

Beijing

28th December 2017 – 4th January 2018



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This short trip report outlines a winter visit to the greater Beijing area, with three full days in the city (mainly sight-seeing) and almost three days visiting the Great Wall at Mutianyu. In addition, a day trip was made to Lingshan mountain. Despite the limited birding time, cold conditions and rather limited bird list (58 species seen in all), quality was excellent and this report will hopefully help others visiting Beijing as a tourist or on business for a few days.

Logistics We flew in from Shanghai on an evening flight and spent the following four nights at the [Fragrant Hills Empark Hotel](#) on the north west edge of **Beijing**. This was a great choice; we got a very nice hotel for what seemed like a knock-down rate. The hotel is a 10min walk from Beijing Botanical Gardens, with a few nice restaurants in between, and, now that the new Xijiao line (opened 30 December 2017) is operational and reaches Bagou on Circular Line 10 in less than 30min, is well-connected to anywhere in Beijing. The hotel is a c35min taxi ride from the international airport. Getting to the tourist sites of Beijing was dead easy and cheap using the excellent and totally bi-lingual metro system; see [this link](#) for a decent map.

We spent a three further nights in **Beigou Village**, close to the **Mutianyu** section of the **Great Wall**. There were several hotels here, but we used the [Brickyard Retreat](#). This was way up on what we usually go for and way beyond what we normally pay, but it was extremely good and very convenient for the Great Wall. Birding was good on foot from the hotel and the wall could be accessed by a short walk (or via free transfer to the main gate – see details below). The Brickyard arranged a transfer for us back to Beijing Airport (c1 ¼hrs away); again this wasn't the cheapest way of doing things but we did have a few hours at the Ming Tombs, vaguely en-route.

We visited **Lingshan** by renting a car and driver for the day. This was arranged by Steven An of [China Dream Tours](#) (email: info@chinadreamstour.com) who we had got to know well from a trip to eastern China immediately preceding

this week in Beijing (see [this link](#) for the lowdown). We'd recommend Steven for guiding or arrangements anywhere in China; he is a super guy. After Lingshan, the same driver drove us back to Beijing and out to Mutianyu, making for a long but fairly cost-effective day.

Weather and birding Pretty cold! Not unbearably cold and often strong sun; luckily so at Lingshan, but easily -5°C overnight, every night. Skies were generally clear and we saw only a tiny scrap of snow (Lingshan only). In mid-winter bird diversity and abundance was low (compared to, e.g. the Shanghai area) with many late autumn migrants having finally moved out and there is little song or call. However, quality was (very) high with all key targets (fairly) easily located. Moreover, tourists were few and far between (by Beijing standards anyway) and we had Lingshan and even long stretches of the wall to ourselves.

What to bring Proper winter gear is essential and, given that few people seemingly speak any English at all, a translation app is very useful. Maps.ME was really great for detailed mapping and navigation. Be sure to download such apps before arriving in China as access to Google Play is (very) restricted (or nil). My scope received little action (Lingshan only) but photography was quite good and I managed to make some sound-recordings (see [this link](#)); **Siberian Accentor** and **Chinese Hill Warbler** were the only birds that really responded to playback (and I saw both well without). Mark Brazil's *Birds of East Asia* is a perfectly adequate field guide on the whole but note that some of the range maps are wildly out and some of the more subtle species have been treated rather superficially. A really excellent resource, of course, is Terry Townsend's [Birding Beijing](#) website and I carefully went through this for lots of useful site information, as well as recent sightings. A big thank you to Terry for helping me with a number of enquiries and providing lot of enthusiasm (and a few stop press snippets of gen that I made the most of!)



Notes on sites

A Beijing The following three sites were all easily accessible by metro. Using this, we also reached the Forbidden City, Lama Temple, Tiananmen Square, Temple of Heaven etc.

1. **Botanical Gardens** Very quiet for visitors, at least in the morning cold. The best spot during our visits was along Cherry Valley; water was still trickling and attracting groups of **Silver-throated Bush-Tits**, along with several **Pallas's Warblers**. My climb up the ridge above Cherry Valley was pretty unproductive on a very cold, grey day, although I saw **Plain Laughingthrush** easily enough and fell in with a group of **Chinese Nuthatches** on the way back. **Naumann's Thrushes** were not too hard find, perching high up in tall trees early on.

2. **Summer Palace** Easily and conveniently accessed from the very quiet west gate, where there is a subway station on the Xijiao Line. From here the main lakes are a short walk. Mostly they were frozen; the single lake with much water held lots of **Goosanders** plus a **Goldeneye**, but was surrounded by a high, birder-unfriendly fence. The main attractions were scattered, high perching **thrushes**, all **Naumann's**, until we got to the main gate late on (c1630) where we were due to exit. Despite many noisy tourists close by, a flock of **Naumann's Thrushes** perching in the canopy of nearby trees yielded both **Dusky Thrush**, a plausible looking intergrade or two and, more importantly by far, **Red-throated Thrush**.

Right: Beijing thrush medley



3. **Agricultural Exhibition Park** A small and inauspicious urban park, easily reached by walking c100m to the back of the subway station of the same name, on Circular Line 10. I dropped in here to have a look at the **Japanese Waxwings** that had settled in a few weeks ago and had great views, including birds flying down to drink from the partially frozen lake. A **Japanese Thrush** had also very recently taken up residence and was equally welcome, both by me the semi-circle of photographers had been tracking it minutely since it was found. Along with bonus **Chinese Grosbeaks** and a good flock of **Mandarins** in beautiful winter light, this all made for a very pleasant hour.

B Lingshan Mountain

Beijing's premier montane site, lying about 2hrs drive WSW of the city. Excellent detailed gen is available on [Birding Beijing](#). With rather limited time, we drove straight to the flatter area above the second village and walked the old road back from the deserted building. Initially, it was very disappointing with little other than many **tits** and **Meadow Buntings** in marvelous clear and sunny conditions. After a brief glimpse, rounding up a single **Pallas's Rosefinch** for a fair, although not fantastic, view took several hours, and **Hill Warbler** was not overly sociable either. Lots of stomping up the side and into the scrub and (limited) berry bushes failed to produce a single redstart. I would have taken it personally, but two other birders I met who had made several visits over the last two days had failed to find anything more either. Luckily, however, I had factored in 30mins on the way out to try the unassuming looking "Przevalski's" gully (see Terry's gen and map) and was able to stretch this to well over an hour as I immediately found some 20 **Pallas's Rosefinches** here. Eventually I had very good views of several and lot of scanning for more of these finally revealed two female **Güldenstädt's Redstarts** perching up and flycatching. The quick uphill chase they ensued led to a calling **Siberian Accentor** and hence a very happy New Year's (day) with all three of Lingshan's even remotely feasible new birds for me all in the bag. Job's a good 'un...

C Beigou village and Mutianyu Great Wall (see map below)

In all we spent 2½ days here, a great finale to round off three weeks in China. Staying over (for three nights) was a good option and we saw a lot more, birds and beyond, than we would have by day-tripping from Beijing.

The standard way to access the wall is from the Cableway car park, having got a ticket (45RMB) from the visitor centre further back down the road. It is short hike up to the wall from here, through nice woodland. From here we walked as far east as we could (1-2km) then back west as far as Tower 18. The final ascent on the wall up to this tower is very steep but from here an obvious, well-marked trail leads down the slope and to a quiet tarred road leading to Beigou village. The next morning, we did the reverse, hiking up the road and trail to Tower 18, and then walking a far west as it was safe or feasible to do. This was 1-2km, almost all of it along original, unrestored wild wall, partially choked scrubby trees and with very steep sections but dramatic views. There were very few other visitors, especially on the second day, once we got west of Tower 14. Walking the wall, especially in winter, was a brilliant experience and the relative lack of birds hardly mattered. We did see **Chinese Nuthatch** and **Chinese Hill Warbler** from the wall, and found **Naumann's Thrushes** territorial on berry bushes and **Songar Tits**, not mention a very close **Siberian Accentor** just below Tower 18 but there was also long periods of very little.

Lower down, around Beigou, where it was possible to get into the leafless orchards and scrubby forest, there were more birds. These included plentiful **Chinese Nuthatches** and **Godlewski's Buntings**, several sightings of **Daurian Redstart** and **Red-flanked Bluetail** and the odd **Elegant Bunting**. The road from Beigou to the trailhead for Tower 18, when examined properly on a slow final morning walk, yielded some 15 **Siberian Accentors**, including c8 in a loose group. **Hill Warbler**, **Plain Laughingthrush** and **Vinous-throated Parrotbill** all featured here too.

小园 THE SCHOOLHOUSE
Mutianyu Great Wall Map
 Our Sustainable Projects 6162-6506



Brickyard Homes

- 1 Persimmon Court (柿子院) 6162-6313
- 2 Grandma's Place (奶奶家) 6162-6008
- 3 The Pavilion (亭子) 6162-6328
- 4 Red Door (红门) 6162-6303
- 5 Stone Forest (石林) 6162-6309
- 6 Mumanyu (慕漫峪) 6162-6196
- 7 Big Rock House (大石头) 6162-6015
- 8 Heart's Desire (心喜院) 6160-3610
- 9 La Petite Muraille (小长城) 6063-8298
- 10 Apricot Lane (杏花径) 6067-0080
- 11 Lilac Cottage (丁香舍) 6160-7992

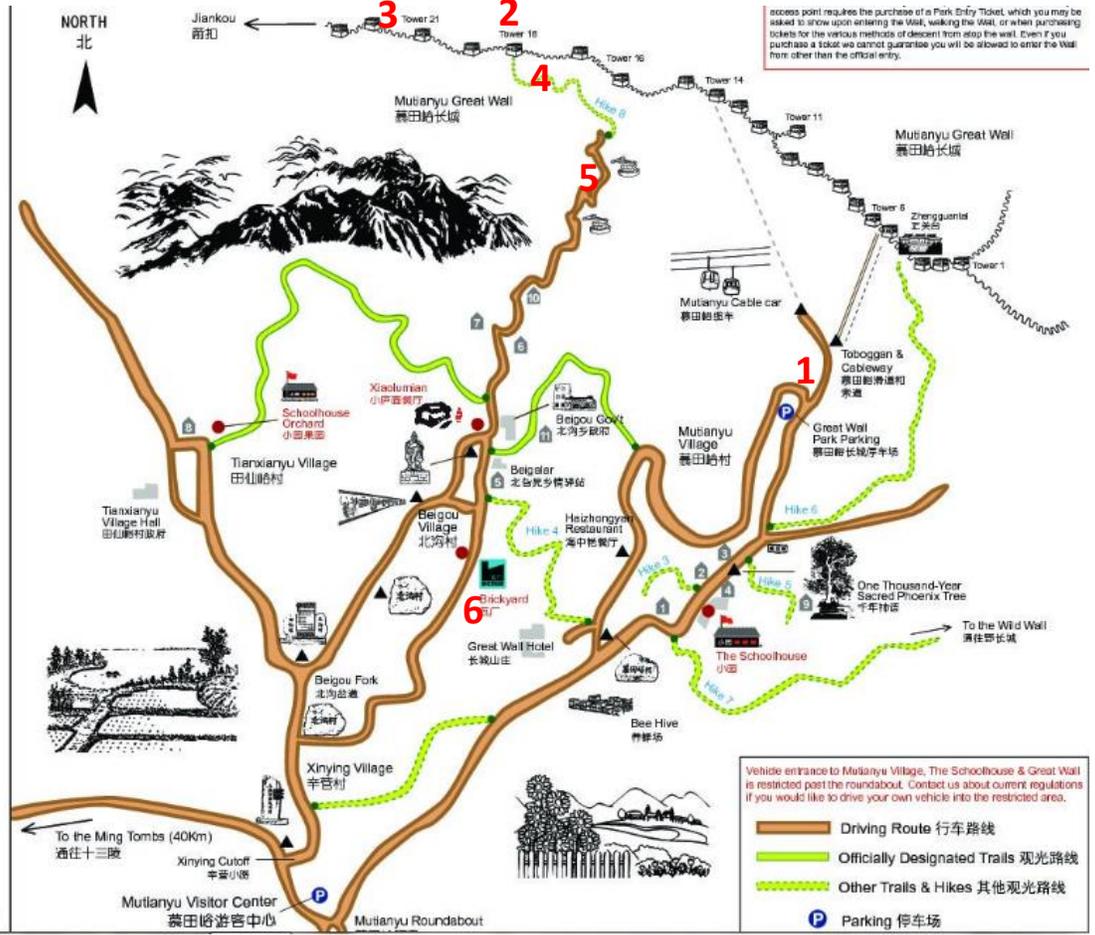
Walking Guide to Mutianyu Hikes

1. The Village's 5th Avenue, 1 km, 10 min
2. The Mutianyu Loop, 2 km, 1 hour
3. Village Homes and Lifestyle, 3 km, 1.5 hours
4. The Nutty Walk to Beigou Village, 2 km, 1 hour
5. Strolling the Hills, 3 km, 1.5 hours
6. Through Orchards to Zhengguan, 4 km, 2 hours
7. The Wild Wall, 3 km, 1.5 hours
8. The Secret Path to Tower 18, 7.8 km, 3 hours

One Way Driving Distances To/From The Schoolhouse:

1. Mutianyu Roundabout: 1.9 km
2. Great Wall Park Parking: 1.3 km
3. Brickyard: 4.4 km
4. Xiaolumian: 4 km
5. Xinying Cutoff: 2.1 km
6. Beigou Fork: 3 km
7. Schoolhouse Orchard: 4km

Welcome to Mutianyu Great Wall! Mutianyu, Beigou, Xinying and Tianxiangyu constitute the Great Wall International Cultural Village. We encourage you to explore our wonderful surroundings. If you would like detailed descriptions of area walks and hikes, you may buy a copy of our guidebook *Walking Guide to Mutianyu*. Discover our villages and learn the timeless language of



1	Parking lot and start of trail / cable car to wall (approximate)	40.430254, 116.556530
2	Tower 18 (approximate)	40.448266, 116.553783
3	Wild Wall to west of Tower 18 – furthest point we reached	40.454524, 116.544510
4	Start of step trail from Accentor alley to Tower 18 (c 1hr uphill)	40.444178, 116.550708
5	Accentor Alley – (c 30mins from Brickyard) starts here	40.436021, 116.545855
6	Brickyard Retreat	40.427049, 116.543641

Grid references from Google Maps.

Species List

1. **Ring-necked Pheasant** Numerous, Lingshan; single Great Wall.
2. **Mandarin Duck** Attractive and close flock, Agricultural Exhibition Centre Park.
3. **Mallard** On several city park lakes.
4. **Common Goldeneye** Single, Summer Palace.
5. **Goosander** Large flock, Summer Palace.
6. **Little Grebe** Several, Summer Palace.



7. **Grey Heron** Single, Summer Palace.
8. **Black Vulture** One over Lingshan on arrival.
9. **Northern Goshawk** Single high over ridge above Botanical Garden.
10. **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** Single very tame and exposed at Summer Palace and another Beigou.
11. **Feral Pigeon** Locally common.
12. **Oriental Turtle-Dove** Small numbers.
13. **Spotted Dove** Small numbers.
14. **Common Kingfisher** Single, Summer Palace.
15. **Grey-headed Woodpecker** Single, Fragrant Hills.
16. **Great Spotted Woodpecker** Small numbers widespread, including single, Lingshan.
17. **Grey-crowned Pygmy-Woodpecker** Small numbers Botanical Gardens and Beigou.
18. **Eurasian Jay** Single, Mutianyu wall.
19. **Azure-winged Magpie** Common in urban areas.
20. **Red-billed Blue-Magpie** Seen well, Botanical Gardens.
21. **Eurasian Magpie** Very common.
22. **Red-billed Chough** Two over Lingshan.
23. **Large-billed Crow** Small numbers widespread.
24. **Japanese Waxing** Small flock seen Agricultural Exhibition Park; had been present most of December.
25. **Japanese Tit** Common.
26. **Songar Tit** Several Lingshan and two seen along Mutianyu Great Wall.
27. **Marsh Tit** Several in Botanical Gardens and common around Beigou.
28. **Silver-throated Bush-tit** Very common.
29. **Chinese Hill Warbler** Pair seen after some struggle, Lingshan, but seen well at several points from Mutianyu Great Wall and at bottom of track below Tower 18.
30. **Chinese Bulbul** Several seen.
31. **Pallas's Leaf-Warbler** Three sightings, all in Botanical Gardens.
32. **Plain Laughingthrush** Common around Beigou; several seen on ridge above Botanical Gardens.
33. **Vinous-throated Parrotbill** Two flocks, both rather large, around Beigou.
34. **Winter Wren** Single in Cherry Valley, Botanical Gardens.
35. **Eurasian Nuthatch** Single seen from Mutianyu Great Wall.
36. **Chinese Nuthatch** Seen once in two visits to Botanical Garden (near the large, central conservatory) but very common in Beigou area and also seen from Mutianyu Great Wall.
37. **Red-billed Starling** Single, Botanical Garden.
38. **White-cheeked Starling** Small numbers in urban parks.
39. **Japanese Thrush** Single 1w male, Agricultural Exhibition Park. Found several days earlier, and surrounded by semi-circle of photographers since. Apparently third record for Beijing area.
40. **Eurasian (Chinese) Blackbird** Several seen, urban areas.
41. **Red-throated Thrush** Fine male with pre-roost gathering of next species, above main entrance gate to Summer Palace. Also, briefly, one suspected, Botanical Gardens.



42. **Naumann's Thrush** The default wintering thrush; widespread in small numbers. Several apparent intergrades seen.

43. **Dusky Thrush** One seen at Summer Palace.

44. **Red-flanked Bluetail** Single Botanical Gardens and several Beigou

45. **Daurian Redstart** Several, Beigou

46. **Güldenstädt's Redstart** 2 females seen, Lingshan.

47. **Plumbeous Water-Redstart** Seen en-route to Lingshan.

48. **Tree Sparrow** Common in urban areas and around Beigou.

49. **Siberian Accentor** Single seen Lingshan, one just below Tower 18 on the wall and c15 in the valley along the road from Beigou to the trail up to Tower 18 (most in rough herbage just above where the trail meets the road).

50. **White Wagtail** One flyover.

51. **Brambling** Small numbers widespread.

52. **Oriental Greenfinch** Small flock Beigou.

53. **Eurasian Siskin** Single, Botanical Garden

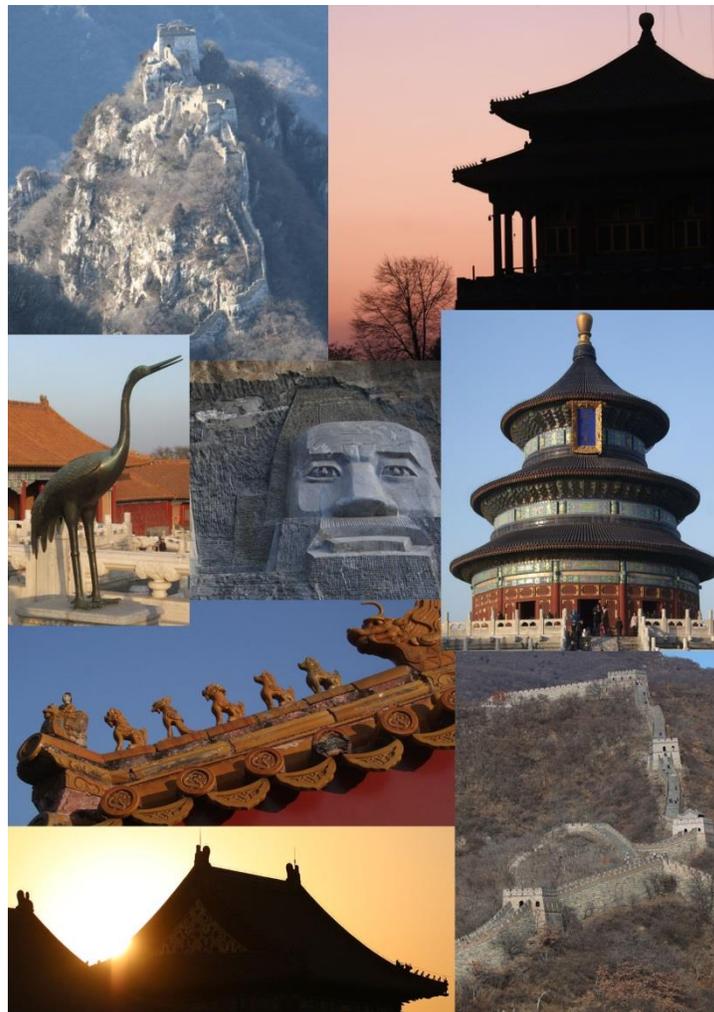
54. **Pallas's Rosefinch** c20+ in all, Lingshan.

55. **Chinese Grosbeak** Two, Agricultural Exhibition Park.

56. **Godlewski's Bunting** Common Beigou and below Mutianyu Great Wall.

57. **Meadow Bunting** Common Lingshan.

58. **Elegant Bunting** associating with



Several seen, Beigou, Godlewski's Buntings.