

Panda tracking and birdwatching trip report, Shaanxi, China.
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I and Bert S. spent a week in Qinling mountains. For the first four days, we were accompanied by Austrian-Danish couple living in Shanghai. Our visit was organized by Zoe Zuo of Wild Giant Panda <http://www.wildgiantpanda.com/contact.htm>.



Giant panda, golden snub-nosed monkeys, (c) Jerzy Dyczkowski

Foping reserve

It is located ca 4 hour drive from Xi'an. It is definitely interesting. 8 km of concrete path to the station, small water power plant, several buildings including ugly two-floor tourist hotel – all were built with all material carried by horseback. There is no paved road. The station provides food, running cold water, no heating but electric blankets and hot water in containers.

Wild birds and mammals are common in the reserve and not very shy, definite sign of successful conservation. One night when we were there, a panda walked on the concrete path and fed right next to the station, leaving behind only dung and feeding signs.

Panda tracking

It is not cheap, and views of panda are likely to be brief and frustrating. The station has several trackers who search for pandas in the bamboo thickets. Some trackers are very dedicated, one has a tendency to take a rest and talk through his mobile phone(!). If they find a panda, you should go with them very quietly (much more quiet than normally birding) and hope to see the panda feeding in the bamboo



Red-and-white Giant Flying Squirrel, Golden Pheasants, (c) Jerzy Dyczkowski

thicket. One needs to be fit, and also very quiet. Pandas at Foping are not rare and not so shy, but hillsides are very steep and thick bamboo blocks the view.

Panda sightings

During five days at Foping we saw pandas three times. First day early morning, trackers took us to the place where panda was seen the day before. We saw panda for about 20 seconds at small distance, as it went between two patches of bamboo.

The second day was spend sitting on the meadow, boring and being frustrated, because trackers couldn't find a panda despite best efforts. On day three, we borrowed a radio from the trackers. This at least allowed us to birdwatch without being tied to waiting for trackers. Towards the evening, trackers located another panda in thick bamboo. At ca 30 m distance, we saw only bamboo moving, loud gnawing, and tiny patch of black-and-white fur was visible for several seconds in thick bamboo. Then rustles of bamboo announced that the panda has moved, squeaking repeatedly. Perhaps it heard us rustling, or trackers talking loudly by radio and their mobile phones (really!). We were really downhearted. We noticed, however, that sounds of the panda are not moving away anymore. We crept in bamboo on all fours, and suddenly saw the black-and-white rump laying in thick bamboo about 6 m from us. It was squeaking rhythmically, and we realized that panda is apparently having a nap and snoring. After about a minute it got up and trotted rather relaxedly away. These two observations of the panda were really not satisfactory.

The really good sighting came evening the last day. After trackers left, we stayed to bird until dusk. As we passed a local farm, the farmer called us. Panda was in the forest right behind his orchard! We could watch it for about 15 minutes, as it fed at down to 10 m distance and several times walked to new bamboo clumps. Another group of three Englishmen got views of it, too. They included some elderly people, who had definite luck to have panda so conveniently close.

On the day first, we also had a longer walk. We were taken to the valley ca 2 h from the station, to see Red-and-White Giant Flying Squirrel. They roost in hollow trees, and one was seen as trackers knocked at its tree. We then went further on the slopes and saw, among others, a distant troop of Golden Monkeys spotted by our tracker.



Ibisbill, Crested Ibis, (c) Jerzy Dyczkowski

One possibility we missed was all day trek to the treeline for Takin, Goral and perhaps Temminck's Tragopan. We concentrated on trying better views of pandas instead.

Birdwatching at Foping

We birdwatched every morning and during waiting time. The forest was mostly cold and quiet, feeling late winter. Nevertheless, several good species were seen like Barred Laughingthrush, Spectacled Parrotbill and Golden-breasted Fulvetta. Last two days were warmer and birds more active.

Spotlighting at Foping

We spotlighted every evening. Spotlighting was productive on the concrete track to the research station. Particular good was area around big, concrete picnic shed ca 0,5 hrs walk from the station, where forest has grass understory instead of thick bamboo. Much shorter walk downhill from the station to the suspension bridge on the creek was also productive for spotlighting.

Dapingyu

On the way to Crested Ibis, we stopped for ca 1h at Dapingyu/Da Ping Yu, which is a kind of nature reserve crossed with wildlife park. Here we saw a group of wild but semi-habituated Golden Monkeys which are fed vegetables. At midday some rather shy monkeys were feeding, but most were sleeping on trees across the narrow valley. There are also captive pandas and tragopans there, which we ignored.

Foping county town

Outskirts of Foping Country town, near the police station, is a known place for Ibisbill and Collared Crow. We were surprised that Ibisbills were in a noisy place with people, gravel extracting machines etc. We found Ibisbill nest. Nesting behavior was visible from the road, and they returned to the nest as soon as we left the river valley to the road.

Yangxian county town

Our final destination was Yangxian county (town). We saw Crested Ibises and Long-billed Plovers on the small creek next to the rather active road. We also saw captive ibises in the gigantic aviary of the breeding centre. The ibis creek is crossed by the road from the town to the aviary, and continues to the right. More wild Crested Ibis were seen roosting on the trees on the nearby hill near colony of herons and egrets. We also travelled around the local fields of rapeseed and suchlike for some smaller birds. Yangxian was warmer and birds more active than in Foping.

Mammal list:

1. Golden Snub-nosed Monkey - *Rhinopithecus roxellana qinlingensis*
3 seen Foping reserve, 20+ habituated seen in Dapingyu reserve.
2. Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel – *Petaurista alborufus*
1 seen Foping reserve
3. Pere David's Rock Squirrel – *Sciurotamias davidianus*
Several seen at Foping reserve, many at Dapingyu, one at roadside stop in Qinling Mts.
4. Rothschild's Zokor – *Eospalax rothschildi*
1 seen Foping reserve, when it was dug out, killed and eaten by a domestic dog.
5. Chinese Bamboo Rat - *Rhizomys sinensis*
Foping reserve. 1 was heard gnawing and seen pulling a bamboo stem underground, but animal itself was not seen or heard. Mounds of apparently this species were also encountered several times in the forest.
6. Leopard Cat – *Prionailurus bengalensis chinensis*
1 Foping reserve, spotlighted at night.
7. Giant Panda – *Ailuropoda melanoleuca qinlingensis*
3x1 seen at Foping reserve.
8. Mountain Weasel – *Mustela altaica*
1 seen in farmland at Yangxian.
9. Wild Boar – *Sus scrofa chrodontus* or *moupinensis*
One seen at dawn 8.04, signs of rooting seen several times at Foping.
10. Tufted Deer – *Elaphodus cephalophus ichangensis*
1 Foping reserve, spotlighted at night.
11. Reeves' Muntjac – *Muntiacus reevesi*
Foping reserve. Many were spotlighted at night. Seen also once at daytime running away from a local farmer's dog (the same dog which hunted a zokor, and also flushed Chinese Bamboo Partridges).
12. Takin – *Budorcas taxicolor bedfordi*
1 Foping reserve, seen closely at the roadside when we driven into the reserve.

Bats sp.: Two unknown species seen in Yangxian county. Several small pipistrelle-type bats hunting at dusk might be Chinese Pipistrelles *Hypsugo pulveratus*, or different species altogether. Long-winged, high-flying bat hunting at dusk might be Schreibers's Long-fingered Bat *Miniopterus schreibersii*.

Not seen mammals at Foping:

Asian Black Bears and Perny's Long-nosed Squirrels were likely hibernating during our visit. Goral, Chinese Serow and Yellow-throated Marten are encountered regularly by visitors. Forest Musk Deer apparently occur at higher altitudes.

Leopard, Clouded Leopard and Asian Golden Cat are present according to trackers. It is interesting because the latter two cats are tropical and Foping has winter frost and snow. Foreign birders saw Clouded Leopard on the track to the station in previous years.

Red Panda was last recorded in the 1980's according to trackers. Foreign visitors reported spotlighting one below the station. We have no idea if they excluded remarkably similar Red-and-White Giant Flying Squirrel.

Bird list:

Chinese Bamboo Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Golden Pheasant	<i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>	Foping reserve
Crested Ibis	<i>Nipponia nippon</i>	Yangxian
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Yangxian
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Yangxian
Western Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Foping county town, Yangxian
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Yangxian
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Yangxian
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	Foping reserve. Uncertain. Seen several times poorly through the trees, no other species fits, but isn't it too early for this migrant?
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Foping reserve, Foping county town
Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>	Dapingyu. Also several <i>Buteo</i> sp. migrating at Foping.
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Foping reserve
Mountain Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus nipalensis</i>	Foping reserve, Dapingyu. Seen well, although said not to occur in this part of China. Also several unidentified mid-sized eagles at Foping.
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Road to Foping, Town, Yangxian
Ibisbill	<i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i>	Foping county town
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Yangxian
Grey-headed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus cinereus</i>	Yangxian
Long-billed Plover	<i>Charadrius placidus</i>	Yangxian
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Yangxian
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Yangxian
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Yangxian
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	Foping reserve. Uncertain. Heard only, tape fits but not 100%
Asian Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium cuculoides</i>	Yangxian
Fork-tailed Swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>	Road to Foping county town
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Foping reserve
Crested Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>	Foping county town
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>	Foping reserve
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	Foping reserve
Crimson-breasted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos cathpharius</i>	Foping reserve
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	Yangxian
Long-tailed Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>	Foping reserve
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	Yangxian
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Qinling Mts roadside stop
Red-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa erythroryncha</i>	Road to Foping, reserve, Yangxian
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Road to Foping, reserve, Yangxian
Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	Foping reserve

Collared Crow	<i>Corvus torquatus</i>	Foping county town, Yangxian
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	Road to Foping, reserve, Yangxian
Sichuan Tit	<i>Poecile weigoldicus</i>	Foping reserve
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	Foping reserve
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Green-backed Tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>	Foping reserve
Collared Finchbill	<i>Spizixos semitorques</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Brown-breasted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthorrhous</i>	Yangxian
Light-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis</i>	Yangxian
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Yangxian
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Yangxian
Brown-flanked Bush Warbler	<i>Cettia fortipes</i>	Foping reserve
Yellow-bellied Bush Warbler	<i>Cettia acanthizoides</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Black-throated Bushtit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Sooty Bushtit	<i>Aegithalos fuliginosus</i>	Foping reserve
Black-streaked Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus gravivox</i>	Yangxian
Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus ruficollis</i>	Foping reserve, Dapingyu
David's Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe davidi</i>	Foping reserve
Chinese Babax	<i>Babax lanceolatus</i>	Foping reserve
Chinese Hwamei	<i>Garrulax canorus</i>	Foping reserve
Moustached Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax cineraceus</i>	Foping reserve
Barred Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax lunulatus</i>	Foping reserve
White-browed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax sannio</i>	Yangxian
Elliot's Laughingthrush	<i>Trochalopteron elliotii</i>	Foping reserve
Golden-breasted Fulvetta	<i>Lioparus chrysotis</i>	Foping reserve
Spectacled Fulvetta	<i>Fulvetta ruficapilla</i>	Foping reserve
Grey-hooded Fulvetta	<i>Fulvetta cinereiceps</i>	Foping reserve
Spectacled Parrotbill	<i>Sinosuthora conspicillata</i>	Foping reserve
Vinous-throated Parrotbill	<i>Sinosuthora webbiana</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	Foping reserve
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Foping reserve
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Foping reserve
White-cheeked Starling	<i>Spodiopsar cineraceus</i>	Yangxian
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	Yangxian
Red-throated Thrush	<i>Turdus ruficollis</i>	Foping reserve
Naumann's Thrush	<i>Turdus naumanni</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Dusky Thrush	<i>Turdus eunomus</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Himalayan Bluetail	<i>Tarsiger rufilatus</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Hodgson's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus hodgsoni</i>	Yangxian
Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>	Foping reserve
Blue-fronted Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>	Foping reserve
Plumbeous Water Redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosa</i>	Foping county town
Little Forktail	<i>Enicurus scouleri</i>	Foping reserve
White-crowned Forktail	<i>Enicurus leschenaulti</i>	Foping reserve
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	Foping reserve
Brown Dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>	Foping reserve, Foping county town
Russet Sparrow	<i>Passer rutilans</i>	Foping county town
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Foping county town

Rufous-breasted Accentor	<i>Prunella strophiata</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	Yangxian
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Foping reserve, town, Yangxian
Olive-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	Foping reserve
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Yangxian
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Foping reserve
Grey-capped Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis sinica</i>	Yangxian
Vinaceous Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus vinaceus</i>	Foping reserve
Little Bunting	<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	Foping reserve, Yangxian
Yellow-throated Bunting	<i>Emberiza elegans</i>	Foping reserve

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