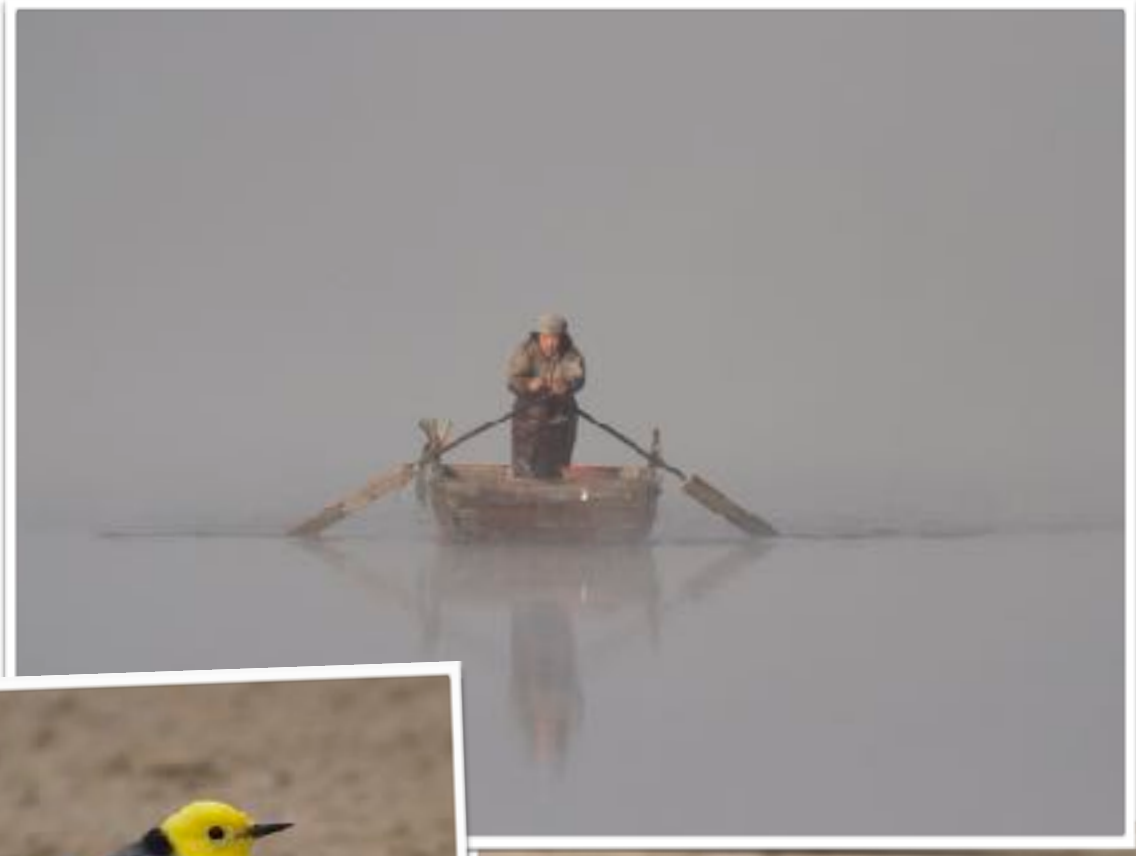


Ma Chang

A Site Guide



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Overview

On the border between Beijing Municipality and the surrounding Hebei Province, Ma Chang is a large area of grassland, criss-crossed with tracks, on the edge of the Guanting Reservoir in Yanqing County.

On arrival along the bumpy dirt-track, it can feel like the end of the Earth with vast wind turbines, weathered-looking horses, motorised buggies and windswept plastic hanging from barbed wire fences. Don't be fooled by appearances; Ma Chang is a special birding site. It is particularly productive early mornings during spring and autumn migration, during which time a tally of 70+ species is possible. From May to October, especially at weekends, the site can be heavily disturbed by visiting tourists from around 0830am until late afternoon. Tourists from Beijing come here to rent horses, buggies or motor boats and hurtle around this unusually flat space. A recommended itinerary is to bird Ma Chang early morning, preferably from first light, and then, as visitors arrive and disturbance increases, head to nearby Yeyahu Wetland Reserve (see separate PDF guide) for the remainder of the day.

In winter Ma Chang can host good numbers of **COMMON CRANES** (occasionally with some **HOODED CRANES** mixed in), a few **GREAT BUSTARDS**, larks (including **MONGOLIAN LARK** and **ASIAN SHORT-TOED LARK**), **LAPLAND BUNTINGS** and, in some years, **PALLAS'S SANDGROUSE**. In Spring (last few days of March and April) it is the most reliable site in Beijing for **ORIENTAL PLOVER** and, in April and early May, can host thousands of pipits, wagtails and larks. In

recent years it has hosted five subspecies of **WHITE WAGTAIL** (*alba*, *baicalensis*, *leucopsis*, *ocularis* and *personata*) and the locally rare **MEADOW PIPIT**. Ma Chang was also the site of Beijing's only records of **DESERT WHEATEAR** and **ISABELLINE WHEATEAR**. The shallow edge of the reservoir can be excellent for shorebirds, gulls and terns.

If you visit, please send your sightings to birdingbeijing@gmail.com.

Location and Directions



Ma Chang is adjacent to Guanting Reservoir, around 75km northwest of the city, following the G6 Badaling Expressway to Yanqing. It is just a few km west of Yeyahu Wetland Reserve, Beijing's premier birding site.

By Public Transport:

Take bus 919 from Deshengmen (north 2nd ring road) to Yanqing (journey time 2-2.5 hours, depending on traffic). Cost (2016) is CNY 13 to Yanqing. 919 buses from Beijing begin at 0545 each morning and continuously thereafter (the buses leave as soon as they are full). From Yanqing, hire a local taxi to Ma Chang (there are usually many taxis - formal and informal - at the bus station). Journey time from the station to Ma Chang should be around 20 minutes and (return) cost around Yuan 100 Yuan. Remember to arrange a time for your return pick up back to Yanqing bus station. The last bus (also 919) from Yanqing bus station to Beijing Deshengmen is around 6pm.

By Car

Take the G6 (Badaling Expressway) northwest out of Beijing. Follow this road for around 60km over the mountains, through a series of tunnels and past Badaling Great Wall. As the road begins to descend, take the exit signposted "Xikang Expressway" (this is the junction immediately after that for Yanqing City Area). After going through the tollbooth (toll is Yuan 35 at the time of writing), continue straight over a railway line and through a set of traffic lights. After about 1-2 km past the traffic lights, turn left (there is a brown sign indicating many tourist attractions, including "Widgeon Lake", an alternative name for Yeyahu Nature Reserve). After turning left, follow the road around to the right and you immediately come to a set of traffic lights with a petrol station on your right. At these lights, turn left and follow this road straight. Just before the paved road ends, you will pass a police checkpoint and, shortly after, a small roundabout. Go straight over the roundabout and follow the bumpy track for 2 km until you go through a small barrier and reach the wind turbines (with a few buildings on both sides).

Hints and Tips:

As you enter the site (passing through the small barrier with low buildings on both sides), you will see a large open area on your right. This is the 'desert area' - very good for larks, plovers (a favourite haunt of Oriental Plover in Spring). Provided it is not too wet, it's possible to drive over this area towards the edge of the reservoir and, depending on water levels in the reservoir, the muddy fringes can be good for waders in April and May and again in late July, August and September. Be aware that many bird photographers have found themselves stuck in the mud after rain and it's pricey to hire the local tractor to extract your vehicle! In addition to the flat 'desert' area to the right (north), there are tracks to the west and southwest, all worth exploring if you have the time.

Note that Ma Chang is a busy tourist attraction from May to October with lots of disruptive leisure activities including horse-riding, driving motorised buggies and power boats. Arrive early as this activity can start as early as 0730 at peak times. Disturbance is much less of a problem in winter.

Ma Chang is a site that can easily be birded from, or very close to, the vehicle. By driving to strategic points and scanning, most of the area can be covered. Alternatively, park and walk around the area. It's flat and relatively easy walking but the edges of the reservoir can be muddy and soft underfoot.

There are very few, if any, places that will offer any refreshments, except possibly during the peak summer season. So remember to bring your own drinks and snacks.

Note that the elevation of Ma Chang is around 500m (versus 50m for central Beijing). Taking into account the urban heat effect, Ma

Chang in the early mornings can be around 10 degrees Celsius cooler than central Beijing, often exacerbated by a brisk NW breeze. Ensure to take appropriate clothing.



The 'desert area' of Ma Chang at dawn. With mountains to the north and south, Ma Chang is a spectacular birding location.

Opening Times

This site is open 24/7/365. There is no barrier in use and no entrance fee.

Species possible at Ma Chang

Status: R=Resident; P=Passage Migrant; S=Summer Visitor; W=Winter Visitor; V=Vagrant

Species	Status	Comments
Daurian Partridge	R	Scarce resident but no records since 2015. May have been a casualty of the rise in water levels from 2016.
Japanese Quail	P, W	Relatively common on passage and a few winter. Possibly a breeder.
Common Pheasant	R	Common resident
Mute Swan	P	Rare passage migrant, most likely in November and March.
Whooper Swan	P,W	Regular winter visitor
Tundra Swan	P,W	Scarce winter visitor
Swan Goose	W	From late October to early April
Bean Goose	P,W	Mostly a passage migrant with the peaks in late October/early November and again in late March/early April. Most are TUNDRA BEAN GEESE with some <i>middendorffi</i> TAIGA mixed in.
Greater White-fronted Goose	P	Scarce passage migrant.
Lesser White-fronted Goose	V	Rare.
Ruddy Shelduck	P, W	Common winter and passage migrant
Common Shelduck	P	Relatively common passage migrant
Mandarin Duck	S	Breeds in small numbers
Gadwall	P	

Falcated Duck	P	Passage migrant from late March to May and from September to November.
Eurasian Wigeon	P	
Mallard	R, P	
Spot-billed Duck	P, S	
Nothern Shoveler	P	
Nothern Pintail	P	
Garganey	P	
Baikal Teal	P	Passage migrant from late March to May and again from mid-September to November
Eurasian Teal	P	
Red-crested Pochard	P	Probably breeds in small numbers.
Common Pochard	P	
Ferruginous Pochard	P, S	Possibly now a breeder; 20+ seen in June and July
Baer's Pochard	P	Scarce but regular passage migrant (late March/April and again in October)
Tufted Duck	P	
Common Goldeneye	P, W	
Smew	P, W	
Red-breasted Merganser	P	
Common Merganser	P, W	
Eurasian Wryneck	P	
Grey-capped Woodpecker	R	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	R	
Grey-headed Woodpecker	R	
Common Hoopoe	P, S, W	
Common Kingfisher	S	
Black-capped Kingfisher	P	Scarce passage migrant

Indian Cuckoo	S	Commonly heard in Spring (late April and May)
Common Cuckoo	S	
Common Swift	P	
Fork-tailed Swift	P	
Eurasian Eagle Owl	W	
Little Owl	P, R	
Long-eared Owl	P, W	
Short-eared Owl	P	
Oriental Turtle Dove	P	
Spotted Dove	R	
Eurasian Collared Dove	R	
Great Bustard	P, W	Passage migrant and winter visitor (late October and November and March and early April the best times)
White-naped Crane	P	Passage migrant and occasional winter visitor
Common Crane	P, W	Common winter visitor from mid-October to April.
Hooded Crane	P	Scarce winter visitor/ passage migrant.
Baillon's Crake	P	Passage migrant in late May and early June
Ruddy-breasted Crake	P, S	Passage migrant and probable breeder from mid-May.
Common Moorhen	S	
Common Coot	S, P	
Common Snipe	P	
Pin-tailed Snipe	P	Probable passage migrant but distinguishing from Swinhoe's possible only if number and shape of tail feathers seen well.

Swinhoe's Snipe	P	Probable passage migrant but distinguishing from Pin-tailed possible only if number and shape of tail feathers seen well.
Black-tailed Godwit	P	
Whimbrel	P	
Eurasian Curlew	P	
Little Curlew	P	Rare passage migrant
Spotted Redshank	P	
Common Redshank	P	
Marsh Sandpiper	P	
Common Greenshank	P	
Green Sandpiper	P	
Wood Sandpiper	P	
Common Sandpiper	P	
Terek Sandpiper	P	Rare passage migrant
Red-necked Stint	P	
Temminck's Stint	P	
Curlew Sandpiper	P	
Ruff	P	Rare passage migrant
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	V	Vagrant with just one record
Black-winged Stilt	P	
Pied Avocet	P	
Pacific Golden Plover	P	
Grey Plover	P	
Little Ringed Plover	P, S	
Kentish Plover	P	
Greater Sand Plover	P	Scarce passage migrant, usually in late March or early April

Oriental Plover	P	Regular passage migrant from late March with the peak in early to mid-April, most often at Ma Chang.
Northern Lapwing	P, S	
Grey-headed Lapwing	P	
Oriental Pratincole	P	
Mew Gull	P	
Glaucous Gull	V	Rare vagrant. Only one record (in November)
Heuglin's Gull	V	
Mongolian Gull	P	
Pallas's Gull	P	Scarce passage migrant
Brown-headed Gull	V	Scarce passage migrant
Common Black-headed Gull	P	
Relict Gull	P	Scarce in late March and early April; rare in autumn
Little Gull	V	
Gull-billed Tern	P	
Caspian Tern	P	
Common Tern	S	
Little Tern	S	
Whiskered Tern	P	
White-winged Tern	P	
Osprey	P	
Oriental Honey-buzzard	P	
Black-eared Kite	P	
White-tailed Sea Eagle	W	
Short-toed Snake Eagle	P	April and May and again in September and October
Eastern Marsh Harrier	S	Breeder and present from late March to mid-October
Northern Harrier	P, W	
Pied Harrier	P	

Japanese Sparrowhawk	P	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	P	
Northern Goshawk	P	
Common Buzzard	P	
Upland Buzzard	P, W	Regular in winter
Rough-legged Buzzard	W	Scarce in winter
Greater Spotted Eagle	P	Regular in April and May and again in late September and October
Steppe Eagle	P	Scarce on passage
Eastern Imperial Eagle	P	Scarce on passage
Golden Eagle	R	Breeds in the mountains but rarely encountered at Yeyahu
Pallas's Fish Eagle	V	Very rare vagrant (just one record in June)
Booted Eagle	V	
Lesser Kestrel	P	Passage migrant, often in the company of Amur Falcons.
Common Kestrel	R	
Amur Falcon	P, S	Passage migrant and breeder.
Merlin	P, W	
Eurasian Hobby	P, S	
Saker Falcon	P, W	
Peregrine Falcon	P	
Little Grebe	S	
Great Crested Grebe	S	
Horned Grebe	P	
Black-necked Grebe	P	
Great Cormorant	P	
Little Egret	P, S	
Grey Heron	P, S	
Purple Heron	P, S	

Great Egret	P	
Cattle Egret	P	
Chinese Pond Heron	P, S	
Striated Heron	P	
Black-crowned Night Heron	P, S	
Yellow Bittern	P, S	
Von Schrenck's Bittern	P, S	
Black Bittern	V	Rare vagrant. Just one record (November)
Great Bittern	P	
Eurasian Spoonbill	P	
Great White Pelican	V	
Dalmatian Pelican	V	
Black Stork	P	
Oriental Stork	P	Rare passage migrant
Tiger Shrike	P	Rare passage migrant
Bull-headed Shrike	P	
Brown Shrike	P	
Chinese Grey Shrike	P, W	Has bred.
Red-billed Blue Magpie	R	
Azure-winged Magpie	R	
Common Magpie	R	
Daurian Jackdaw	P	
Rook	P	
Carrion Crow	P, R	
Large-billed Crow	P, R	
Black-naped Oriole	P	
Black Drongo	P	
Bohemian Waxwing	P	
Japanese Waxwing	P	

Red-throated Thrush	P	
Black-throated Thrush	P	
Naumann's Thrush	P	
Dusky Thrush	P	
Grey-streaked Flycatcher	P	
Dark-sided Flycatcher	P	
Asian Brown Flycatcher	P	
Yellow-rumped Flycatcher	P	
Taiga Flycatcher	P	
Siberian Rubythroat	P	
Bluethroat	P	
Red-flanked Bluetail	P	
Daurian Redstart	P	
Common Stonechat	P	
Desert Wheatear	V	
Red-billed Starling	P	
Purple-backed Starling	P	
Common Starling	P, W	
White-cheeked Starling	R	
Crested Myna	P	
Winter Wren	P, W	
Chinese Penduline Tit	P, S, W	Breeds
Marsh Tit	R	
Yellow-bellied Tit	P	
Great Tit	R	
Silver-throated Tit	R	
Sand Martin	P	
Eurasian Crag Martin	P	Rare passage migrant
Barn Swallow	P	

Red-rumped Swallow	P	
Light-vented Bulbul	R	
Zitting Cisticola	P, S	
Chinese Hill Babbler	R	
Chestnut-flanked White-eye	P	
David's Bush Warbler	P	Late May/early June best time
Lanceolated Warbler	P	
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler	P	Late May/early June and late August/early September
Marsh Grassbird	V	A few records in late May and October
Black-browed Reed Warbler	P, S	
Blunt-winged Warbler	P, S	May breed in small numbers
Oriental Reed Warbler	S	Common breeder
Thick-billed Warbler	P	
Dusky Warbler	P	
Radde's Warbler	P	
Pallas's Leaf Warbler	P, W	
Yellow-browed Warbler	P	
Arctic Warbler	P	
Two-barred Warbler	P	
Eastern Crowned Warbler	P	
Plain Laughingthrush	W	Breeds in mountains and sometimes seen at Yeyahu in winter
Bearded Reedling	R	Breeds in small numbers since 2016 with some remaining in winter.
Vinous-throated Parrotbill	R	
Mongolian Lark	P, W	Scarce winter visitor
Great Short-toed Lark	P	
Asian Short-toed Lark	P, S, W	
Crested Lark	P	

Eurasian Skylark	P, W	
Horned Lark	P, W	Scarce winter visitor
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	R	
White Wagtail	P, S	Ssp <i>leucopsis</i> breeds, other ssp are passage migrants including (in order of abundance) <i>ocularis</i> , <i>baicalensis</i> , <i>personata</i> , <i>alba</i> and <i>lugens</i> . The latter three ssp all rare.
Citrine Wagtail	P	
Eastern Yellow Wagtail	P	
Grey Wagtail	P	
Richard's Pipit	P, S	
Blyth's Pipit	P	Regular in small numbers in spring (late April and first half of May) and autumn (September)
Olive-backed Pipit	P	
Red-throated Pipit	P	
Water Pipit	P, W	
Buff-bellied Pipit	P	
Siberian Accentor	P, W	Regular in small numbers in winter
Brambling	P, W	
Grey-capped Greenfinch	R	
Long-tailed Rosefinch	P, W	Scarce
Common Rosefinch	P	
Hawfinch	P, W	
Yellow-billed Grosbeak	P	
Pine Bunting	P, W	
Godlewski's Bunting	P, W	
Meadow Bunting	P, W	Breeds in the mountains around Yeyahu, most often encountered in late autumn, winter and early spring

Tristram's Bunting	P	
Chestnut-eared Bunting	P	Late May and early June and again in September.
Little Bunting	P, W	
Rustic Bunting	P	
Yellow-throated Bunting	P, W	
Yellow-breasted Bunting	P	Scarce passage migrant
Black-faced Bunting	P	
Pallas's Bunting	P, W	Common in winter
Common Reed Bunting	P	Scarce passage migrant
Japanese Reed Bunting	P, W	Scarce in winter and on passage
Lapland Bunting	W	