8-10	Hongbenghe – Hornbill Valley
Day 11	Tenchong
Day 12	Lijiang
Day 13	Travel to N Yunnan
Day 14	Biet's Laughingthrush Hide, Return to Lijiang
Day 14	Depart Lijiang
Day 15	Arrive London

Departs

January & February

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code CHN07) or the Naturetrek brochure.

Grading

Grade B. Slow-paced walks, but sometimes over rough ground and steep trails. Some long travel days.

Focus

Birds

Highlights:

- The special birds of China's Yunnan Province
- Mrs Hume's, Lady Amherst's & Grey Peacock-pheasant
- Sensational range of forest birds including laughingthrushes, sibilias, barwings & many others
- Rare endemics such as Biet's Laughingthrush
- Birdwatching on foot & from specially constructed bird hides in spectacular forest & mountain scenery
- Extend tour to see the rare Black Snub-nosed Monkey



From the top: Red-tailed Laughingthrush, Grey Peacock-pheasant & Black Snub-nosed Monkey.



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Introduction

The Chinese province of Yunnan lies in the far south-west of China and borders Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. Covering an immense range of elevations and habitats, it boasts the richest birdlife of any Chinese province, with more than 800 species recorded to date. From the subtropical forests that cloak the frontier with Myanmar to the rugged mountains and high plateaux of the north, Yunnan offers some of the finest birdwatching in Asia and an extraordinary diversity of wildlife.

This tour focuses on the province's remarkable avian treasures, combining some of China's most celebrated birding sites with outstanding opportunities for photography and observation. In the forests of Baihualing and the Gaoligong Mountains, we will search for an exceptional range of laughingthrushes, babblers, thrushes and pheasants, including Mrs Hume's Pheasant, Rufous-throated Partridge, Beautiful Sibia and Scarlet Finch. Further south, in the tropical forests of Hongbenghe, we will look for such specialities as Grey Peacock-pheasant, White-cheeked Partridge, Blue-naped Pitta and the magnificent Great and Wreathed Hornbills.

Our journey then takes us north through western Yunnan to the mountains around Lijiang, where we will search for upland species such as Yunnan Nuthatch and Lady Amherst's Pheasant before making a dedicated visit to one of the province's greatest birding prizes – the globally threatened Biet's Laughingthrush. Few places in Asia offer such an impressive collection of endemic, rare and highly sought-after birds within a single itinerary.

For those wishing to extend their holiday, there is also the opportunity to visit a troop of wild Black Snub-nosed Monkeys. Restricted to the high mountains of north-western Yunnan, this bizarre and endangered primate ranks amongst the rarest mammals in the world and provides a fitting finale to an unforgettable exploration of one of Asia's premier birdwatching destinations.

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Depart London

We depart London on an overnight flight bound for Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province and one of the most biodiverse regions in all of China. Stretching from the snow-capped mountains that fringe the Tibetan Plateau to the tropical forests that border Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, Yunnan is home to an extraordinary variety of habitats and supports more bird species than any other province in the country. Our forthcoming journey will take us through a remarkable cross-section of these landscapes, focusing on some of the finest birdwatching sites in south-west China and offering unrivalled opportunities to observe and photograph many of the region's most sought-after birds.

Day 2

Arrive Kunming & Transfer to Baoshan

Following our arrival in Kunming we continue westwards to Baoshan, gateway to the magnificent Gaoligong Mountains. The journey provides our first introduction to the scenery of western Yunnan,

where cultivated valleys, forested hillsides and rugged mountain ridges combine to create one of Asia's most spectacular landscapes.

Depending on our arrival time, there may be an opportunity to begin exploring the countryside around Baoshan. Even roadside birding in Yunnan can be rewarding, and species unfamiliar to most Western birders often appear almost immediately. We will spend the night in a comfortable hotel in Baoshan, well placed for our journey into the Gaoligong Mountains tomorrow.

Day 3 – 5

Baihualing & the Gaoligong Mountains

After breakfast we drive approximately two hours to Baihualing, a small settlement nestled beneath the forested slopes of the Gaoligong Mountains. Regarded by many as one of China's premier birdwatching destinations, Baihualing has become renowned for its exceptional network of photographic hides and the astonishing diversity of birds that these attract.



Mrs. Hume's Pheasant

Over the next three days we will divide our time between the hides and the surrounding forest trails. The hides provide an opportunity to enjoy prolonged views of species that elsewhere are often little more than fleeting shadows in dense vegetation. The quality of observation is frequently exceptional and the photographic opportunities are among the finest available anywhere in Asia.

Our target list is impressive. The area is famous for its pheasants and partridges, and we will hope to encounter Mrs Hume's Pheasant, Hill Partridge, Rufous-throated Partridge, White-cheeked Partridge and Mountain Bamboo Partridge. During the winter months the forests also host an extraordinary array of laughingthrushes, many of which visit the hides regularly. Among them are Assam, Grey-sided, Moustached, Scaly, Blue-winged and Red-tailed Laughingthrushes, each displaying its own distinctive plumage and behaviour.

The supporting cast is equally impressive. Beautiful and Long-tailed Sibias are among the most striking birds of the mountain forests, while Red-faced Liocichla, Rusty-fronted Barwing and Slender-billed Scimitar-babbler all rank amongst the highlights of any visit to the region. More skulking species such as Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler and Lesser Shortwing may also reveal themselves, while mixed feeding flocks often contain a bewildering assortment of leaf-warblers and other small insectivorous birds.

The area's thrushes are particularly attractive. Scaly Thrush, Chinese Thrush, Black-breasted Thrush and Grey-winged Blackbird all occur, whilst wintering robins and flycatchers add further variety. Scarlet Finch, one of the most dazzling members of the mountain bird community, is another regular visitor to some of the feeding stations.

Away from the hides we will spend time walking the forest trails that climb into the Gaoligong Mountains. These ancient forests cloak steep mountain valleys and provide habitat for a remarkable diversity of

wildlife. In addition to the birds, the scenery itself is unforgettable, with giant trees draped in mosses and lichens creating an atmosphere more reminiscent of a tropical cloudforest than mainland China.

The combination of spectacular scenery, outstanding bird diversity and some of the best hide birding anywhere in the world makes Baihualing a truly unforgettable introduction to Yunnan.

Day 6 – 7

Yingjiang

Following a final morning at Baihualing we continue south-west to Yingjiang, close to the border with Myanmar. The transition from cool mountain forest to lower-altitude riverine habitat introduces a completely different suite of birds and provides an exciting contrast to the previous few days.

Yingjiang occupies a strategic position in one of the most biologically rich parts of southern Yunnan. Here a mixture of rivers, farmland, scrub and patches of lowland forest supports an impressive range of species, many of which reach the northern limits of their distribution in this region.

Much of our birding will take place around the Daying River, where broad gravel banks and shallow channels provide ideal habitat for a number of specialities. River Tern is one of the principal attractions, while Little Pratincole, River Lapwing and Indian Spot-billed Duck are all possibilities. The open nature of the habitat often allows excellent views and photographic opportunities.

Elsewhere we will explore local parks, farmland and woodland edges. White-browed Piculet, one of Asia's smallest woodpeckers, is regularly encountered, while Chestnut-tailed Starling, Burmese Shrike and Rufous-necked Laughingthrush all occur in the area. Wintering passerines can be numerous and every day offers the possibility of unexpected discoveries. We spend two nights in Yingjiang.

Day 8 – 10

Hornbill Valley (Hongbenghe)

Great Hornbill



A short drive brings us to Hongbenghe, often known as Hornbill Valley, one of the most exciting birdwatching destinations in southern China. Located close to the Myanmar border, this area preserves an important block of tropical forest and supports a bird community very different from that of the high mountains further north.

Like Baihualing, Hongbenghe has developed a network of

specialist hides that allow remarkable close encounters with many of the forest's most elusive inhabitants. During the next three days we will make extensive use of these facilities whilst also exploring the surrounding trails and forest roads.

Among the highlights are several sought-after gamebirds. Grey Peacock-pheasant is perhaps the ultimate prize and can often be observed at close range, while Kalij Pheasant, White-cheeked Partridge and Red



Lady Amherst's Pheasant

Junglefowl also visit the hides. Watching these normally secretive birds emerge silently from the forest is one of the great experiences of birding in Yunnan.

The forests support a colourful cast of babblers, laughingthrushes and forest passerines. Crested Laughingthrush, White-hooded Babbler, Pale-billed Parrotbill and both Greater and Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbills are regularly encountered. Common Green Magpie adds a splash of brilliant colour, while Dark-sided Thrush, Large Scimitar-babbler and Red-billed

Scimitar-babbler are among numerous other possibilities.

One of the most coveted birds in the region is the spectacular Blue-naped Pitta. This jewel-like species is often considered one of Asia's most beautiful birds and a sighting would represent a major highlight of the tour.

Birding beyond the hides can be equally rewarding. Great Slaty Woodpecker may be encountered along forest trails, whilst Jerdon's Baza, Oriental Hobby and Collared Falconet patrol the skies above the valley. Pin-tailed Green Pigeon and Crested Treeswift add a distinctly tropical flavour to the avifauna.

Hongbenghe's greatest claim to fame, however, is reflected in its nickname 'Hornbill Valley'. The forests remain one of the few areas in China where hornbills still occur with some regularity. Oriental Pied Hornbill is the species most frequently encountered, but with luck we may also observe the magnificent Wreathed Hornbill or even Great Hornbill soaring over the forest canopy or crossing the valley from neighbouring Myanmar. Such encounters rank among the most memorable wildlife experiences that Asia has to offer. We spend three nights in this remarkable area.

Day 11

Tenchong

Today we drive north to Tenchong. Although often viewed as a convenient stopover, this attractive town possesses one of China's finest urban birding sites. The extensive parkland in the centre of town supports an unexpectedly rich bird community and has become increasingly popular amongst Chinese bird photographers.

We will spend time exploring the park and making use of its hides in search of local specialities such as Slender-billed Oriole, Brown-winged Parrotbill and Bar-throated Minla. Wintering thrushes and leaf-warblers are often abundant, and the combination of mature trees, ornamental planting and water features creates an excellent environment for birdwatching.

After our afternoon's birding, we spend the night in a comfortable hotel.

Day 12

Lijiang

A longer drive takes us north-east to Lijiang, one of Yunnan's most famous destinations. Set beneath a dramatic mountain backdrop, this historic town provides access to a range of upland habitats supporting several highly desirable species.

The forests and surrounding countryside hold a distinctly different bird community from that encountered elsewhere on the tour. Our principal targets include Lady Amherst's Pheasant, perhaps one of the most spectacular pheasants in the world, together with Black-bibbed Tit, Sharpe's Rosefinch, Yunnan Nuthatch and Black-capped Greenfinch.

The scenery around Lijiang is also exceptional, and snow-capped peaks often dominate the horizon as we explore the surrounding habitats. We spend the night in Lijiang.

Day 13

Journey to the Biet's Laughingthrush Area

Today we travel into increasingly remote areas of northern Yunnan in search of one of China's most celebrated endemic birds. The journey itself is rewarding, taking us through dramatic mountain scenery and a succession of beautiful landscapes.

We will bird along the route whenever opportunities arise and may encounter a variety of montane species while travelling. By late afternoon we reach our accommodation close to the Biet's Laughingthrush site, ready for an early start tomorrow.

Day 14

Biet's Laughingthrush Hides & Return to Lijiang

Today is devoted to one of the great prizes of Yunnan birding. Biet's Laughingthrush is one of China's rarest endemic birds and one which many visiting birdwatchers dream of seeing. The carefully managed hides in this area provide perhaps the best opportunity anywhere to observe and photograph this highly local species.

In addition to our principal target, we may encounter a number of other attractive mountain birds

including Spotted Laughingthrush, Moustached Laughingthrush, Bar-winged Wren-babbler, Crimson-browed Finch and Manipur Fulvetta. The surrounding scenery is also superb and provides a fitting finale to our exploration of Yunnan's forests and mountains.

After our morning's birding, we return to Lijiang for our final night in the province.



Day 15

Depart Lijiang

We transfer to Lijiang Airport for our return journey via Kunming and onward international connections. As we travel southwards for the final time, there will be an opportunity to reflect upon an extraordinary journey through one of Asia's most bird-rich and scenically spectacular regions.

Day 16

Arrive London

We arrive back in London after our overnight flight.

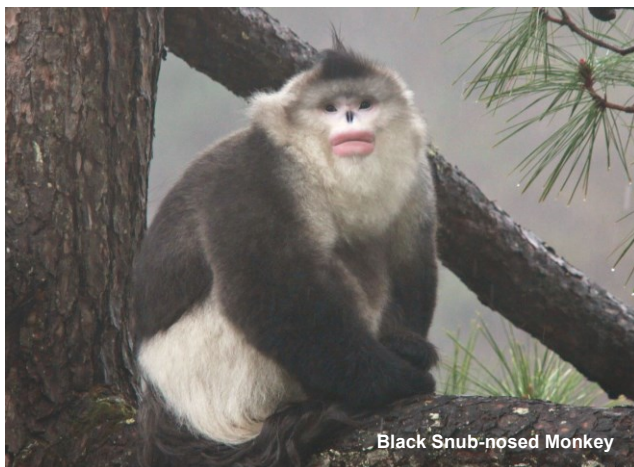
Black Snub-nosed Monkey Extension

On this 3-night extension we offer the opportunity to visit a troop of habituated, but wild, Black Snub-nosed Monkeys, a bizarre-looking and endangered primate that lives in a forested reserve close to the village of Tacheng.

Day 15 – 16

Tacheng

On the morning of Day 15 we will drive for around four hours from Lijiang to the village of Tacheng for a 2-night stay in comfortable, but simple, en suite chalets inside the park. Arriving in the early afternoon we will spend the rest of the day birdwatching in the region's montane forests where we have a chance of finding an interesting range of birds including Blood Pheasant, Lady Amherst's Pheasant, Blue-fronted Redstart, Himalayan Bluetail, Grey-headed Bullfinch and Vinaceous Rosefinch.



Black Snub-nosed Monkey

The following day we will join a member of the reserve staff and head out into the park in search of the Black Snub-nosed Monkeys (also known as Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey). This bizarre primate is restricted to the Yunling mountain range of northern Yunnan and has been classified by the IUCN as endangered with a population trend that is decreasing. The thick lips of the males coupled with their upturned nose and lack of a nasal bone give them a very unusual and unique appearance. Black Snub-nosed Monkeys live at around 10,000 feet and so visitors need to be prepared for the high

altitude, cold conditions and the need to walk around three kilometres or so to find the animals (mostly on a paved path but with some steep climbs). A good level of fitness is therefore required.

After spending an hour with the monkeys, we will spend the rest of the day birdwatching in the forests and other habitats around Tacheng.

Day 17

Lijiang

After a final morning exploring the varied habitats around Tacheng and looking for a few of the birds we may have missed previously we will return to Lijiang for an overnight stay.

Day 18 – 19

Fly London

We have an early start this morning to catch a domestic flight to Kunming, where we connect with our flight back to London

Tour Focus & Grading

Grade B – The main focus of this tour will be the birdlife of Yunnan, which we will enjoy on foot and from specially constructed hides. Trails are undulating but can be steep and – after rain – slippery in places and participants should be comfortable walking in such terrain. Walks will be conducted at a slow pace, however, with plenty of stops to view birds and other wildlife. The tour will involve plenty of early starts (the best times for the birds!) and several long drives when travelling between the key sites. On the travel days, we will be accompanied by an expert naturalist at all times, who will be on hand to point out any wildlife of interest en route and will provide comfort breaks and opportunities to 'stretch your legs' where possible.

Accommodation & Food

Throughout the tour we will be staying in simple, but comfortable, 'western-style' tourist hotels with private facilities and western toilets. All meals are included in the price of this holiday from dinner on Day 2 to breakfast on Day 15 (Day 18 if joining the Black Snub-nosed Monkey extension).

Group Size

The group will consist of a maximum of eight clients, plus a Naturetrek tour leader and a local naturalist guide.

Extra Expenses

The cost of the holiday does not include drinks, tips, locally paid airport taxes and all items of a personal nature.

Weather

In February the average daily temperatures in Kunming range from the mid- to upper teens degrees Celsius. In the forests along the border with Myanmar it will be warm and humid but cooler in the early mornings and evenings. However, at the higher altitude sites around Lijiang it will be much cooler and so warm clothing should be packed along with lighter gear. Those opting to join the Black Snub-nosed Monkey extension should be prepared for cold conditions at the high altitude at which the monkeys live, with the possibility of snow on the ground and wintery showers. Some rainfall is likely, especially in the more tropical forests near Myanmar. This is a tour where participants need to pack for a wide range of temperatures!

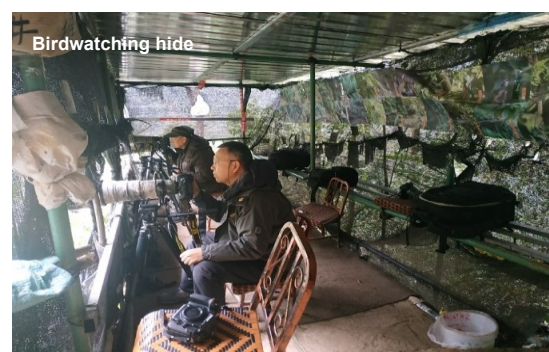
Your Safety & Security

You have chosen to travel to China. Risks to your safety and security are an unavoidable aspect of all travel and the best current advice on such risks is provided for you by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. In order to assess and protect against any risks in your chosen destination, it is essential that you refer to the Foreign Office website: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/china or telephone 0870 6060290 prior to travel.

Since we will be travelling close to the border with Myanmar, it is likely that our group will be stopped a couple of times at routine security checkpoints. You should therefore keep your passport with you at all times.

How to Book Your Place

In order to book a place on this holiday, you will need to read the Naturetrek terms and conditions in the back of our brochure or on our website, and then book either online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, by calling us on 01962 733051, or by completing and returning the booking form in the brochure together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost. If you do not have a copy of this brochure, please call us on 01962 733051.



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