20 世纪 80 年代的鸟类学探索和鸟类新种

Ornithological explorations in the 1980s and new species of birds

Per Alström The first part of the series 连载第一部分

Between 1984 and 2018, I visited China almost every year, between a few weeks to several months every time, plus nearly 2.5 years (2012–2014) as a Visiting Professor at the Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing. Because of Covid 19 and other duties (mainly teaching and research on African larks), I was unable to visit China during 2019–2023, and only managed a short trip to Beijing in 2024.

During these visits, I travelled extensively across China, visiting almost every province, and explored a large number of places where the locals had never seen a foreigner before. I've experienced lots of hardships, especially in the early years, including some dangerous situations in mountainous regions where the roads were often destroyed by landslides (and a friend's broken leg on a small mountain trail in Sichuan in 1989 far from any hospital was an extremely unpleasant experience!).

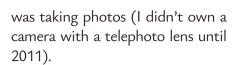
These trips and expeditions have rewarded me with unforgettable memories of natural wonders, such as the boreal forests in Heilongjiang, Liaoning and northern Nei Menggu, the Taklamakan desert in Xinjiang, the vast Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the fabulous Hengduan mountains, the tropical forests on Hainan Island, and coastal migration points. I've also been fortunate to see almost all species of birds on the Chinese list (some, admittedly, in neighbouring countries). Importantly, I

have always been very well treated in China, and made a large number of very good friends across the country.

My friend Urban Olsson and I spent a few months on Taiwan Island in 1982, and also visited Hong Kong, at the time under British administration, the same year, and then visited China's mainland for the first time in December 1984. In those days, only a few places (and hotels) were open to foreigners, with some additional sites possible to visit after obtaining permit from the Public Security Bureau.

As Chinese literature was unavailable to us, and only a small number of western birdwatchers had visited China's mainland before us, the information in English on Chinese birds and good areas for birds were extremely scant. Accordingly, this visit (and several others in the years to follow) was limited to a few places that were accessible to foreigners, and where we thought there might be some natural habitats and hence some birds – a bit like fumbling in the dark!...

Fortunately, R. Meyer de Schauensee's "Birds of China" was published a few months before our trip (based exclusively on museum specimens and the literature – the author allegedly never set foot in China!). Urban Olsson and I made a good team: we were both equally interested in birds and in exploring new areas and not afraid of hardships, and while I was sound recording and sketching birds, Urban



We first entered China from Hong Kong and went by train to Fuzhou – a 45-hour(!) ride on a hard seat, where the lights were on 24 hours a day, noisy music and announcements continuously streaming from the loudspeakers, and virtually every man (except us) was smoking.

The reason for our choice of destination was because it was stated in the "Birds of China" that Pallas's Reed Bunting Emberiza pallasi was a winter visitor to that area, and we were very eager to see this species (which was one of the few Asian species of Emberiza buntings we had not seen; we had just spent the entire autumn of the same year in Japan, where we devoted much time to studying buntings, which later resulted in Urban Olsson's book on buntings and North American sparrows, with Jon Curson, illustrated by Clive Byers; Pica Press, 1995).

Actually, the main reason for our interest in China was to learn more about identification of East Asian birds that occasionally turned up as vagrants in Europe, such as the Pallas's Reed Bunting (two records by then), other buntings, pipits, thrushes, flycatchers, warblers, and others. (This knowledge was later incorporated into "A Field Guide to the Rare Birds of Britain and Europe", with text by me and Peter Colston and illustra-

tions by Ian Lewington; Harper-Collins, 1991.)

Finding suitable habitats by randomly cycling around proved very hard, and nearly all reed beds we found had been harvested. We failed to find Pallas's Reed Bunting, although we were very pleased to see Tristram's Bunting Emberiza tristrami. After Fuzhou we went to Wuyi Shan because we learnt that there was a nature reserve.

Not speaking any Chinese, we struggled to get there (as we did many other times in many other places!...), but we eventually managed to reach the scenic area. Unfortunately, it proved to be rather poor for birds at that time of the year. We continued our search for Pallas's Reed Bunting (and other birds) at Huzhou, and finally found several individuals in reed beds at Taihu Lake near Suzhou on 28 December (Fig. 1).

On this first trip, we also visited Emei Shan, where we were pleased to find, e.g., our first ever Slaty Buntings Emberiza siemsseni (then in the monospecific genus Latoucheornis; moved to Emberiza based on the molecular phylogenetic analyses by Alström et al. 2008a) and Crimson-browed Finch Carpodacus subhimachalus. The upper reaches of the mountain were all covered in snow and ice, so the bird life there was limited, and it was impossible to get to the summit.

A short visit to Kunming produced mainly some common birds at Qiongzhu temple. One thing that surprised us was that we saw very few birds that were not already listed from the areas

we visited in Meyer de Schauensee's book. We naively thought that these areas would be rather poorly known ornithologically, but it was evident that the early explorers had done a very thorough job. It seems highly likely that many species that are now scarce were much more common during the early explorations, and their expeditions often lasted for very long periods.

We finally arrived in Beijing in mid-January. Coming from the south, we weren't prepared for the bitter cold in Beijing (where most buses were driving with the windows open!). Traffic jams with bicycles were common - quite a change from today!... We explored some places near Beijing, where we were hoping to find some interesting birds. One of these was Dong Ling (Eastern Tombs), where we found more Pallas's Reed Buntings, this time in scrub, i.e. a very different habitat from where we encountered them at Suzhou.

In 1987, Urban Olsson and I did a 4-months long trip to

China. We started at Beidaihe, Hebei in early March, hoping to see some migrating birds. Two Oriental Storks Ciconia boyciana and three Great Bustards Otis tarda (and more Pallas's Red Buntings) were some of the highlights, but otherwise there was not much visible migration. From Beijing we went by train to Hong Kong (no hard seat - hard sleeper this time!) and took an overnight boat across to Haikou, Hainan in mid-March. Our main goal was to see some tropical forest birds, and to search for a leaf warbler that we considered to be likely an undescribed species (see below), so we randomly went by bus around the island looking for potentially suitable forest areas......

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Alström, P. et al. 2008a. Phylogeny and classification of the Old World Emberizini (Aves, Passeriformes). *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 47: 960–973. DOI: 10.1016/j.ympev.2007.12.007.

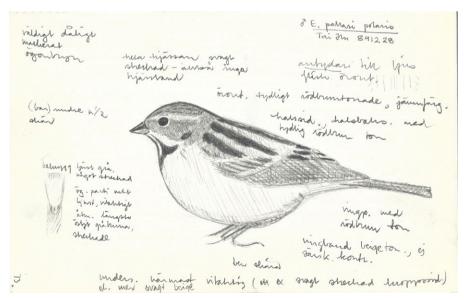


Fig.1 Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallasi*, Tai hu, Suzhou, Jiangsu, 28 December 1984. (Drawing: Per Alström)

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Per Alström Department of Ecology and Genetics, Uppsala University 连载第二部分 The 2nd part of the series

When we found some interesting-looking patches of forest, we would hop off the bus and venture into the forest in search of birds. Unfortunately, none proved excellent for birds, and there were no signs of our sought-after leaf warbler (sadly, we didn't find Jianfengling until two years later). In the agricultural areas just east of Haikou, Singing (Australasian) Bushlarks Mirafra javanica and Oriental Skylarks Alauda gulgula were both "fairly common" (sadly, the former species might have gone extinct in China, Figure 2).

Next, we took a boat from Haikou to Zhanjiang and train from there to Kunming, arriving two days later. We somehow got information about the existence of the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica, Kunming, and went there and met Prof. Yang Lan, who spoke good English, and who was extremely helpful. Near the institute we found a singing Brown Bush Warbler Locustella luteoventris (at the time in the genus

Bradypterus, but moved from there based on molecular phylogenetic analyses by Alström et al. 2011, further supported by Alström et al. 2018a). We were confused at first, as the song was extremely different from the only description in the literature that we were aware of (King et al. 1975), which later actually proved to refer to another species (Russet Bush Warbler L. mandelli).

Next stop Dali, where we mainly looked at larks, pipits and wagtails in the open areas near the lake. One of the goals was to find Paddyfield Pipit Anthus rufulus, which at the time was usually treated as conspecific with Richard's Pipit A. richardi (often under the name A. novaeseelandiae, which also included African and Australian taxa), and whose distributions were apparently abutting in south China (now, Richard's Pipit might have disappeared as a breeding bird from southern China, probably as a result of habitat destruction). We were successful, and could confirm

that its vocalisations matched those of Paddyfield Pipits from elsewhere in Southern Asia and differed from those of Richard's Pipit.

We continued our trip to Lijiang, where we hiked up into the mountains northwest of Yufeng temple, and camped for a few night in early April. We were extremely surprised to hear a Boreal (Tengmalm's) Owl Aegolius funereus, as the nearest known sites for this species were in northwestern Gansu; remarkably, we found the bird by chance the next day (the only time in my life that I've found a Boreal Owl on a day roost anywhere in the world, despite that it's quite common in Sweden!). There was no water available at our camp site, so we had to hike far down back the trail to get water for our instant noodles!

The first day, spring was in full swing, and there were lots of birds singing. We were particularly pleased to hear one of the two song types (see below) of Sichuan Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus forresti* (at the time treated as conspecific with Pallas's Leaf Warbler *P. proregulus*, but subsequently split into four species based on studies of vocalizations and DNA: Alström et al. 1990b, Alström et al. 1992, Alström et al. 1997, Martens et al. 2004, Wu et al. 2023).

When we woke up the second morning, everything was dark and silent, and we thought our watch was wrong – until we realized our tent and everything else was covered by 20 cm of snow, which had fallen during the night! Luckily, it melted away during the day, allowing the return of spring.

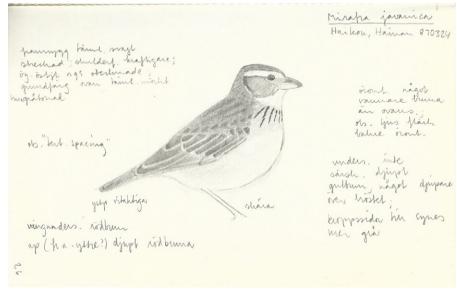


Fig.2 Singing (Australasian) Bushlark *Mirafra javanica*, Haikou, Hainan, 24 March 1987. (Drawing: Per Alström)



Fig.3 Per Alström drinking tea with the men running the ferry (in the background) across the Lhasa river, April 1987. (Photo: Urban Olsson)

We then returned to Kunming and boarded a train to Chengdu, from where we flew to Lhasa on 10 April. After having explored the surroundings of Lhasa by bike for two days (Figure 3), we were told that there was a trail from the Samye Monastery across the mountains back to Lhasa (some 40 km). We bought a lot of instant noodles, biscuits and canned fruit and set off – without any maps and with no real knowledge of how long time it would take. The trail was easy

to follow, and when we met some (few!) locals we pointed ahead and said "Lhasa?", hoping that we were still on the right track.

Lots of exciting birds, e.g. in total 115 Tibetan Eared-Pheasants *Crossoptilon harmani* in one day (15 April), and one of our favourite redstarts, White-throated Redstart

Phoenicurus schisticeps (Figure 4). In the evenings we would stop at suitable spots and pitch our tent and cook dinner (i.e. instant noodles!...) on our small Swedish camping kitchen (Figure 5). Running out of food in the morning of the fourth day and not knowing how far we had left to walk was unpleasant, but luckily, we found out that we were close to a village from where we could catch a bus back to Lhasa.

On 19 April, we started hitch-hiking with lorries from Lhasa towards Chengdu via Chamdo (on the road that is now called G318, later splitting to G214). The road was exceptionally bad in places, and we were often ready to jump off the lorry, in case it would accidentally fall off the road! When we came to a place that looked interesting for birds, we would get off the lorry and pitch our tent in the forest, and explore the area for one or more days before getting back onto the road and try to get a lift again (Figure 6). Some beautiful forests, both broadleaved at



Fig.4 White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus* schisticeps, one of the many beautiful birds seen on the Samye to Lhasa trek in April 1987. (Drawing: Per Alström)



Fig.5 Per Alström and Urban Olsson at one of their camps on the Samye to Lhasa trek. (Photo: Urban Olsson)

Fig.6 Per Alström and Urban Olsson drinking tea with road workers at Bayi, southeast Xizang, late April 1987. (Photo: Urban Olsson)

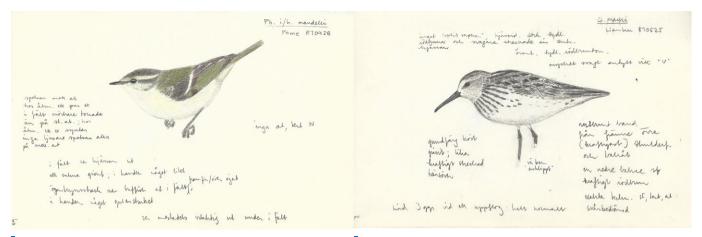


Fig.7 Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei mandellii*, Pome, southeast Xizang, late April 1987. (Drawing: Per Alström)

Fig.8 Western Sandpiper *Calidris mauri*, the first record for China, Lianghu (Tuosu Lake), Qinghai, 25 May 1987. (Drawing: Per Alström)

low elevation and coniferous or mixed higher up, with lots of exciting birds for us, such as several species of leaf warblers (Figure 7), babblers and Derbyan Parakeet *Psittacula derbiana* (4 at one place, 14 at another). We arrived in Chamdo about two weeks after we left Lhasa.

After a few days of exploring the areas around the town by foot, we managed to get on a bus to Chengdu, where we arrived on 10 May; no explorations after Chamdo. After a very adventurous three weeks, we spent a whole day in a restaurant in the Jinjiang Hotel, literally eating more in a day than we had done in total in the past few weeks!

The next day, we left for Emei Shan, where we spent 10 days, hiking from the foot to the summit and staying overnight in monasteries (being woken up by the monks' pre-dawn chanting every morning). Lots of new birds for us, and extremely exciting to learn and sound record the songs of the different leaf warblers and bush warblers, most of which we had not heard before. It took some time and playback-experiments before we were confident that the two completely different song types of Sichuan Leaf Warbler were of the same species.

We were confused by the variation in song of the "Golden-spectacled Warbler Phylloscopus burkii" (then in the genus Seicercus, but this genus was merged with Phylloscopus following phylogenetic analysis by Alström et al. 2018b); see further below. And on 13 May we heard (and sound recorded the call) of what we eight years later described as Emei Leaf Warbler Phylloscopus emeiensis (see below). The song of Spotted Bush Warbler Locustella thoracica (then in the genus Bradypterus, see above) was undescribed (and later, together with other evidence, formed the basis for the splitting of this species into three species: Round et al. 1995, Alström et al. 2008b).

A new, long train ride brought us to Xining, from where we took a bus to Heimahe on the shores of Qinghai hu (Koko Nur), and then on to Lianghu (Tuosu Lake) in the Qaidam depression, where we hopped off because it looked interesting. We camped there on 26-28 May, and were excited to find Mongolian Ground-Jay Podoces hendersoni, the first Western Sandpiper Calidris mauri for China (Figure 8), 3 Slender-billed Gulls Chroicocephalus genei in 1st-summer plumage (according to Meyer de Schauensee 1984, only one record for China, needing confirmation) and Paddyfield Warbler Acrocephalus agricola (sensu stricto - a considerable eastward extension of its range).

At Qinghai Lake itself, where we stayed until 3 June, we explored the lake, muddy shores, grasslands and adjacent scrub-covered mountain slopes, and watched, sound recorded and photographed, e.g., six species of snowfinches, five species of larks, the peculiar Ground Tit Pseudopodoces humilis (then thought to be related to groundjays, but realized to be a tit by James et al. 2003), and the poorly known Przevalski's Pinktail Urocynchramus pylzowi (then thought to be a bunting or a rosefinch, now placed in a monospecific family, Urocynchramidae; Groth 2000, Päckert et al. 2016).

It took us two days by train to get back to Beijing. At the Summer Palace we found Blunt-winged Warbler Acrocephalus concinens to be "fairly common" (we judged it to be more numerous than Blackbrowed Reed Warbler A. bistrigiceps, which is apparently the opposite nowadays; Blunt-winged Warbler probably no longer occurs there at all). From Beijing we took another train to Harbin, arriving on 9 June. We met Prof. Ma Yiqing and Jin Longrong, who both were extremely helpful, providing information on interesting areas and other assistance. From there, we went to Zhalong at Qiqihar, where

we focused on studying Manchurian Reed Warbler Acrocephalus tangorum (then treated as conspecific with either Paddyfield Warbler or Black-browed Reed Warbler, but now treated as a distinct species; cf. Alström et al. 2013) and Marsh Grassbird Helopsaltes pryeri (then in the genus Megalurus, but moved to Locustella based on the molecular phylogeny by Alström et al. 2011, and then moved to the newly created genus Helopsaltes as Locustella was split into two genera by Alström et al. 2018a). In mid-June we arrived at Dailing in the Xiaoxingan Mountains, where we explored the beautiful forests, and were extremely pleased to find, e.g., Eastern Crowned Warbler Phylloscopus coronatus (Figure 9), Palelegged Leaf Warbler P. tenellipes (Figure 10), Pallas's Leaf Warbler P. proregulus, Lanceolated Warbler Locustella lanceolata, several species of thrushes and buntings. Yellow-breasted Bunting Emberiza aureola was still quite common and widespread in those days, whereas now it's listed by IUCN as Critically Endangered. We also found (and sound recorded) 2 or 3 calling Band-bellied Crakes Zapornia paykullii, which took us some time to see well enough to identify, as we did not have access to any sound recordings of this species (if they at all existed in those days?). After a visit to Changbai Shan in

late June, Urban Olsson left me. Together with Jin Longrong, I visited the wetlands and grasslands at Medamuji (c. 100 km SW of Hulunbuir, Nei Menggu), where among other interesting birds, we noted a significant westward extension of the range of Reed Parrotbill Paradoxornis heudei. After a visit at the Institute of Zoology, Academia Sinica (now Chinese Academy of Sciences), where I met Prof. Tan Yao-kuang and examined specimens of various species, I returned to Sweden......

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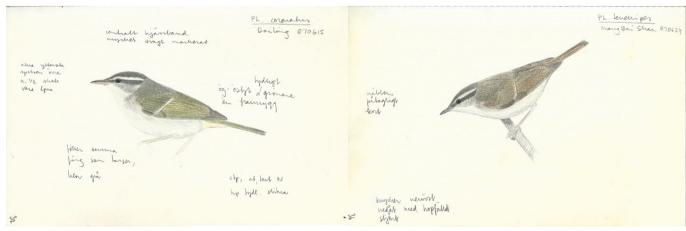


Fig.9 Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus*, Dailing, Heilongjiang 15 June 1987. (Drawing: Per Alström)

Fig.10 Pale-legged Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tenellipes*, Changbai Shan, Jilin 24 June 1987. (Drawing: Per Alström)