

Some bird observations in Ganzi prefecture of extreme north-west Sichuan province, China

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A brief survey of birds in Ganzi prefecture, Sichuan, in October–November 1989, resulted in records of 92 species, including two species apparently new to the Sichuan list: Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*.

We visited Ganzi prefecture of extreme north-west Sichuan province of China from 24 October to 2 November 1989 for the purpose of doing a brief bird survey. The main area worked was the Obala valley near Luoxu. Luoxu (Daikog) lies at 3,260 m in Shiqu County in the Jinsha river valley which, at that point, forms the boundary between Sichuan and Xizang provinces. The river valley is heavily cultivated. The Obala valley extends north of Luoxu to an elevation of 4,730 m at Chawzhela Pass. A road runs right through the valley and north to Shiqu City.

While most of Shiqu County is grassy steppe, there are six or seven forested valleys, of which Obala is the only one with road access. The Obala has been completely logged and now is in second-growth forest, spruce *Picea* on the wetter, north-facing slopes and juniper *Juniperus* on the drier south-facing slopes. There is a considerable amount of deciduous scrub and bushy growth throughout the valley. A number of small Tibetan communities (a few buildings) exist in the valley with their fairly large herds of yaks, sheep and goats and the attendant heavy overgrazing everywhere.

Chinese Monal *Lophophorus lhuysii* and Tibetan Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon* are said to be present, along with Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus* (which we saw). Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia*, Bharal or Blue Sheep *Pseudois nayaur*, White-lipped Deer *Cervus albirostris* and Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* are also said to be present. Our objective in searching this valley was to find the Tibetan Babax *Babax koslowi* and the Tibetan Bunting *Emberiza koslowi*, both of which occur in neighbouring Qamdo (Xizang province) and Yushu (Qinghai province), but we failed to find either.

The Obala valley has been proposed as a natural reserve and it would be a unique one in Sichuan, preserving an interesting and threatened flora and fauna in that part of the province. However, some curtailment of domestic animal grazing would be both necessary and difficult to achieve if a useful reserve is to result. Hunting occurs there but on a small scale as the local Tibetans are not serious hunters. We did not see a single Snow Leopard skin on the coats of the Tibetans in Ganzi prefecture in our short stay (although this is fairly common in other parts of the Tibetan Plateau).

We left Kangding on 24 October, heading north-west. Kangding is at 2,550 m, lies just beyond the rim of the Sichuan Basin, and thus holds similar

wet forests (all second-growth). The road climbs over a 4,300 m pass and then drops right into Tibetan grassy steppe, with its Tibetan peoples, culture and architecture, as well as domestic yaks, sheep and goats. Up to Luhuo, there are a number of forested slopes and a fair bit of scrubby vegetation in the river valleys. After that first 4,300 m pass, elevation varies from about 3,000 m to 4,100 m up to Ganzi City (3,350 m).

From Luhuo on, there is no forest and little scrub except here and there in the river and stream valleys. Between Ganzi and Shiqu, the elevation varies from 3,350 m up to 4,500 m and Shiqu itself is at 4,140 m. Perhaps 160 km south-east of Shiqu to Shiqu, the steppes along the road have an enormous pika *Ochotona* concentration. Upland Buzzards *Buteo hemilasius* were common there along with Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug*, both of which presumably feed on the pikas. Snowfinches *Montifringilla* spp. (3 species) and the Tibetan Ground-Jay *Pseudopodoces humilis*, which use the pika burrows for nests and shelter, were abundant there.

On 26 October, we climbed to the top of a 4,750 m ridge about 30 km south-east of Shiqu on a false lead for Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes tibetanus* (which turned out to be Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraoallus tibetanus*). There is an old record for the sandgrouse for Shiqu County, but we failed to find any. On 27 October, we drove south of Shiqu to Luoxu, a distance of about 70 km, going over the Chawzhela Pass and down through the Obala valley.

After our four days in Obala valley, we drove east-south-east to pick up the main road to Ganzi on 1 November and spent the night at Luhuo, before returning to Kangding on 2 November.

Kangding (Kangting, Dardo, Tatsienlu):	2,450 m; 29°55'N 102°14'E
Luhuo	3,220 m; 31°23'N 100°40'E
Ganzi (Garze)	3,350 m; 31°38'N 100°00'E
Manigangguo	4,000 m; 31°51'N 99°04'E
Shiqu (Serxu)	4,140 m; 32°59'N 98°06'E
Obala valley (base)	3,300 m; 32°28'N 98°00'E
Luoxu (Dainkog)	3,260 m; 32°28'N 99°00'E

We stopped briefly at two large lakes, both along the road, one (Kasa Lake) between Luhuo and Ganzi and the other between Ganzi and Manigangguo. Both have been proposed as natural reserves. They are resting and nesting places for waterfowl. Black-necked Cranes *Grus nigricollis* occasionally stop there. Hunting by passing truckers (this is a main route to Qinghai and Lhasa) is a serious disturbance problem for the waterfowl.

Two species apparently new to the Sichuan list were seen: Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis* (see Li 1980, Cheng 1987).

ANNOTATED LIST

GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus* One at a large lake north-west of Luhuo on 1 November.

BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis* Three at a large lake north-west of Ganzi on 25 October.

GREAT CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo* Two on 1 November along river north-west of Luhuo.

CHINESE POND-HERON *Ardeola bacchus* One at about 3,300m about a third of the way from Kangding to Ganzi.

BAR-HEADED GOOSE *Anser indicus* Five on 25 October and 30 on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Ganzi.

RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea* Ten on 25 October and 15 on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Ganzi; 25 on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Luhuo.

EURASIAN WIGEON *Anas penelope* Four on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Ganzi.

GADWALL *Anas strepera* Six on 25 October and 15 on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Ganzi; 25 at a large lake north-west of Luhuo on 1 November.

COMMON TEAL *Anas crecca* Ten at a large lake north-west of Ganzi on 25 October.

MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos* Four on 25 October and six on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Ganzi; nine on a large lake north-west of Luhuo on 1 November.

SPOT-BILLED DUCK *Anas poecilorhyncha* Eight on 25 October at large lake north-west of Ganzi; 25 on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Luhuo.

NORTHERN PINTAIL *Anas acuta* Fifty on 25 October and 20 on 1 November at a large lake north-west of Ganzi.

COMMON POCHARD *Aythya ferina* Four on 25 October at a large lake north-west of Ganzi.

FERRUGINOUS POCHARD *Aythya nyroca* Sixteen on a large pond north-west of Ganzi on 25 October and two on 1 November; four on 25 October on a large lake north-west of Ganzi.

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula* Three on 25 October at a large lake north-west of Ganzi; one on 1 November at a large pond north-west of Ganzi.

COMMON MERGANSER *Mergus merganser* Fifteen on 25 October on a large lake north-west of Ganzi and eight on 1 November; 12 along rivers between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

LAMMERGEIER *Gypaetus barbatus* Two to six seen daily 3,200–4,700 m.

HIMALAYAN GRIFFON *Gyps himalayensis* One to ten daily 3,200–4,700 m.

CINEREOUS VULTURE *Aegypius monachus* One at 4,500 m, 25 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October.

HEN HARRIER *Circus cyaneus* One to eight most days (except Obala valley).

EURASIAN SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter nisus* One almost daily.

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo* One (two on one day) on most days.

UPLAND BUZZARD *Buteo hemilasius* Thirty on 25 October and 40 on 26 October on the steppes up to 40 km south-east of Shiqu; eight between Shiqu and Luoxu on 26 October; three between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

STEPPE EAGLE *Aquila nipalensis* Fifteen between Ganzi and Shiqu on 25 October; one at 3,900 m in Obala valley on 29 October. All were first or second year birds.

GOLDEN EAGLE *Aquila chrysaetos* One to three most days.

EURASIAN KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus* Eight on 25 October between Ganzi and Shiqu; three up to 30 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; two between Shiqu and Obala valley on 27 October; three between Luoxu and Luhuo on 1 November.

MERLIN *Falco columbarius* One first year bird at 4,300 m 24 km north-west of Manigangguo.

SAKER FALCON *Falco cherrug* Twelve on 25 October and eight on 26 October up to 40 km south-east of Shiqu; four between Shiqu and Obala valley on 27 October; four between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

TIBETAN SNOWCOCK *Tetraogallus tibetanus* Six at 4,700 m on 26 October about 25 km south-east of Shiqu.

TIBETAN PARTRIDGE *Perdix hodgsoniae* One or two flocks consisting of 4–25 birds most days north-west of Ganzi.

BLOOD PHEASANT *Ithaginis cruentus* A flock of four at 3,600 m in Obala valley on 28 October.

COMMON PHEASANT *Phasianus colchicus* One female at 3,500 m near Kangding on 2 November.

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus* A flock of 30 at a large lake north-west of Ganzi on 1 November.

IBISBILL *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* Three (separate) between Ganzi and Shiqu on 25 October; one 10 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; one 10 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; one halfway between Luoxu and Luhuo on 1 November.

GREAT BLACK-HEADED GULL *Larus ichthyaetus* Two along river south-east of Shiqu on 25 October.

SNOW PIGEON *Columba leuconota* Two hundred in several flocks on 1 November between Luoxu and Ganzi.

HILL PIGEON *Columba rupestris* Thirty in a flock between Ganzi and Shiqu on 25 October; 600 in several flocks between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November; two south-east of Luhuo on 2 November.

ROCK PIGEON *Columba livia* Flock of ten over Kangding on 2 November.

ORIENTAL TURTLE-DOVE *Streptopelia orientalis* Two along road south-east of Luhuo on 24 October; one (with several missing tail-feathers) in Obala valley on 27, 29 and 30 October and another one with it on 27 October.

RED TURTLE-DOVE *Streptopelia tranquebarica* One along road south-east of Luhuo on 24 October.

LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua* Five on 25 October and three on 26 October up to 40 km south-east of Shiqu.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops* One a few kilometres south-east of Luhuo on 2 November.

TIBETAN LARK *Melanocorypha maxima* Three at 4,700 m, 25 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; 60 at 4,500 m on the tundra about 2 km south of Chawzhela Pass on 27 October.

ORIENTAL SKYLARK *Alauda gulgula* Fifty north-west of Ganzi on 25 October; 10 up to 30 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; 20 between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November; one south-east of Luhuo on 2 November.

HORNED LARK *Eremophila alpestris* Between thirty and 300 daily (except Obala valley where only a few were seen where the valley spilled out onto the cultivated Jinsha River valley).

NORTHERN CRAG-MARTIN *Hirundo rupestris* Two around cliffs just west of Ganzi on 1 November.

WHITE WAGTAIL *Motacilla alba* A few between Kangding and just west of Ganzi, 24 and 25 October; one near Luoxu on 30 October.

CHINESE GREY SHRIKE *Lanius sphenocercus* One just north-west of Manigangguo on 1 November.

COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris* One just north-west of Ganzi on 25 October. This is apparently the first record for Sichuan.

BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE *Pica pica* Between 15 and 50 per day (except Obala valley 4–10 per day).

TIBETAN GROUND-JAY *Pseudopodoces humilis* Two hundred up to 100 km south-east of Shiqu on 25 October; 70 up to 30 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; 40 between Shiqu and Obala valley on 27 October; 40 between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

RED-BILLED CHOUGH *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Between six and 400 per day (fewer in Obala valley, 5–40 per day).

DAURIAN JACKDAW *Corvus dauuricus* Ten between Kangding and Ganzi 24 October; 60 between Ganzi and Shiqu on 25 October; 100 between Luoxu and Luhuo on 1 November; 250 between Luhuo and Kangding on 2 November.

CARRION CROW *Corvus corone* Three on 25 October and 10 on 2 November south-east of Luhuo.

LARGE-BILLED CROW *Corvus macrorhynchos* Forty on 25 October and 50 on 2 November between Ganzi and Kangding; 20 on 25 October north-west of Ganzi; one in Obala valley on 27 October.

COMMON RAVEN *Corvus corax* Between four and 50 per day.

WHITE-THROATED DIPPER *Cinclus cinclus* One to eight per day in Obala valley, 3,300–4,400 m; one between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

NORTHERN WREN *Troglodytes troglodytes* One to five daily in Obala valley; one about 15 km east of Luoxu on 1 November.

ALPINE ACCENTOR *Prunella collaris* One in Obala valley at 3,600 m on 29 October; five along road at 3,500 m about 15 km east of Luoxu on 1 November.

ROBIN ACCENTOR *Prunella rubeculoides* Between five and 40 daily along road Kangding to Shiqu to Luoxu to Kangding; 50–100 daily in Obala valley up to 4,700 m.

RUFOUS-BREASTED ACCENTOR *Prunella strophiiata* Eight in Obala valley on 28 October, 3,400–4,000 m.

BLUE-FRONTED REDSTART *Phoenicurus frontalis* Three on 28 October and one on 29 October in Obala valley, 3,500–3,900 m.

WHITE-THROATED REDSTART *Phoenicurus schisticeps* Between five and 40 daily in Obala valley, 3,400–4,300 m; five between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

WHITE-WINGED REDSTART *Phoenicurus erythrogaster* Found at 3,400–4,750 m; 3–20 daily along road from just south-east of Luhuo to

Shiqu to Luoxu to 100 km south-east of Luhuo; six at Chawzhela Pass on 29 October.

STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata* One between Shiqu and Obala valley on 27 October.

WHITE-BACKED (KESSLER'S) THRUSH *Turdus kessleri* A flock of 55 at 4,000 m in Obala valley on 29 October.

RED-THROATED THRUSH *Turdus ruficollis ruficollis* Two at 3,600 m in Obala valley on 28 October.

SPOT-BREASTED SCIMITAR-BABBLER *Pomatorhinus erythronemus* One to six seen daily in Obala valley, 3,500–3,700 m.

GIANT LAUGHINGTHRUSH *Garrulax maximus* Between six and 22 daily in Obala valley, 3,500–3,800 m.

ELLIOT'S LAUGHINGTHRUSH *Garrulax elliotii* Between 12 and 60 daily in Obala valley, 3,400–4,000 m; 3 between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

CHINESE FULVETTA *Alcippe striaticollis* Between five and 20 daily in Obala valley, 3,400–4,200 m.

TICKELL'S LEAF-WARBLER *Phylloscopus affinis* One in Obala valley at 3,500, on 28 October.

WHITE-BROWED TIT-WARBLER *Leptopoeile sophiae* Between three and 35 daily, 3,400–4,400 m.

CRESTED TIT-WARBLER *Leptopoeile elegans* Two at 3,900 m on 29 October in Obala valley.

WILLOW TIT *Parus montanus* Between 2 and 30 daily in Obala valley, 3,400–4,000 m.

WHITE-BROWED TIT *Parus superciliosus* Three between Ganzi and Shiqu on 25 October and two about 15 km east of Luoxu on 1 November, both in roadside scrub.

RUFIOUS-VENTED TIT *Parus rubidiventris* Three on 28 October and four on 29 October in Obala valley, 3,500–4,000 m.

GREY-CRESTED TIT *Parus dichrous* Two at 3,600 m on 28 October.

GREAT TIT *Parus major* One at 3,500 m on 28 October and 30 October and two at 3,700 m on 29 October in Obala valley; one in Luhuo at 3,200 m on 1 November.

EURASIAN TREE-SPARROW *Passer montanus* In all towns and villages up to 4,200 m.

WHITE-WINGED SNOWFINCH *Montifringilla nivalis* Two at 4,500 m

just north of Chawzhela Pass on 27 October; one at Chawzhela Pass at 4,700 m on 29 October. These are apparently the first records for Sichuan.

BLACK-WINGED SNOWFINCH *Montifringilla adamsi* Three about 25 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October at 4,200 m; seven between Shiqu and Obala valley on 27 October at 4,300 m.

WHITE-RUMPED SNOWFINCH *Montifringilla taczanowskii* Three hundred up to 100 km south-east of Shiqu on 25 October; 60 up to 30 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; 20 between Shiqu and Obala valley on 27 October.

RUFIOUS-NECKED SNOWFINCH *Montifringilla ruficollis* Two hundred up to 60 km south-east of Shiqu on 25 October; 80 up to 30 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; 30 between Shiqu and Obala valley on 27 October; 10 between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

TWITE *Acanthis flavirostris* A hundred between Ganzi and Shiqu on 25 October; 10 up to 30 km south-east of Shiqu on 26 October; 50 between Luoxu and Ganzi on 1 November.

LONG-TAILED ROSEFINCH *Uragus sibiricus* Ten on 28 October in Obala valley and one on 31 October, 3,500–3,800 m.

PINK-TAILED ROSEFINCH *Urocynchramus pylzowi* Two about 100 km east of Luoxu on 1 November in low scrub along road.

PINK-RUMPED ROSEFINCH *Carpodacus eos* Between 150 and 300 per day in Obala valley, 3,400–4,400 m; 20 up to 20 km east of Luoxu on 1 November.

WHITE-BROWED ROSEFINCH *Carpodacus thura* Between 30 and 80 per day in Obala valley, 3,400–4,100 m; one between Kangding and Ganzi on 24 October.

RED-FRONTED ROSEFINCH *Carpodacus puniceus* Seven at 4,700 m at Chawzhela Pass on 29 October and two on 30 October at the same site.

WHITE-WINGED GROSBEAK *Mycerobas carnipes* Between three and 15 daily in Obala valley, 3,500–3,900 m.

EURASIAN ROCK-BUNTING *Emberiza cia* One to 40 daily, 3,200–4,200 m.

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