

Birding Beijing

The Birds of HM Ambassador Beijing's Residence Garden
10-16 September 2013

Highlights

- 30 species seen or heard in or over the garden during the September survey period, with notable sightings including:
 - At least 4 **RUFOUS-BELLIED WOODPECKERS** on 10th (a record number seen together in Beijing)
 - 3 **SIBERIAN THRUSHES** on 16th
 - Single **WHITE'S THRUSHES** on 11th, 12th and 16th
 - A single **DAURIAN STARLING** on 10th
 - **ASHY MINIVET** heard on 16th
 - **BLACK DRONGO** on 11th
 - Single **SIBERIAN RUBYTHROATS** on 12th, 13th and 16th



Photos: White's Thrush (left) and Rufous-bellied Woodpecker

1. Introduction and Summary

Following the spring survey of HM Ambassador Beijing's garden, which demonstrated the rich diversity of migratory birds that use this central Beijing green space, I was keen to repeat the exercise during the autumn migration period. I therefore arranged to visit the Residence garden each morning from Tuesday 10th to Friday 13th September and again on Monday 16th (five visits in total). Each visit lasted around one hour from c0600-0700. The route consisted of two circuits of the garden perimeter, involving several stops of a few minutes each at productive locations. The majority of the birds seen are likely to be migrants, temporarily using the garden as a refuge on their way to wintering grounds further south.

A total of 30 different species were seen, with an average daily total of 16.5. A daily list from each visit can be found in [Annex A](#) and a full systematic list of the birds seen in September can be found in [Annex B](#). [Annex C](#) is a combined list of species from the surveys in May and September, showing that a total of 47 species have now been recorded in the garden from the two surveys.

The most notable sightings of September's survey were the **4 Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers**. Unusually for a woodpecker, Rufous-bellied is a long-distance migrant, breeding in a restricted area in NE China and SE Russia and spending the winter in SE China. I believe the total of 4 in the Residence garden is a record number seen together in Beijing. First seen on Tuesday 10 September, at least two remained until Friday 13th but none were seen on Monday 16th. Other notable sightings included **3 Siberian Thrushes** on 16th and single **White's Thrushes** on 11th and 12th and again on 16th. **Siberian Thrush** breeds in central Siberia and the Russian Far East wintering in SE Asia. It is a scarce migrant in Beijing. **White's Thrush** (named after the British naturalist Gilbert White, 1720-1793) breeds from the Urals to Sakhalin, Korea and Japan and winters in NE India, S China and SE Asia.

All of the sightings will be submitted to the Chinese ornithological authorities for inclusion in the national archive of sightings, from which the annual publication "The China Bird Report" is drawn.

2. Habitat

The garden at HM Ambassador Beijing's Residence is a haven for birds. The habitat includes a mixture of mature trees (of a variety of species), lawn, shrubs and areas of ground cover. This mixture of habitat is attractive to a variety of migrating birds, from flycatchers and leaf warblers (which prefer mature trees) to thrushes (lawn and relatively sparse undergrowth), shrikes (shrubs) and robins (shrubs with ground cover). As the garden is not 'tamed' or meticulously manicured in the style of most of Beijing's parks, the garden offers more than most other green spaces in the capital.

3. Timing

The peak migration in terms of species diversity is thought to be from mid-September to mid-October. My visits came at the beginning of this period. It is possible that the last week of September and/or first week of October might be equally as good or better in terms of the number of species. It would be interesting to try!

Most of the birds seen in the Residence garden in September will be migrants and will likely spend the winter in South China, Southeast Asia or even as far away as Australasia.

4. Comments

I am grateful to HMA Sebastian Wood for allowing me into the Residence garden for a second survey and to Alison Burke for making the arrangements with security. The early starts were again rewarded with a variety of species that would grace any park or green space in Beijing. The total number of species seen – 30 – was slightly fewer than the 35 seen in mid-May. And the daily totals, ranging from 14 to 19 were also slightly down on spring (21 to 23). This might be due to the timing (it's possible I was a little early for the maximum diversity of species during autumn migration) or it could be related to weather conditions. In any case, I enjoyed some exceptional views of some difficult-to-see species with the Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers and Siberian Thrushes being the pick of the bunch. If it's convenient I would like to visit again in early October, at which time there will probably be fewer, but possibly different, species present – it would be nice to bump up the total number of species seen in the garden to 50 or more!

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19 September 2013

Annex A: Daily Observations

Tuesday 10 September 2013

Time: 0600-0700

Weather: clear and still, around 19 degrees C at 0600

Route: two circuits of the garden

15 species:

Spotted Dove - 1
Rufous-bellied Woodpecker - 4 (at least 4, possibly 5)
Azure-winged Magpie - 4
Common Magpie - 8
Large-billed Crow - 4
Yellow-bellied Tit - 1
Red-rumped Swallow - 4
Chinese Bulbul - 1
Dusky Warbler - 1
Yellow-browed Warbler - 5
Arctic Warbler - 2
Daurian Starling - 1 overhead calling
Siberian Blue Robin - 1 juvenile
Taiga Flycatcher - 4
Tree Sparrow - 6

Wednesday 11 September 2013

Time: 0600-0715

Weather: Another beautiful morning with almost no wind and clear blue skies. Temperature a very comfortable 18 degrees C at 0600.

Route: two circuits of the garden

19 species

Spotted Dove - 2
Rufous-bellied Woodpecker - 2
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker - 2
Great Spotted Woodpecker - 2
Black Drongo - 1 (singing)
Azure-winged Magpie - 5
Common Magpie - 4
Large-billed Crow - 4
Marsh Tit - 2
Chinese Bulbul - 1
Yellow-browed Warbler - 10
Arctic Warbler - 2
Small (unidentified) Thrush sp - 3
White's Thrush - 1
Chinese Blackbird - 1
Taiga Flycatcher - 2

Tree Sparrow - 2
Yellow Wagtail - 2 overhead
Richard's Pipit - 1 overhead
Bunting sp - 1 heard

Thursday 12 September 2013

Time: 0600-0710

Weather: A bit murky, temperature around 19 degrees C @ 0600. No wind.

Route: two circuits of the garden

16 species

Spotted Dove - 2
Rufous-bellied Woodpecker - 1
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker - 1
Azure-winged Magpie - 3
Common Magpie - 3
Large-billed Crow - 4
Chinese Bulbul - 1
Siberian Rubythroat - 1
Chinese Blackbird - 3
White's Thrush - 1
Taiga Flycatcher - 2
Dusky Warbler - 1
Two-barred Greenish Warbler - 1
Yellow-browed Warbler - 6
Chinese Grosbeak - 14 (in a single flock overhead)
Tree Sparrow - 3

Friday 13 September 2013

Time: 0600-0700

Weather: Overcast and damp after storms overnight; temperature around 18 degrees C at 0600

Route: 2 circuits of the garden

14 species

Spotted Dove - 2
Rufous-bellied Woodpecker - 2 still in the NE part of the garden
Azure-winged Magpie - 16
Common Magpie - 4
Large-billed Crow - 4
Red-rumped Swallow - 2
Chinese Bulbul - 1
Chinese Blackbird - 1
Taiga Flycatcher - 3
Yellow-browed Warbler - 5
Dusky Warbler - 1
Two-barred Greenish Warbler - 1
Arctic Warbler - 1

Tree Sparrow - 1

Monday 16 September 2013

Time: 0615-0715

Weather: Around 18 degrees C at 0615, no wind, reasonably good visibility and 3/8 cloud cover.

Route: 2 circuits of the garden

19 species

Japanese Sparrowhawk - 1 adult male flushed a Siberian Thrush before flying low south

Spotted Dove - 1

Great Spotted Woodpecker - 1

Ashy Minivet - heard

Azure-winged Magpie - 5

Common Magpie - 4

Large-billed Crow - 4 (a pair with two fully grown young)

Yellow-bellied Tit - heard

Red-rumped Swallow - 5 overhead

Dusky Warbler - 1

Yellow-browed Warbler - 2

Siberian Thrush - 3 females (one flushed by the Japanese Sparrowhawk and two more briefly in a tree before flying high south)

White's Thrush - 1 (see photo)

Chinese Blackbird - 3

Siberian Rubythroat - 2 (one adult male and one first cal yr/female)

Taiga Flycatcher - 3

Tree Sparrow - 2

Olive-backed Pipit - one flyover

Chinese Grosbeak - 1 singing

Annex B: Systematic List for September

30 species in total

1. Japanese Sparrowhawk
2. Spotted Dove
3. Rufous-bellied Woodpecker
4. Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker
5. Great Spotted Woodpecker
6. Ashy Minivet
7. Black Drongo
8. Azure-winged Magpie
9. Common Magpie
10. Large-billed Crow
11. Yellow-bellied Tit
12. Marsh Tit
13. Red-rumped Swallow
14. Chinese Bulbul
15. Dusky Warbler
16. Yellow-browed Warbler
17. Arctic Warbler
18. Two-barred Greenish Warbler
19. Daurian Starling
20. Siberian Thrush
21. White's Thrush
22. Chinese Blackbird
23. Siberian Rubythroat
24. Siberian Blue Robin
25. Taiga Flycatcher
26. Tree Sparrow
27. Eastern Yellow Wagtail
28. Richard's Pipit
29. Olive-backed Pipit
30. Chinese Grosbeak

Annex C: Systematic List (including spring and autumn)

- 1. Chinese Pond Heron** (*Ardeola bacchus*) – 5 flew over on 13th May
- 2. Oriental Honey Buzzard** (*Pernis orientalis*) – 44 seen migrating northeast on 14th May
- 3. Japanese Sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter gularis*) – 1 adult male seen on 16th September
- 4. Spotted Dove** (*Streptopelia chinensis*) – seen on every visit in spring and autumn with a maximum count of 3 on 15th May
- 5. Indian Cuckoo** (*Cuculus micropterus*) – singles on 13th and 15th May
- 6. Common Swift** (*Apus apus*) – seen on every spring visit with a maximum of 6 on 14th May; none in autumn (this species leaves Beijing at the end of July)
- 7. Rufous-bellied Woodpecker** (*Hypopicus hyperythrus*) – 4 on 10th September with 2 still there on 13th September. Probably a maximum Beijing count for a single location.
- 8. Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker** (*Yungipicus canicapillus*) – singles on 15th and 17th May; in autumn, 2 on 11th and 1 on 12th September
- 9. Great Spotted Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos major*) – one on 17th May; in autumn, 2 on 11th and 1 on 16th September
- 10. Ashy Minivet** (*Pericrocotus divaricatus*) – one heard on 16th September
- 11. Brown Shrike** (*Lanius cristatus*) – Two on 13th and 14th with one still present on 15th and 17th May; no autumn records
- 12. Black-naped Oriole** (*Oriolus chinensis*) – one heard singing on 13th May
- 13. Black Drongo** (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) – one singing on 11th September
- 14. Azure-winged Magpie** (*Cyanopica cyanus*) – one or two seen on 13th, 15th and 17th May; seen daily in autumn with a maximum count of 16 on 13th September
- 15. Common Magpie** (*Pica pica*) – Up to 4 seen on each visit in May; seen daily in autumn with a maximum of 8 on 10th September.
- 16. Large-billed Crow** (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) – 4 from 10th to 16th September
- 17. Yellow-bellied Tit** (*Periparus venustulus*) – one on 17th May and one on 16th September
- 18. Marsh Tit** (*Poecile palustris*) – two on 11th September
- 19. Barn Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica*) – seen on 13th and 14th May
- 20. Red-rumped Swallow** (*Cecropis daurica*) – Seen on 13th, 14th and 15th May with a maximum of 5 on 13th. Also 2 on 13th September and 5 on 16th September.

21. **Chinese Bulbul** (*Pycnonotus sinensis*) – seen on each visit with a maximum of 4 on 15th May; in autumn, one seen every day except 16th September
22. **Asian Stubtail** (*Urosphena squameiceps*) – one on 15th May
23. **Thick-billed Warbler** (*Acrocephalus aedon*) – one singing on 15th May
24. **Dusky Warbler** (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*) – singles on 13th, 14th and 17th May; in autumn, singles on 10th, 12th, 13th and 16th September
25. **Radde's Warbler** (*Phylloscopus schwarzi*) – seen on 14th, 15th and 17th May
26. **Pallas's Leaf Warbler** (*Phylloscopus proregulus*) – seen on 14th, 15th and 17th May
27. **Yellow-browed Warbler** (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) – seen every day with a maximum of 6 on 13th and 14th May; in autumn seen daily with a maximum of 10 on 11th September
28. **Two-barred Greenish Warbler** (*Phylloscopus [trochiloides] plumbeitarsus*) – one on 14th, 15th and 17th May; in autumn, singles on 12th and 13th September
29. **Chestnut-flanked White-eye** (*Zosterops erythropleurus*) – 3 on 16th and 6 on 17th May
30. **Crested Myna** (*Acridotheres cristatellus*) – one on 14th May
31. **Daurian Starling** (*Sturnus sturninus*) – one on 10th September
32. **White-cheeked Starling** (*Sturnus cineraceus*) – up to 4 seen on every visit; breeding in hole in tree near storage building; no records in autumn
33. **Siberian Thrush** (*Zoothera sibirica*) – three on 16th September
34. **White's Thrush** (*Zoothera dauma*) – one on 13th May and singles on 11th, 12th and 16th September
35. **Chinese Blackbird** (*Turdus merula mandarinus*) – one on 11th and 13th September with three on 12th and 16th September
36. **Eyebrowed Thrush** (*Turdus obscurus*) – one on 17th May
37. **Siberian Rubythroat** (*Luscinia calliope*) – singles on 13th and 14th with 2 on 15th May; in autumn, one on 12th and two on 16th September
38. **Siberian Blue Robin** (*Luscinia cyane*) – up to four seen on 14th, 15th and 17th May with one (a juvenile) on 10th September
39. **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** (*Ficedula zanthopygia*) – one male on 17th May
40. **Taiga Flycatcher** (*Ficedula albicilla*) – seen every day with a maximum of 6 on 14th May; in autumn, seen every day with a maximum of 4 on 10th September

- 41. Eurasian Tree Sparrow** (*Passer montanus*) – seen every day in spring and autumn breeding in the garden
- 42. Eastern Yellow Wagtail** (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – 2 overhead on 11th September
- 43. Richard's Pipit** (*Anthus richardi*) – 1 overhead on 11th September
- 44. EUROPEAN TREE PIPIT** (*Anthus trivialis*) – one on 13th May represented the first record for Beijing and possibly only the second record in China outside Xinjiang. An incredible record!
- 45. Olive-backed Pipit** (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – one overhead on 16th September
- 46. Chinese Grosbeak** (*Eophona migratoria*) – seen every day in spring, with a maximum of 5 on 13th May; in September a flock of 14 overhead on 12th and one singing in the garden on 16th
- 47. Tristram's Bunting** (*Emberiza tristrami*) – singles on 13th and 14th with 4 on 15th May.