

Trip Report: China, Far East and Dubai. November 4th to December 2nd 2012

Itinerary:

China: Beijing and area: 04 to 11.11.12
At Sea: Yellow Sea: 12.11.12
South Korea: Busan: 13.11.12
At Sea: Yellow/East China Sea: 14.11.12
China: Shanghai: 15.11.12
At Sea: East China Sea and Taiwan Straits: 16 to 17.11.12
China: Hong Kong: 18.11.12
At Sea: South China Sea: 19.11.12
Vietnam: Da Nang and Phu My/Ho Chi Minh City: 18 to 19.11.12
At Sea: 22.11.12
Malaysia: Singapore: 23.11.12
At Sea: Gulf of Thailand: 24 to 25.11.12
Thailand: Laem Chabang and Bangkok: 26 to 29.11.12
Dubai: 29.11 to 02.12.12

Party of Mike and Eleanor Martin and sister in law Irene Miller travelled to China to visit the Martin's son Liam in Beijing in early November, before boarding the Diamond Princess at Tientsin for a 16 night cruise, taking in South Korea, back to China, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand, and after a four day break in Bangkok, stopped in Dubai for four days and then returned to Glasgow. This was Mike and Eleanor's third trip to China, with previous ones focussed largely on Hong Kong, other venues with the exception of Dubai, were first visits. All ports of call were new to Irene. This was not primarily a birding holiday, but every opportunity was taken for birding, with binoculars and camera constantly in use. Cruising aspects of the holiday provided some really good birding opportunities (see in particular a remarkable few hours in the Taiwan Strait on 15/11/12), and in most venues where possible parks and other such sites were looked for alongside mainstream tourist visiting.

China: Beijing: 04.11.12

With stop off in Dubai in middle of night arrived Beijing mid-afternoon. Heavy rain during transfer to Courtyard 7 Hotel, and only a single bird seen, a Large-billed Crow as approached centre of the city. Courtyard 7 is a small hotel developed from a seven hundred year old courtyard household, with perhaps 25 rooms. There are a number of trees in and around the courtyard development that provided cover for several species seen regularly over the six days spent here.

Beijing: 05.11.12

Tree Sparrows in courtyards from first light at 06.30hrs. Two Large-billed Crows calling high overhead, and an Azure-winged Magpie in courtyard at 09.30hrs. Walk to Tingshaw Park, with Common Kestrel enroute, where Spotted Dove 4, Tree Sparrow 100+, Azure-winged Magpie 30 and Common Magpie 1. A squirrel, pale grey and larger than British (N.American!) but with dark ear tufts. Forbidden City: many hundreds of Large-billed Crow observed in small parties of up to 25 between 14.30 and 16.30hrs moving to NW, and appearing to head for a supposed roost site not too far from the Forbidden City. There were at least 2 Daurian Jackdaws amongst the largest group of crows. One Common Magpie and c.30 Azure-winged, a single

Chinese Bulbul and c.30 White-cheeked Starlings in several small parties, and c.30 Tree Sparrows.

Beijing: 06.11.12

In Courtyard 7: Magpie, Tree Sparrows and a female Great Spotted Woodpecker. Tienamen Square, only Large-billed Crows noted, in smaller numbers than previous day, but left the area at 13.00hrs, presumably before the roost movement started (House Mouse seen in the open in the Square much later in day at 21.00hrs). East Watchtower Crows and magpies seen moving in NW direction towards dusk, but in much smaller numbers than in the Forbidden City/Tienamen Square area the previous day. The Colours of the Common Magpie were seen to be rather different from Western European, with dark blue where our birds have bottle green feathers. Several small groups of White-cheeked Starlings.

Beijing: 07.11.12

Courtyard 7: Tree Sparrow carrying feather into supposed nest site...looks like may breed throughout the year; several White-cheeked Starlings. Lama Temple: Common Magpie 1, and c.10 Azure-winged Magpies. Olympic Park: Several Common Magpies and a single Large-billed Crow; there were several large expanses of water that in Western Europe would have attracted quantities of water-birds, but not a single bird seen; the waters were however populated with fish.

Beijing: 08.11.12

Courtyard 7: Great Spotted Woodpecker and single Azure-winged Magpie. Jinguomen Observatory: White-wagtail, Large-billed Crow slight passage to W towards dusk, and several Azure-winged Magpies; small numbers of Tree Sparrows, perhaps 15, appearing to come into roost. Feral Pigeons in groups of up to 30, noted over past few days and seemingly with a high proportion of very pale coloured birds, at least compared with typical flocks in the UK.

Beijing: Great Wall at 09.11.12

Great Wall: Cole Tit several, and also several Eastern Great Tit (though most identified by similarity of call to the few that were seen clearly), similar size to European but with all the colours greyed out. Two flocks of fast flying birds, similar in size to European Starling, crossed the Wall North to South, they whole flock appeared to be calling, with sound similar to tinkling of Bohemian Waxwing, so assumed Japanese Waxwing, though have not been able to identify sound recording to confirm; both flocks contained about 15 birds and they gave impression of being intent on passage. Medium sized Thrush species, basically brown with no obvious eye-stripe/head marking. Distant views of c20 Magpie and Azure-winged Magpie.

Tristram's Bunting, one male seen on top of a small tree at eye level from the Wall, although brief view the very distinctive head markings were noted, and it was thought that several other more distant birds were also this species.

Great Wall to Ming Tombs: Large-billed Crow, Magpie and Azure-winged Magpie noted many times enroute, single Eurasian Kestrel, and single Grey-headed Woodpecker; this bird conveniently flew across the bonnet of our bus, landing in a bush beside the road, contrasting grey head with Green woodpecker size and basic colour, though brighter on back between wings and on rump, no red noted so assumed female.

Ming Tombs: Yellow-bellied Tit c20 birds in small parties. Distinctive yellow and green appearance with black head markings.

Beijing to Tientsin: 10.11.12

Heavy rain all day, becoming torrential during our trip through to board our cruise ship at Tientsin at dusk.

Courtyard 7: Great-spotted Woodpecker 2, male and female.

Tientsin: Black-headed Gull 2 together feeding in gale force winds and driving rain in lee of ship, making use of the ship lights.

Tientsin: 11.11.12

Storm bound all day in the harbour, with over 100 ships waiting to come in and out; when eventually embarked in small hours of 12th, we were one of two ships permitted to leave before the port was closed again (one result of this 24hrs delay was that we had to drop a day at Nagasaki from the itinerary). Few birds seen during the day, but a peregrine crossed the deck and flew strongly in the high winds out over the port area, and an adult Slaty-backed and immature Black-tailed Gull were identified, with several more distant gulls remaining unidentified.

At Sea in mid-Yellow Sea (36 N, 112E at noon): 12.11.12

3 buntings seen during course of day (1 at least had a broad pale supercilium and may have been Meadow?), but not enough detail to confirm as to species. Several Black-tailed and Vega Gulls, with immature and adults of both seen at various points during the day, all appeared to be heading in a SW direction; one clear adult Slaty-backed Gull at 09.00hrs. Oriental Turtle Dove watched over period of an hour flying around the boat, and staying pace up to 100 metres off the starboard side. At 16.30hrs two Streaked Shearwaters were seen and noted to be very pale below and quite pale above (these proved to be the only ones seen on the trip); shortly after c.10 Arctic Skua (group of 7 together) mostly dark phase, with a couple of intermediate birds.

South Korea: Busan: 13.11.12

Harbour area at first light produced quite a few gulls: Slaty-backed, Black-tailed and Vega, with c.20 Black-headed, and 15 Great Cormorants. Coming ashore and travelling around on an open-topped Big Bus Tour for several hours produced: Tree Sparrow, Eastern Great Tit, Oriental Turtle Dove, Spotted Dove, Common Magpie, Large-billed Crow, Grey Heron, 2 Oriental Greenfinches and a Siskin. Stopping to spend time in ...Park, a particularly raucous group of birds was noted with a pale head and most of body and a very distinctive tear shaped brown patch behind the eye. Despite reasonable quality photographs being taken, no thrush/laughing thrush species seemed to fit the bill (birds seemed very much the size of European Mistle Thrush), only very much later were the bulbuls considered, when it proved very straightforward to assign as Brown-eared Bulbul. With all the other species of bulbul I have seen in several countries I just hadn't appreciated that the family included anything as large as this species! There were about a dozen in a loose flock, feeding voraciously, and giving the impression of birds passing through the park.

At Sea: Yellow Sea: 14.11.12

Vega Gull, one bird slip-streaming astern of the boat for over an hour in the afternoon. An owl species (presumably either Long or Short-eared) was watched initially flying strongly low over the water several hundred metres off the port bow,

and thereafter circling to gain height, eventually being lost to sight astern and having gained several hundred feet in height.

China: Shanghai: 15.11.12

Use made of Big Bus Tour and visits made to temples and along the waterfront, though very few birds seen: Tailorbird 2 (1 immature); Chinese Bulbul c40; Spotted Dove 3; and, Masked Laughing Thrush 2.

At Sea in mid-East China Sea (28N 120E at mid-day): 16.11.12

A pipit sp, giving a single soft flight call similar to Meadow Pipit flew on at stern at 07.50hrs, most likely to have been Buff-bellied Pipit. Daurian Redstart adult female landed on railings for a few seconds, showing white patch on wings, russet on tail and rump, and lacking dark head markings.

At Sea Taiwan Straits (23 51N 118 22E at mid-day) 17.11.12

Several Boobys between 08.30 and 09.15hrs, thought to be Brown Boobys. Very humid morning with steady rain and poor visibility from 11.15hrs. Over the next 2 hours had some of the best birding of the journey (and of my life!) with a small but steady fall of birds with buntings proving particularly difficult. Identified myself or with help from members of the Oriental Bird Club and SOC colleagues: Siberian Rubythroat 2 adult males; Siberian Stonechat; Little Bunting; 3 Pale Thrushes; Chinese Thrush; Daurian Redstart; 3 Pallas's Warbler; a Yellow-browed Warbler; and a female Brambling; later identifications with assistance: Japanese Yellow Bunting; Black-winged Cuckoo Shrike; and, Red-flanked Bluetail. The Rubythroats were the first birds noted, with buntings and thrushes coming in a few minutes later, and most birds proving very tame; an exception was the Chinese Thrush which, apart from a few seconds conveniently perched in the open on a railing, had the ability to hide in a fake fig tree only 1.5 metres across for minutes at a time. This thrush looked like a European Song Thrush, except that the markings were more like those of a Mistle Thrush. The area that the birds landed on was on the Top Deck, and was appropriately called The Sanctuary; it is intended as a quiet area for folk to sunbathe, and charged extra to use it...however with the weather conditions it was pretty well abandoned, and the birds had the fake trees, bushes, hedges and grass to themselves...and some seemed to find at least some food (good photograph of Pallas's Warbler with a grub of some kind, and Buntings apparently finding something in the fake grass...natural food was supplemented by my scattering remains from food plates abandoned when the rain set in). The area was checked at night for roosting birds but none were found. I regretted not having found The Sanctuary on the previous day when there were clearly passerines aboard, and who knows what birds were missed!

China: Hong Kong; 18.11.12

Hong Kong is a territory that we have spent some time in over the past few years when visiting our son who has subsequently transferred to Beijing. On this occasion we took the Big Bus Tour onto Hong Kong Island, visiting Stanley, Aberdeen, The Peak and the Star Ferry, with only a few minutes on mainland Kowloon. Species seen: 30 Black Kite; Great White Egret 1; Grey Heron 3; Little Egret 4; Sulphur Crested Cockatoo 8; Tree Sparrow; Crested Mynah 20; Common Mynah; Japanese White-eye two flocks of c30; Common Magpie 2; Large-billed Crow 1; Black-collared Starling 2; Southern Great Tit 2; Red-whiskered Bulbul sev; Sooty Bulbul; Chinese Bulbul; Red-billed Blue Magpie; and, Feral and Spotted Doves.

At Sea: South China Sea: (17 44N and 101 39E at mid-day): 19.11.12
Little Egret 2 to NE at mid-day.

Vietnam: Da Nang: 20.11.12

Day trip to suburbs and surroundings of the city proved rather disappointing with relatively few birds seen, a lunch-time stop in a wooded area alongside major river looked very promising, but turned up few birds and most of them were heard and not seen in the canopy. Species identified: Great White Egret, Little Egret, Cattle Egret, Chinese Pond Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Barn Swallow, Japanese White-eye and Tree Sparrow.

Vietnam: Phu My and Ho Chi Minh City: 21.11.12

Another very disappointing day, despite a lengthy coach trip from mooring many miles up Meekong River in surrounding mangrove swamp, time spent touring Ho Chi Minh City and a couple of hours back on board ship through dusk. Species seen: Common Sandpiper, Great White Egret, Little Egret, Common Myna, Japanese White-eye and Tree Sparrow.

At Sea: South China Sea: (5 38N and 105 0E at mid-day): 22.11.12

Brown Booby 1 at 09.00hrs. Only bird seen all day.

Singapore: 23.11.12

Again a rather disappointing day for birding despite spending the full day out and about, and taking Big Bus Tour and a great city over-view from a Ferris Wheel. A spectacular thunderstorm found us taking cover in Raffles Hotel, just after seeing a sizeable flock of Philippine Glossy Starlings on the roof, with a couple of Asian Koel calling in the background. Other species included: Chinese Pond Heron, Javan and Common Myna (the former seems to be recorded as White-vented in some texts), House Crow, Tree Sparrow, House Swift, Barn Swallow, Spotted Dove, and Japanese White-eye (take it was Japanese?)

At Sea: South China Sea (3 50N and 104 50E at mid-day) 24.11.12

White Wagtail off Port bow and over ship, but apparently not landing over a 20 minute period from 08.25hrs. Only bird seen today. Dolphin sp 3 seen surfacing twice off Starboard only a few 10s of metres out from the boat, and inexplicably then disappearing; small looking species, no white noted.

At Sea: Gulf of Thailand (9 34N and 102 4E at mid-day): 25.11.12

Immature Black-crowned Night Heron slip-streaming along Starboard side for over 2 hrs from 09.00hrs, occasionally flying over the vessel. Challenging to identify for quite a period, but eventually concluded on basis of red eye. At 13.30hrs a Brown Booby headed NW, and at 15.45hrs a party of 11 Chinese Pond Herons flew NE. A large bird of prey was watched at 16.45hrs alongside ship about 300 metres off Port side, initially flying low over the water before circling and gaining height. Watched for about 30 minutes before being lost in height and at a distance; thought to be an Eastern Marsh Harrier.

Thailand: End of the cruise phase. Laem Chabang Port, and then to Bangkok (couple of hours journey): 26.11.12

Early morning spent looking over harbour and surrounding area before travelling to Bangkok. Before leaving the port birds seen included: Chinese Pond Heron c15; Black-headed Gull; Barn Swallow; and, c12 Common Mynahs. Enroute to Bangkok: Grey Heron; Chinese Pond Herons; Little Egret; Great Cormorant; Barn Swallow and at Hotel party of c.30 House Swifts.

Thailand: Bangkok: 27.11.12

Most of the day was spent exploring sites up and down the river, using tourist ferry boats, and towards evening not realising that our boat had become a commuter vessel and taking us several miles beyond city centre area downstream towards port and residential suburbs. We initially boarded at River Stage 13 Phra Achit Pier, and visited Sumone Fort, Banglampoo Market and the Royal Palace. Birds seen included: Javan Pond Herons; Peaceful Doves; Little Egret; Black Drongo; Asian Koel; House Swift; Common Mynah; Streak-eared Bulbul; Oriental Magpie Robin; Olive-backed Sunbird; Large-billed Crow and Tree Sparrows (largest flock c25 in Royal Palace).

Thailand: Bangkok: Lumpini Park: 28.11.12

Spent about 5 hours in the park, covering the whole area perhaps 3 times. A couple of species evaded identification, but most managed ok....Coppersmith Barbet was quite a star, and although I never managed to see one to identify, I had several Black-naped Orioles identified by call, which was very similar to European Golden Oriole. Birds seen: Coppersmith Barbet; Common Kingfisher; Plaintive Cuckoo; Asian Koel; Indian Roller; House Swift; Peaceful Dove; Chinese Pond Heron; Javan Pond Heron; Large-billed Crow; Black-naped Oriole; Ashy Drongo; Pied Fantail; Oriental Magpie Robin; Asian Pied Starling; Black-collared Starling; Common Mynah; White-vented Mynah; Yellow-vented Bulbul; Streak-eared Bulbul; Olive-backed Sunbird; and, Tree Sparrow.

Thailand: Bangkok: 29.11.12

Taxi ride from Lebua Hotel to Airport. Two cormorants observed flying some distance away, appeared faster winged and shorter necked than the Great Cormorant, and thought at first were Pygmy Cormorants which don't occur here....later discovered must have been Little Cormorants!

Dubai: Meridien Airport Hotel: 30.11.12

Birds seen from Hotel gardens: Black-headed Gull; Laughing Dove; Collared Dove; Red-vented Bulbul; White-cheeked Bulbul; Common mynah; Pied Mynah; Graceful Prinia; House Crow; Indian Silverbill; and, House Sparrow.

Dubai: Meridien Hotel, Dubai 7s Rugby; and City: 01.12.12

Pallid Swift; Sandgrouse sp 2; Laughing Dove; Collared Dove; Hoopoe; White Wagtail; Red-vented Bulbul; White-cheeked Bulbul; Common Mynah; Pied Mynah; Graceful Prinia; House Crow; Indian Silverbill; and, House Sparrow.

Dubai: Meridien Hotel: 02.12.12

Laughing Dove; Collared Dove; Red-vented Bulbul; White-cheeked Bulbul; Common Mynah; Pied Mynah; Graceful Prinia; House Crow; Indian Silverbill; and, House Sparrow.

Species		C h i n a/ H K	S. K o r e a	V i e t n a m	S i n g a p o r e	T h a i l a n d	D u b a i	A t S e a
New species: *								
Streaked Shearwater*	<i>Calonectris leucomelas</i>							*
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>			*		*		*
Chinese Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>			*	*			*
Javan Pond Heron*	<i>Ardeola speciosa</i>					*		
Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>			*				
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	*	*			*		
Great White Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	*		*				
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	*		*		*		*
Brown Booby	<i>Sula leucogaster</i>							*
Little Cormorant*	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>					*		
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>		*			*		
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	*						
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	*						
Black-eared Kite	<i>Milvus lineatus</i>	*						
Eastern Marsh Harrier*	<i>Circus spinolotus</i>							*
Common Sandpiper				*				
Black-tailed Gull*	<i>Larus crassirostris</i>	*	*					*
Vega Gull*	<i>Larus vegae</i>	*	*					*
Slaty-backed Gull*	<i>Larus schistisagus</i>	*	*					
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundis</i>	*	*				*	
Arctic Skua	<i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i>							*
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	*						
Oriental Turtledove	<i>Sreptopelia orientalis</i>		*					*
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>						*	
Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	*	*		*			
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>						*	
Peaceful Dove*	<i>Geopilia striata</i>							
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	<i>Cocatus galerita</i>	*						
Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>					*		
Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>				*	*		
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>					*		
Owl sp (Long/Sh-e)	<i>Asio sp</i>							*

Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>						*	
House Swift	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>				*	*		
Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>					*		
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>						*	
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>					*		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos noguchii</i>	*						
Grey-headed Woodpecker*	<i>Picus canus</i>	*						
Coppersmith Barbet*	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>					*		
Brown-winged Cuckoo Shrike*	<i>Coracina mealschistos</i>							*
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>					*		
Ashy Drongo*	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>					*		
Pied Fantail*	<i>Rhipidura javanica</i>					*		
Black-naped Oriole*	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>							
Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	*						
Red-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa erythrorhyncha</i>	*						
Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	*	*					
Daurian Jackdaw*	<i>Coloeus dauuricus</i>	*						
House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>				*		*	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	*						
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrohynchos</i>	*	*					
Japanese Waxwing*	<i>Bombycilla japonica</i>	*						
Eastern Great Tit*	<i>Parus minor</i>	*	*					
Southern Great Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>	*						
Yellow-bellied Tit*	<i>Periparus sibilans</i>	*						
Cole Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	*						
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>			*	*			
Graceful Prinia	<i>Prinia gracilis</i>						*	
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	*						
Red-whiskered Bulbul	<i>Pyconotus jocosus</i>	*						
White-eared Bulbul	<i>Pyconotus leucotis</i>						*	
Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pyconotus cafer</i>						*	
Chinese Bulbul	<i>Pyconotus sinensis</i>	*						
Sooty-headed Bulbul	<i>Pyconotus aurigaster</i>	*						
Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pyconotus goiavier</i>					*		
Streak-eared Bulbul*	<i>Pyconotus blanfordi</i>							
Brown-eared Bulbul*	<i>Microscelus amaurotis</i>		*					
Pallas's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>							
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>							
Masked Laughing Thrush	<i>Garrulax perspicillatus</i>	*						
Olive-backed Sunbird*	<i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>					*		
Japanese White-eye	<i>Zosterops japonicus</i>	*	*	*	*			
Asian Glossy Starling*	<i>Alponis panayensis</i>				*			
Crested Myna	<i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>	*			*			
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	*		*	*			
Javan Myna*	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>				*			
Asian Pied Starling*	<i>Sturnus contra</i>					*	*	
Black-collared Starling	<i>Sturnus nigricollis</i>	*				*		

