I was heading to China for business and had arranged a couple of days birding with Lin Jiansheng (aka LaoLin) at Poyang Hu through his friend Xie Kai (laoxieandfriends@gmail.com). Then I saw on BirdForum that Kevin Harding and Mark Maddock were also planning on coming down from Shanghai that same weekend. So I rearranged my plans and we all got to bird together. It turned out to be a wonderful weekend with good friends and great birds. I ended up with 8 lifers and a whole mess of China ticks.

We chose to handle all meals and lodging ourselves rather than package it together with the guiding. We stayed in Yongxiu instead of at the preserve in Wucheng, mostly because we wanted to visit other areas besides Wucheng. We booked our hotel, the Yongxiu Hotel (Yongxiu Binguan), on line. The rooms were warm and the staff friendly if you speak a little Chinese, although like many places in southern China, there was no heat in the public areas. They charged RMB 235 for a deluxe queen room including breakfast (which we skipped). We had dinners in a couple of the restaurants on the main street near the hotel and picked up drinks and snacks for our lunches at a small grocery store just outside the hotel’s entrance road. We also covered the costs of all of LaoLin’s meals and his lodging for one night.

LaoLin handled all transport from Saturday morning to Sunday evening. He drove his 4WD drive van, which was big enough to fit the four of us plus luggage and camera gear. The advantage of 4WD is that you don’t need to take a boat trip – we went through some muddy places that you could barely call roads. He’s a very enthusiastic guide, a safe driver, and best of all, he knows what birds the ex-pats want and where the birds are. He’s THE guide to go with in Jiangxi Province. However, he doesn’t speak any English other than the names of some of the birds. If you don’t speak Chinese, you’ll need a translator. Fortunately, Kevin speaks fluent Chinese, so we were set.

I’d given Kai a list of target species – cranes topping the list, of course – and we’d arranged a plan. We would go to Nanjishan Reserve on Saturday for ducks and Japanese Swamp Warbler and bird in the Wucheng/Da Hu area on Sunday. Cranes would be possible either day. We also contemplated driving to look for scaly-sided merganser as a site west of Nanchang, but time didn’t allow for it. That would have to wait for another trip.

I know that the three of us each saw some birds that the other didn’t. Kevin also spent two days in Poyang before Mark and I arrived, so his lists are likely different (and longer) than mine. This report covers what I saw only. Mark has also put a short trip report (with photos!) in his thread in the China Section of BirdForum, but I thought I’d capture my thoughts as well.

Day 1 – 12 Jan. 2013

LaoLin met us at 6:30 at the hotel. Heavy fog had settled in overnight and LaoLin was afraid that the expressway might be closed. So instead of driving all the way to Nanjishan (OK, only about 40-50 km), we piled in and headed to Sha Hu instead. We saw many doves in the trees along the road. We didn’t check them all, but likely they included both spotted doves and oriental turtle-doves. Eurasian tree sparrows and crested mynas were common in the villages we passed. Other species, like light-vented bulbuls, ring-necked pheasants, white wagtail, and long-tailed shrikes were easily found in the open areas.

Our first sighting of note was one of many brown crakes – we had over 10 on the day, followed by a mixed flock of yellow-billed grosbeaks and white-browed laughingthrushes* in a small village. Another village had a flock of rooks, an uncommon bird in China. We found a couple semi-countable mallards mixed in with some flocks of farm ducks, and a few common moorhens. There were daurian redstarts in the brush along the road. A stop
along the way for some buntings turned up a few of the more common black-faced buntings, but no other bunting species we could pick out.

Then the paved road ended.

We continued bouncing through the mud along the north bank of the XiuShui River (and I do mean bouncing) for over an hour. A fly-by merganser turned out to be a common merganser/goosander, not the unlikely but strongly hoped for scaly-sided. Further on we found another small group of common mergs on the river, along with a few little grebes. Then the pipits showed up. First we had large flocks of buff-bellied pipits followed by similar number of water pipits. Both species would be common wherever we went. Mixed in with those were some Eurasion skylarks. We also found a Eurasion kestrel in a bare tree, an occasional common sandpiper in the river, and a few grey herons and dusky thrushes. Some more reedy patches gave us zitting cisticolas and at one Laolin also heard a different sound that we eventually discovered was a Siberian stonechat. We also found some kingfishers – both white-throated kingfisher and common kingfisher.

Eventually we stopped in the middle of a big open area. LaoLin told us this was Sha Hu, which normally would have been under water. His plan was to wait there and as the fog lifted the cranes would be near us with us in the van as a blind. Unfortunately, the cranes didn’t cooperate. When the fog started to lift, the cranes were distant. But with a scope we could clearly make out many white-naped cranes, along with large flocks of taiga bean geese (probably taigas, anyway). While scoping the cranes, a small flock of oriental white storks flew over and landed in the fog. As the fog continued to lift, we found a close Chinese grey shrike that flitted around from stalk to stalk, and in the distance we saw hundreds more white storks that we tried to turn into Siberian cranes along with many more white-naped cranes. Mark picked out a couple black storks mixed in with them and we also managed to locate a couple hooded cranes*. But there was a channel between us and the birds, so that was as close as we could get.

We started working our way back the way we came (still bouncing!), and found a flock of red-billed and black-collared starlings near a ruined house. LaoLin picked out an oriental skylark from among the pipit flocks. We found a common buzzard flying over one of the fields and then a dark morph long-tailed shrike along the road. That was a bird that sent us scrambling for the field guides. A stop at some mudflats turned up a large flock of spotted redshanks, with a few pied avocets, black-necked stilts, and a distant northern lapwing. Laolin stopped at another spot and taped in a yellow-bellied prinia, one of Kevin’s targets. Eventually we stopped at another brushy area to check for buntings. Laolin said that yellow-browed would be possible there. We had more black-faced and one distant bird we couldn’t ID. At this point, Laolin told us that we should follow a dirt path for “a few kilometers” and he would meet us at the other end.

Off we went, through the tea plants, cotton fields, and rice fields, but only finding more black-faced buntings. A couple white-cheeked starlings perched on a distant wire along with more shrikes. We next picked out a couple Pallas’ leaf-warblers among the buntings. A bird flew by that we first called a woodpecker, but when it flew close it turned out to be a hoopoe. As we kept walking, Mark also found an olive-backed pipit or two from their calls. We then found a large flock of vinous-throated parrotbills, but couldn’t find anything mixed in with them other than a great tit. Just past them, I saw a few Chinese bamboo-partridge shoot across one of the rice fields, but the others only got a glimpse. A distant pair of pied kingfishers flew over a flooded area nearby.

Then we saw a Chinese/Eurasian blackbird fly into a net mounted on two bamboo poles. We looked further and saw three other birds trapped in it. One was already dead, one nearly so, but two were still alive. We tore down the net, and using a knife that Kevin carries for just this purpose, cut the three birds free. It took a long time because they were really fouled in the netting. It was quite gratifying to eventually see the two birds fly off into the cover of some nearby brush, but it was hard to watch the third bird flap helplessly on the ground and then just stop struggling. Just heartbreaking.
As we saw LaoLin parked in the distance, the path came to a field of cotton plants full of buntings. Most of these were little buntings or more black-faced. And as we got back in the van, I was able to pick out a yellow-throated bunting, too. We hadn’t driven very far when LaoLin stopped the van, shouting “Quail! Quail!” We walked a little way into the field where he saw it, and up popped a Japanese quail.* it flew a little bit and dropped back down into the brush. Another one of my target birds down.

LaoLin stopped at another spot for buntings. This time we picked up a meadow bunting among the black-faced’s, some plain prinias, a flock of nutmeg manikins, and a few Chinese penduline tits. But since we still hadn’t seen the star of the show – Siberian crane – we headed back into Yongxiu town and then out to Wucheng where Kevin had seen them the day before.

On the way we found our only eastern spot-billed duck of the trip. And just as Kevin said, along the causeway we finally caught up with a pair of Siberian cranes*. Such beautiful birds! We also found a flock of greater white-fronted geese. LaoLin took a look at those geese through the scope and picked out a few lesser white-fronted geese* right in the front of the flock. We then continued on to Wucheng town, where we took a short walk. Kevin and Mark found a red-flanked bluetail and Mark saw a gray-backed thrush but I missed both of those. Out on the water we saw a few great-crested grebes and a flock of black-headed gulls. We then spent some time trying to coax out a brownish-flanked bush warbler, but only got a peek as it played hide-and-seek.

By then it was getting dark, so we headed back to Yongxiu for dinner and to celebrate our "four crane day" followed by a good night’s sleep.

**Day 2 – 13 Jan. 2013**

Sunday dawned cold and rainy, although the rain stopped on the way to Nanjishan. We drove down the “main” road on the dike to Nanjishan, seeing many grey herons (they’d be common all day) and a few more brown crakes along with some more dodgy mallards. LaoLin said that area used to be good for buntings, but since there had been some development the quality had dropped off. He also noted that although Nanjishan is usually the place for ducks in the Poyang Hu area, this was not a good year. None of the common dabbling ducks had shown up this year.

Our first stop was at a small temple on the top of a rocky peak. We followed a paved path around that for a little way. I finally caught up with red-flanked bluetail and Mark and I briefly saw a thrush shoot by that we think was a grey-backed thrush. Eventually the path came out at a large, flooded stone quarry, where two pairs of pied kingfishers flew back and forth hunting and defending their territories. We could also look down on some brush where we had a good look at a brownish-flanked bush-warbler (although we tried to turn it into a yellowish-flanked). We also turned up another yellow-throated bunting and of course, a few black-faced’s. As we straggled our way back to the van, Kevin and I tried for another look at another bush-warbler, and when we got back to the van Mark had seen a couple more grey-backed thrushes.

From there we drove over a large bridge, passing a close white-throated kingfisher on the wires, and down to a large reedy area. LaoLin got out his recording and started playing a rattling song. We got several responses and eventually we all had great looks at Japanese Swamp Warbler* (aka Marsh Grassbird). This is a specialty of the Poyang Hu area, and the others got some good photos. We also were able to scope a chestnut-eared bunting* sitting on the road and found more black faced and little buntings. The others saw a Pallas’ bunting, too, but LaoLin was busy getting me onto another swamp warbler and I missed it. At this point we had quite a few common cranes flying overhead along with more grey herons, but none of the Asian specialty cranes.

We drove to another reedy area and looked for more buntings. More chestnut-eareds plus a flock of Chinese penduline tits and several plain prinias, but no Pallas’ yet. We also had our first string of swan geese flying over. Someone spotted a raptor on a nearby power pole, and a scope confirmed it was a large (probably female)
peregrine falcon. Continuing through the reeds, we found a hunting northern/hen harrier, a few sitting cisticolas and also spooked a common snipe. We eventually ended up at the town of NanJiXiang, where we could look down on a flock of Siberian cranes. We estimated there were at least 200, which put this at more than 5% of the world population. Just beyond the town we were able to chase down a pair of soaring eastern marsh harriers and we saw a lone Richard's pipit sitting on a wrecked boat.

By this point the light had improved. Kevin and Mark both wanted some better photos of the swamp warbler, Kevin wanted some penduline tit shots, and I still needed the Pallas’ bunting, so we went back to one of the reedy areas. On the way we had a common coot on a small pond. We had killer views of a nice male chestnut-eared bunting and I heard the penduline tits in the distance. We finally got a Pallas’ bunting* to pop up and I saw the white rump. Eventually the Chinese penduline tits came in closer and Kevin got his photos. Further down the road we found a flock of swan geese and some greater white-fronts, and while looking at them a small skein of tundra swans flew past.

It was now mid-afternoon, and we’d all seen and photographed our targets (except for ducks) at Nanjishan, so we decided to head to a lake in Nanchang City for some additional birding. On the way back, LaoLin stopped the van and got very excited about something he was seeing. Kevin couldn’t figure out what it was, but eventually LaoLin grabbed a field guide and pointed to the picture of a great bittern. Kevin found it first, followed by Mark. I took forever to find it but when I did I was stunned it was in the reeds just 2 or 3 meters from us! Of course, it was being a bittern - standing absolutely still with its bill pointing upward. We just took picture after picture, and once the bird decided we weren’t a threat, it just decided to walk away out in the open. Incredible. When we asked how he found it, LaoLin said he saw the eye. What a guide!

We finally made it back to Nanchang, and to the Lake LaoLin knew. A sandbank in the lake was full of little egrets. There were shorebirds on the far shore, black-winged stilts, pied avocets, spotted redshanks, a common sandpiper, and a handful of plovers that we scoped and saw were Kentish plovers (I was hoping for long-billed, but the habitat really wasn’t right). We also found a half-dozen common teal which we dutifully checked in case there were North American vagrants. From there we headed to some forested areas near the airport to try for laughingthrushes. After a couple dips, we found a small group of masked laughingthrushes along with a lone white-browed laughingthrush and the last of many black-faced buntings.

We had a nice dinner at a restaurant right next to the airport, said our goodbyes to LaoLin at the terminal curbside, and then eventually caught our (delayed) flights.

**Trip List**

Swan Goose - *Anser cygnoides* – Several flocks at Nanjishan

Taiga Bean Goose - *Anser fabails* – Abundant at Sha Hu. Scattered birds at Nanjishan.

Greater White-fronted Goose – *Anser albifrons* – A large flock near Wucheng and a few birds at Nanjishan

Lesser White-fronted Goose – *Anser erythropus* – A handful of birds mixed in the flock of greaters near Wucheng

Tundra Swan – *Cygnus columbianus* – A string flew over at Nanjishan.

Mallard – *Anas platyrhynchos* – A few birds mixed in with flocks of farm ducks may have been wild.

Eastern Spot-Billed Duck – *Anas zonoryncha* – A single bird along the Wucheng causeway.
Common Teal – *Anas crecca* – A few birds at a lake in Nanchang.

Common Merganser – *Mergus merganser* – A small group on the Xiushui River on the way to Sha Hu.

Japanese Quail – *Coturnix Japonica* – One bird spotted by LaoLin that we were able to flush.

Chinese Bamboo Partridge – *Bambusicola thoracicus* – Four birds shot across a rice field near Sha Hu.

Ring-necked Pheasant – *Phasianus colchicus* – Scattered birds on both days.

Little Grebe – *Tachybaptus ruficollis* – Common on open water.

Great-crested Grebe – *Podiceps cristatus* – A few birds offshore at Wucheng.

Black Stork – *Ciconia nigra* – A couple birds spotted by Mark at Sha Hu.

Oriental White Stork – *Ciconia boyciana* – A large flock at Sha Hu.

Grey Heron – *Ardea cinerea* – A couple birds on the XiuShui River. Abundant at Nanjishan.

Little Egret – *Egretta garzetta* – One or two birds near Nanjishan, and a huge flock at a lake in Nanchang.

Eastern Marsh Harrier – *Circus spilonotus* – A pair of soaring birds near Nanjixiang Village.

Northern (Hen) Harrier – *Circus cyaneus* – A lone bird hunting at Nanjishan.

Common Buzzard – *Buteo buteo* – A couple of birds in the Sha Hu and Wucheng areas.

Eurasian Kestrel – *Falco tinnunculus* – One bird on the way to Sha Hu and another at Nanjishan.

Peregrine Falcon – *Falco peregrinus* – One bird perched on a power tower at Nanjishan.

Brown Crake – *Amaurornis akool* – Surprisingly common in any water-filled ditch.

Common Moorhen – *Galinula chloropus* – Common.

Common Coot – *Fulica atra* – One bird seen at Nanjishan.

Siberian Crane – *Grus leucogeranus* – A few birds at Wucheng. A flock of over 200 near Nanjixiang Village.

White-naped Crane – *Grus vipio* – A large flock at Sha Hu.

Common Crane – *Grus grus* – A few birds near Sha Hu. More numerous at Nanjishan.

Hooded Crane – *Grus monacha* – A couple birds each at Sha Hu and at Nanjishan.

Northern Lapwing – *Vanellus vanellus* – Scattered birds on both days.

Kentish Plover – *Charadrius alexandrinus* – 5 or 6 birds at the lake in Nanchang.
Pied Avocet – *Recurvirostra avocetta* – A few birds on the way back from Sha Hu, and a couple birds at the lake in Nanchang.

Black-winged Stilt – *Himantopus himantopus* - A large group on the way back from Sha Hu, and a couple birds at the lake in Nanchang.

Common Sandpiper – *Actitis hypoleucus* – Scattered sightings.

Spotted Redshank – *Tringa erythropus* – Abundant

Common Greenshank – *Tringa nebularia* – Scattered sightings and heard often.

Common Snipe – *Gallinago gallinago* – One bird spooked out of field at Nanjishan.

Black-headed Gull - *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* – A flock seen offshore at Wucheng.

Vega (Herring) Gull – *Larus vegae* - A couple birds at Sha Hu.

Oriental Turtle-Dove – *Streptopelia orientalis* – Common

Spotted Dove – *Streptopelia chinensis* - Common

Common Kingfisher – *Alcedo atthis* – One bird seen on the way to Sha Hu

White-throated Kingfisher – *Halcyon smyrnensis* – Scattered sightings both days.

Pied Kingfisher – *Ceryle rudis* – A couple birds over the fields on the walk through the fields near Sha Hu and two pairs at the stone quarry.

Eurasian Hoopoe – *Upupa epops* – A fly-over bird on the walk through the fields near Sha Hu.

Long-tailed Shrike - *Lanius schach* – Abundant. Two dark morphs also seen.

Chinese Gray Shrike – *Lanius sphenocercus* – One bird at Sha Hu and another at Nanjishan.

Rook – *Corvus frugilegus* – A flock on the way to Sha Hu.

Skylark – *Alauda arvensis* – Common on open fields near Sha Hu and Wucheng

Oriental Skylark – *Alauda gulgula* - A few sightings near Sha Hu.

Great Tit – *Parus major* – One or two near Sha Hu. Surprisingly uncommon.

Light-vented Bulbul – *Pycnonotus sinensis* – Common around habitation.

Brownish-flanked Bush-warbler – *Cettia fortipes* – One bird heard at Wucheng and a few birds heard and one seen at the stone quarry.

Pallas’ Leaf-warbler – *Phylloscopus proregulus* – A few birds on the walk through the fields and a couple birds at Nanjishan.
Japanese Swamp-warbler – *Megalurus pryeri* – Two birds seen and more heard at Nanjishan. Very responsive to tape, but you need to be in the right habitat. Aka Marsh Grassbird.

Zitting Cisticola – *Cisticola juncidis* – Fairly common in reedy areas.

Plain Prinia – *Prinia inornata* – A few small groups in reedy areas.

Yellow-bellied Prinia – *Prinia flaviventris* – One bird seen on the road from Sha Hu.

Vinous-throated Parrotbill – *Paradoxornis webbianus* - A large flock on the walk through the fields.

Masked Laughingthrush – *Garrulax perspicillatus* - Three birds at a farm near Nanchang Airport

White-browed Laughingthrush – *Garrulax sannio* – A group of birds in a town on the way to Sha Hu and one at the farm near Nanchang Airport.

Oriental Magpie Robin – *Copsychus saularis* – One bird seen on the way to Sha Hu.

Red-flanked Bluetail – *Tarsiger cyanurus* - One seen by the others in Wucheng and a couple near the temple with the stone quarry.

Daurian Redstart - *Phoenicurus auroreus* – Fairly common in brushy areas.

Siberian (Stejneger’s) Stonechat – *Saxicola maurus* – One or two birds each day.

Grey-backed Thrush – *Turdus hortulorum* – One bird seen by Mark at Wucheng and another seen near the temple with the stone quarry.

Chinese (Eurasian) Blackbird – *Turdus merula* – A few birds on the walk through the fields two of which were rescued from a net.

Dusky Thrush – *Turdus eunomus* - Scattered sightings both days

Crested Myna – *Acridotheres cristatellus* - Common in habitation

Black-collared Starling – *Gracupica nigricollis* – Several flocks. Usually around ruined buildings or rural houses.

Red-billed Starling – *Sturnus sericeus* – Large flocks. Usually around ruined buildings or habitation.

White-cheeked Starling – *Sturnus cineraceus* – Usually mixed in with the red-billed flocks.

White Wagtail – *Motacilla alba* – Common

Olive-backed Pipit – *Anthus hodgsoni* – A few. Usually IDed by Mark from their call.

Richard’s Pipit – *Anthus richardi* – One bird seen near Nanjixiang Village.

Water Pipit – *Anthus spinoletta* – Abundant in fields and mud.

Buff-bellied Pipit – *Anthus rubescens* – Also abundant in fields and mud.
Meadow Bunting – *Emberiza coides* – One bird along the road from Sha Hu

Chestnut-eared Bunting – *Emberiza fucata* – Common in the reeds at Nanjishan

Little Bunting – *Emberiza pusilla* – A large flock in the cotton fields on our walk. A few sightings at Nanjishan.

Yellow-throated Bunting – *Emberiza elegans* – One bird in the cotton fields on our walk. Another at the stone quarry.

Black-faced Bunting – *Emberiza spodocephala* – Common in all brushy areas.

Pallas’ Bunting – *Emberiza pallasi* – A couple birds in the reeds in Nanjishan.

Yellow-billed Grosbeak – *Eophona migratoria* – A flock in a village on the way to Sha Hu. Scattered sightings at Nanjishan.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow – *Passer montanus* – Flocks common around habitation.

Nutmeg Mannikin/Scaly-breasted Munia – *Lonchura punctulata* – A flock seen on the road from Sha Hu