

The Birds of South East China in Winter

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Arrive Wuhan & transfer to Dongzhai
Day 3	Dongzhai Nature Reserve
Day 4	Dongzhai to Jiujiang
Day 5-6	Wuyuan
Day 7-8	Mingxi & White-eared Night Heron
Day 9-11	Emei Feng & Cabot's Tragopan
Day 12-14	Poyang Lake
Day 15	Depart Nanchang
Day 16	Arrive London

Departs

November/December

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code CHN10)

Grading

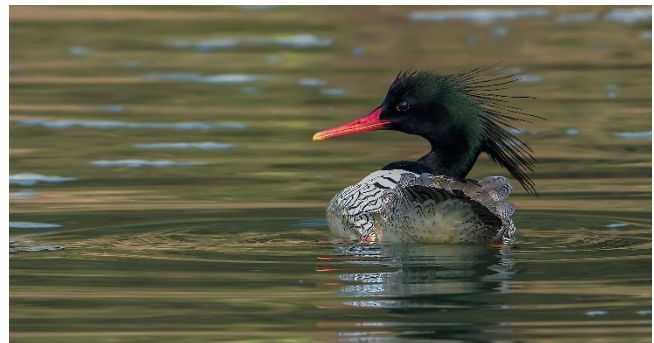
Grade B. Slow-paced walks, but sometimes over rough ground and steep trails. Some long travel days.

Focus

Birds.

Highlights:

- A tour seeking the special birds of China's south-east in winter
- Spectacular pheasants including Cabot's Tragopan, Eliot's Pheasant and Reeve's Pheasant
- Sought-after wildfowl such as Scaly-sided Merganser and the vanishingly rare Baer's Pochard
- Siberian, White-necked, Hooded and Common Cranes
- Night-time spotlighting by boat for the enigmatic White-eared Night Heron
- A wealth of wintering eastern palearctic passerines



Siberian Crane, Scaly-sided Merganser & Yellow-throated Bunting



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Introduction

The provinces of Henan, Jiangxi and Fujian in south-eastern China harbour some of the country's most celebrated birdwatching sites and support an extraordinary concentration of rare, endemic and globally threatened species. From the forests of the Dabie Mountains and the traditional river valleys of Wuyuan to the vast wetlands of Poyang Lake and the subtropical forests of Fujian, this region offers a remarkable diversity of habitats and some of the finest winter birding in Asia.

This tour focuses on the outstanding avian specialities of eastern China, combining renowned bird reserves, carefully managed photographic hides and some of the country's most important wintering sites. At Dongzhai we will search for the magnificent Reeve's Pheasant and the increasingly scarce Crested Ibis, whilst nearby wetlands offer the possibility of the critically endangered Baer's Pochard. The beautiful countryside around Wuyuan provides opportunities to look for Chinese Merganser, Pied Falconet, Huet's Fulvetta and Orange-bellied Leafbird, whilst the forests and river valleys of Fujian hold such highly sought-after birds as Elliot's Pheasant, Blyth's Kingfisher and the extraordinarily elusive White-eared Night Heron.

Our journey then continues through the forested mountains of Emei Feng, one of the best locations in China to search for the stunning Cabot's Tragopan, before culminating at the immense wetlands of Poyang Lake. Wintering here are the vast majority of the world's remaining Siberian Cranes, alongside Oriental Stork, countless waterfowl and a wealth of other wetland birds. Few birdwatching itineraries can rival the combination of endemic pheasants, rare waterbirds, forest specialities and globally threatened species found on this remarkable tour.

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 to Wuhan, beginning an exciting exploration of some of East Asia's most remarkable birdwatching destinations.

Day 2

Arrive Wuhan & Transfer to Dongzhai

Following our arrival in China, we continue to Wuhan before transferring by road to the renowned Dongzhai National Nature Reserve. Situated within the Dabie Mountains, Dongzhai protects extensive tracts of broadleaved woodland interspersed with reservoirs, farmland and traditional villages. This varied landscape supports an impressive diversity of birdlife and has become one of the most important birdwatching sites in eastern China.



Reeve's Pheasant

Should flight schedules permit, we hope to begin our exploration of the reserve this afternoon. The principal attraction is undoubtedly Reeve's Pheasant, one of the world's most spectacular gamebirds. Endemic to China, the male's astonishingly long tail can exceed one and a half metres in length and makes an unforgettable first impression. Carefully managed viewing hides offer the opportunity to observe and photograph these magnificent birds at close range.

We spend our first two nights in comfortable accommodation close to the reserve.

Day 3

Dongzhai Nature Reserve

We devote a full day to exploring Dongzhai's varied habitats. Early morning is the best time to visit the pheasant hides and we will position ourselves before dawn in the hope of witnessing Reeve's Pheasants emerging quietly from the surrounding forest.

The reserve offers much more than pheasants, however. Dongzhai is an important stronghold for the reintroduced Crested Ibis, one of the great conservation success stories of modern ornithology. Once thought on the brink of extinction, this striking species can now be seen feeding in traditional agricultural landscapes around the reserve.

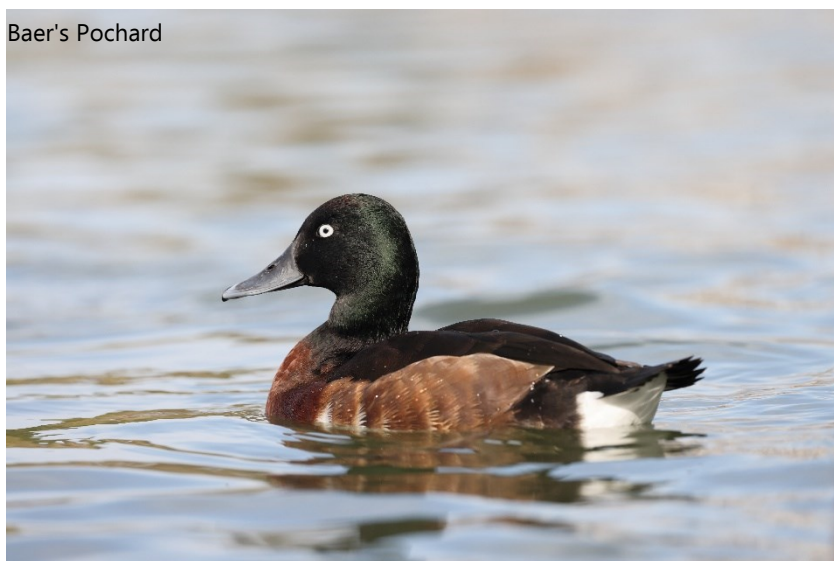
Other possibilities include Crested Kingfisher along rocky streams, White-crowned Forktail, Yellow-browed Bunting, Rustic Bunting and Masked Laughingthrush. Mixed feeding flocks may contain Silver-throated Bushtit, while woodland trails can produce surprises at any time. The attractive Siberian Bluetail is another species regularly encountered during the winter months.

The reserve's wooded hills and tranquil scenery provide a wonderful introduction to eastern China's birdlife and we spend a full day exploring the area's many birding opportunities.

Day 4

Dongzhai to Jiujiang

Baer's Pochard



After a final morning in Dongzhai, we begin our journey south-west towards Jiujiang. En route we will make birding stops wherever conditions look favourable, taking advantage of opportunities to explore agricultural land, reservoirs and woodland.

Our destination is one of the most important wintering areas for Baer's Pochard. This globally threatened diving duck has undergone a catastrophic decline

in recent decades and finding good numbers today represents a special privilege. Depending on our

arrival time we will make an initial visit to the site and search for this highly endangered species amongst the many other waterbirds that winter in the region.

We spend the night close to the reserve, allowing a further opportunity to search for Baer's Pochard the following morning if necessary.

Day 5 – 6

Wuyuan

Following our morning birding around Jiujiang, we continue to Wuyuan, one of China's most attractive rural regions. Characterised by rolling hills, bamboo groves, clear rivers and traditional villages, Wuyuan has become famous amongst birdwatchers for a number of highly desirable species.

Foremost amongst these is the remarkable Scaly-sided Merganser. One of the world's rarest sawbills, it winters along fast-flowing rivers where clear water and undisturbed conditions remain. Searching for this elegant and highly distinctive duck is one of the highlights of our time in eastern China.

The surrounding countryside supports a wealth of other specialities. Pied Falconet, one of Asia's smallest raptors, is regularly encountered, while forested valleys provide habitat for Huet's Fulvetta, Short-tailed Parrotbill and Orange-bellied Leafbird. The varied landscape means every day can produce fresh discoveries and we will spend time exploring rivers, woodland and traditional farmland in search of the area's many birding attractions.

Wuyuan's picturesque scenery and traditional architecture also make it one of the most appealing regions we visit during the tour. We spend two nights here.

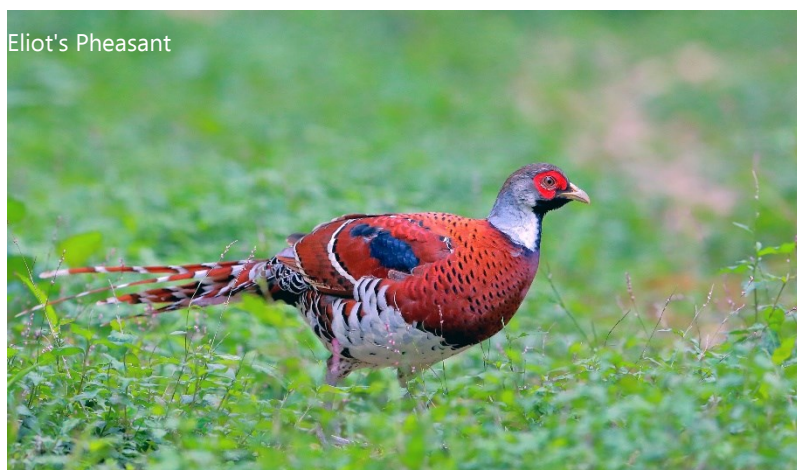
Day 7 – 8

Mingxi & White-eared Night Heron

Today we travel south to Mingxi in Fujian Province, an area that has rapidly become one of China's premier birdwatching destinations. The journey is longer than some previous travel days, but the rewards awaiting us are considerable.

Mingxi is renowned for a remarkable collection of highly localised and elusive species. Foremost amongst them is Elliot's Pheasant, perhaps the region's most celebrated endemic gamebird. Carefully maintained hides provide an excellent opportunity to observe this beautiful species under ideal conditions.

The forests also support such sought-after birds as Sultan Tit and Slaty-backed Forktail, whilst streams and wooded valleys provide habitat for the elusive Blyth's Kingfisher.



The highlight for many visitors, however, is undoubtedly White-eared Night Heron. One of the world's rarest herons, this enigmatic species was once considered one of Asia's most difficult birds to see. Following dinner we undertake a special evening excursion by boat in search of this extraordinary bird, hoping to observe it as it emerges to feed along quiet forest rivers.

A second full day in the area allows us further opportunities to search for any species we may have missed and to enjoy the excellent birding opportunities offered by the forests and valleys surrounding Mingxi.

Day 9 – 11

Emei Feng & Cabot's Tragopan

A relatively short drive brings us to Emei Feng, one of the most important birdwatching sites in south-eastern China. Situated amongst forested mountains and characterised by extensive areas of mature woodland, the reserve protects habitat for one of China's most spectacular endemic pheasants.

Our principal target is Cabot's Tragopan. The male, with its intricate patterning and brilliant colours, ranks amongst the most beautiful members of the pheasant family. Thanks to carefully managed feeding areas and hides, Emei Feng offers one of the best opportunities anywhere to observe this remarkable bird.



During our stay we will make repeated visits to the tragopan sites whilst also exploring the surrounding forests. Resident woodland species, wintering passerines and a variety of other forest birds can all be encountered. The scenic mountain environment provides a welcome contrast to the wetlands and river valleys visited earlier in the tour.

Three days in the Emei Feng region should provide ample opportunity to appreciate both its scenery and remarkable birdlife.

Day 12 – 14

Poyang Lake

Today we travel westwards to Poyang Lake, one of the greatest freshwater wetlands on Earth and unquestionably one of the finest birdwatching sites in Asia.

During winter, the shrinking waters of this vast lake create extensive mudflats, shallow pools and wet grasslands that attract immense numbers of wintering waterbirds. Amongst them are some of the rarest and most threatened species on the planet.

The star attraction is undoubtedly the Siberian Crane. More than 90% of the world's remaining population winters around Poyang Lake and the sight of these elegant white cranes feeding across the wetlands is one of the defining wildlife spectacles of Asia.

Our visits to the reserve will also focus on Oriental Stork, Swan Goose and a huge variety of ducks, geese and other waterbirds. Depending upon water levels and conditions, we may encounter thousands of birds concentrated into surprisingly small areas, providing some truly spectacular birdwatching.

The famous 'Five Star Farm' area is one of the key wintering locations for Siberian Crane and we will spend time carefully searching the wetlands, allowing opportunities for photography and detailed observation. Large numbers of commoner cranes, wintering raptors and other wetland birds can also be expected.

Such is the quality of birding that we devote two full days to the area before beginning our journey home.

Day 15

Depart Nanchang

After a final morning around Poyang Lake, we transfer to Nanchang Airport for our flight onwards to Shanghai and our international connections home. Depending upon airline schedules, an overnight stop in Shanghai may be required before continuing our journey to the United Kingdom.

Day 16

Arrive London

We arrive back in London after our overnight flight.

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



Oriental Stork

days, we will be accompanied by an expert naturalist at all times, who will be on hand to point out any wildlife of interest enroute 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.

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 winter, south-eastern China experiences a wide range of weather conditions, reflecting the diversity of habitats visited during the tour. Temperatures are generally cool and comfortable, with daytime temperatures often reaching the low to mid-teens Celsius in the lowlands and river valleys, although frosty mornings are possible, particularly inland and at higher elevations. Around Dongzhai and Wuyuan, conditions are typically cool and dry, making for pleasant birdwatching, although warm layers are recommended for early morning starts.

Further south in Fujian Province, the climate is generally milder and more humid, especially in the forested valleys around Mingxi and Emei Feng. Here, temperatures are usually comfortable during the day, but rain or mist can occur at any time and lightweight waterproof clothing should always be carried.

The wetlands of Poyang Lake can feel considerably colder, particularly when exposed to strong northerly winds blowing across the open water and mudflats. Warm clothing, including a hat and gloves, is recommended for prolonged periods spent observing cranes and waterfowl in these exposed conditions. Overall, participants should pack for a range of temperatures and weather conditions, including cool mornings, mild afternoons and the possibility of rain. Layered clothing is strongly recommended, allowing you to adapt comfortably to the varied conditions encountered during this fascinating winter journey through eastern China.

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.



Pied Falconet