

Dalian Maple Leaf International School Environmental Wildlife 12 class

Tangjiahe Nature Reserve, Sichuan, China

Birds and Mammals Trip Report

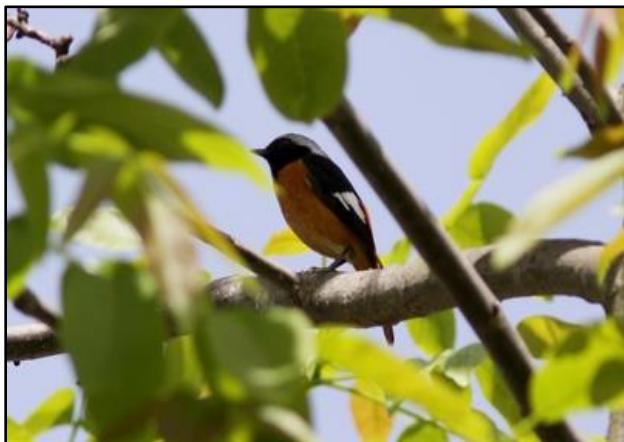
April 16-22, 2016

After two flights (Dalian – Xian – Chengdu) and a 1.5 hour fast train from the Chengdu airport to Mianyang, we arrived at our hotel near the Mianyang train station. We stayed at the budget Jia Hao Holiday Hotel which was perfect for a one night stay. After check-in we met in the lobby and walked less than a block to some excellent Sichuan hot pot for supper. Here some of the students met the local spicy Sichuan food head on and claimed they were crying because they missed their moms, not from the overwhelming spice. After a brief walk around a night pedestrian shopping area we went to bed. The next morning we grabbed breakfast wherever we could and met Dr. Zhu Lei and our driver with a nice 15 seat mini bus. Dr. Zhu Lei is an excellent guide. He speaks fluent English and is extremely knowledgeable about birds and mammals in China and is great company. Based in Chengdu, he comes highly recommended for Chinese or foreign guests. We were soon on our way to the best place in China to see forest mammals and an excellent birding site → Tangjiahe Nature Reserve. Spirits were high as we drove through some beautiful country side that included river canyons, terraced farms, gorgeous deciduous forest, and the odd village. We only stopped a few times and each time we were quick to have a scan for birds. The drive took around 4.5 hours and we stopped for lunch (a different kind of local Muslim hot pot) at the last piece of civilization before heading into the park. The list of birds below is from the drive between Mianyang and Tangjiahe.

1. Common Buzzard - 2
2. White Wagtail
3. Grey Wagtail
4. Collared Finchbill - 1
5. Brown-breasted Bulbul - 1
6. Green-backed Tit
7. Japanese Tit
8. Common Magpie
9. Daurian Redstart
10. Little Egret
11. Chinese Blackbird
12. Chinese Bulbul
13. Common Pheasant
14. Spotted Dove
15. Barn Swallow
16. Red-rumped Swallow
17. Carrion Crow - 1
18. Green-backed Tit
19. Brown-breasted Bulbul – 1
20. Collared Finchbill - 2
21. Brown-flanked Bush Warbler - 1
22. Japanese White-eye - 1
23. Tree Sparrows
24. Oriental Greenfinch – 2



Collared
Finchbill



Daurian
Redstart

It is 11 kms from the entrance gate of Tangjiahe to the only accommodation located within the park. Birding and wildlife spotting can be excellent along this road and things got kicked off in fine fashion with a brilliant Wallcreeper spotted by Zhu Lei shortly after entering. The next kms were driven slowly and we stopped whenever something of interest presented itself. We searched a known Tawny Fish Owl site extensively with no luck. There was no hurry as we wanted to pass the Takin slope area on this road after 4:30 pm when Takin begin to emerge from the forest to feed on the grassy slope. Other birds enjoyed on the drive in included Brown Dipper, Common Kingfisher, Daurian, White capped, and Plumbeous Redstarts, Eurasian Jay, and Grey Wagtail. Upon arriving at the Takin slope we immediately saw 3 or 4 which eventually turned into 7 or 8. After lingering there for a while we finished the 5 kms or so to the hotel, seeing more Takin, 2 Rhesus Macaques, and 2 Reeve's Muntjac in the process. Check-in was followed by a delicious supper (not hot pot this time!) in the restaurant located at the hotel.

Bird list from the entrance gate of Tangjiahe to the hotel and around the hotel area.

Wallcreeper



Wall Creeper

Common Kingfisher



Grey Wagtail

Crested Kingfisher

Hoopoe

Eurasian Jay

Red-billed Blue Magpie

Large-billed Crow

Long-tailed Minivet

Daurian Redstart

Plumbeous Redstart

White-capped Water Redstart

Green-backed Tit

Yellow-bellied Tit

Mountain bulbul

Claudia's Leaf Warbler

Bianchi's Warbler

Golden Spectacled Warbler

Red-billed Leothrix



Common Hoopoe

David's Fulvetta

Vinous-throated Parrotbill

White Wagtail

Grey Wagtail

Rosy Pipit

Little Bunting



Rosy
Pipit



Green-backed Tit



Plumbeous Redstart



Claudia's Leaf Warbler



Red-billed Blue Magpie

As we waited for darkness, the group was briefed on the dos and don'ts of night time mammal spotting. When we boarded the bus we weren't sure what to expect. The first 4 km's were noticeably quiet and I was beginning to wonder if we were too late in the year to see the mammals near the road – I've been told by several people that the best mammaling at Tangjiahe, in terms of quantity, is the fall time. The quietness was soon broken with a fine Takin spotted feeding in the grass near the far side of the river. A few minutes later we had more Takin followed by a nice Tufted Deer. At the main Takin place there were easily 10+ present including one almost on the road. We then headed down to the Tawny Fish Owl

site but came up empty. Content with how the night had gone and considering how late into the evening it was, we decided to head back to the hotel at a normal speed without spending too much time wildlife spotting. I decided to try to scan along the river during the return trip for the Fish Owl hoping to see it hunting from the large rocks along the banks or sitting in one of the numerous large trees along the river. As we zipped along I noticed two pairs of eyes looking back at me from a large tree not 4 meters from the roadside. We stopped and had excellent views of two gorgeous Masked Palm Civets. A short ways later we rounded a corner and met a Wild Boar standing nearly in the middle of the road. A close experience with that was followed by 2 and then 1 more Masked Palm Civets totaling 5 for the night! We were all excited about how good the drive was going when I remarked that we were seeing all the animals on the first night and we still had 3 more to go. I believe I said exactly the following loudly and clearly from the front of the bus, “well, at least we didn’t see a badger so we have something to try to find on the next nights” when a Hog Badger promptly crossed the road right in front of us and scampered through some short grass allowing everyone to have a good look. It should be noted that I repeated the same phrase, substituting Hog Badger for Giant Panda, without the same result. Tangjiahe is an awesome place to see forest mammals in China. Here is the mammal list from the 3 hour night drive between the hotel and the Tawny Fish Owl Site on the first night:

Takin – 20+

Reeve’s Muntjac – 8

Tufted Deer – 2

Masked Palm Civet – 5

Wild Boar – 1

Hog Badger – 1



Reeve’s
Muntjac



Takin



Wild Boar

The next day 3 students joined me for a birding walk before breakfast. We misjudged when daylight would arrive and ended up in the lobby of our cottage 45 minutes before it was light enough to see ☺. At 6:15 we headed out with our birding gear and a camera trap we brought with us from Dalian. The birding

was great on the track behind the hotel and we decided to turn left up the small trail where the large waterfall is. The birding along this trail was frustratingly difficult as the river was at full flood stage and the noise drowned out bird calls. I had wanted to put the camera trap at the end of this trail so we continued on. We eventually set it up in the grassy area right at the end where it was evident Wild Boar had been busy within a few days before. As we walked back for breakfast we had trouble not stopping once we reached the main river. The birding was fantastic with Long-tailed Minivet, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Crested Kingfisher, Mountain Bulbul, abundant Claudia's Leaf Warblers, Redstarts, and a Pere David's Ground Squirrel creating welcome distraction. After breakfast we headed down to the Tawny Fish Owl place again to have another go but once again turned up empty. After walking a ways up another smaller road we stopped alongside a stunning mountain river and had a rest. Most students were keen to drink river water, hearing about it from other students in past trips. Soon we were all beside each other enjoying excellent fresh river water from the mountains. My daughter then started turning over rocks and discovering many types of bugs which led to a short discussion about how even the small creatures (that people don't jam on the brakes for during night drives or take beautiful photos of) matter and play an important role in nature. Birds around this site included David's Fulvetta, Red-billed Leothrix, Yellow-bellied Tit, Golden Spectacled Warbler, and more Red-billed Blue Magpies. After returning to the hotel for lunch we agreed to have some down time until 4:30 when we would meet for a bird walk across the pedestrian bridge adjacent to the restaurant.



Group Picture



Dr. Zhu Lei

The 4:30 bird walk across the bridge went very well. In addition to the birds we saw 5 Reeve's Muntjac trailside as well as Macaque and Leopard Cat Scat near the Tennis Court. On the way back we had a Reeve's Muntjac walk out of the brush right behind us on the trail heading towards the river for a drink. We hurried back across the bridge and watched it from the other side of the river for a while. There was also a Muntjac right across the river from the restaurant during dinner. In terms of the birds, we enjoyed views of:

David's Fulvetta

Red-billed Leothrix

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Yellow-bellied Tit



Black-throated Tit

Brown-flanked Bush warbler

Chinese Leaf Warbler

Greenish Warbler

Daurian Redstart

Green-backed Tit

Black-throated Tit

Calling Elliot's Laughingthrush



Great Spotted
Woodpecker
with a walnut



Reeve's Muntjac



Reeve's Muntjac

After dinner we jumped back into our bus and set out for night drive number 2. We headed down to the owl site and again came up empty despite scouring the trees, cliffs, and river rocks in the entire area. The drive back to the hotel was uneventful except for two nice Hog Badgers very close to the road. Here's the list from the night drive:

Reeve's Muntjac – 15

Takin – 10

Hog Badger – 2



Hog Badger

The next day most of the students and I met in front of our accommodation at 6:15. We walked directly to the riverside near the hotel and saw a Takin crossing the river no more than 150 meters from where we slept and 50 meters from where we were observing! No doubt it had been feeding on grass right in the hotel grounds the night before. Shortly after this we saw 2 Reeve's Muntjac running from where the Takin went back into the forest. We then walked the trail across the bridge near the restaurant until 8:00 staying near the Tennis court area.

Elliot's Laughingthrush – 3

Red-winged Laughingthrush – 2

Red-billed Leothrix

Mountain Bulbul – 3

Calling Great Spotted Woodpecker

Green-backed Tit

Black-throated Tit

Brown-flanked Bush Warbler

Chestnut-crowned Warbler

Black-throated Tit

Dipper

White-capped Redstart

Plumbeous Redstart

Red-billed Blue Magpie

Takin - 1 Reeve's Muntjac - 2



Takin



Reeve's Muntjac



Elliot's Laughingthrush



Mountain Bulbul

Breakfast was ready to go when we returned and after this we headed out on the gravel road past the hotel. The gate was down due to government inspections happening so we were forced to walk the 4km (!) to the place where Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys can be seen sometimes (not the best time of year for them but one was seen there 2 weeks previous). The walk there was beautiful and the temperature rose from below 10 to 20 degrees while we walked. Along with the gorgeous scenery along this road we also had some fantastic birding. After spending around 45 minutes looking for monkeys but seeing nothing we paid a guy that works at a research station near there to give us a lift back the hotel restaurant for lunch. We didn't see any monkeys but some of us who waited around for the second car trip were fortunate enough to see a very large Wild Boar across the river. One of the student's phones said we walked more than 22,000 steps that day. Birds seen on the walk to the Golden Snub-nosed Monkey site:

Verditer Flycatcher



Brown
Dipper

Blue and White Flycatcher

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher

Long-tailed Minivet – 2

Claudia's Leaf Warbler

Greenish Warbler

Chestnut-crowned Warbler

Bianchi's Warbler

Dipper

White-capped Redstart



Common
Rosefinch

Plumbeous Redstart

Crested Kingfisher

Elliot's Laughingthrush

Red-billed Blue Magpie

Large-billed Crow

Pacific Swift

Asian House Martin

Common Rosefinch

Little Bunting

Common Stonechat

Green-backed Tit



White-capped
Water Redstart

Yellow-bellied Tit
Red-billed Leothrix
White Wagtail
Grey Wagtail
Pere David's Ground Squirrel – 3
Wild Boar – 1



Pere David's
Ground Squirrel

After a much needed lunch from walking 4kms we had down time until supper at 5:15. One of the students found a way to get the upper gate open for us at 6:00 pm that day (took a lot of discussion with many different people at different places within the park) so we headed out after supper with high hopes of this new area for mammal spotting. The predictions for this night drive came true – less quantity of animals but more quality. Before it was dark we drove the 4kms past the hotel to the next gate and research station area. Here, on the slopes across the river, we added 5 Tibetan Macaques and 2 Chinese Goral to the mammal list. We also had very good views of a Wild Boar on the same slope. We stayed at that area until dark and then drove back to the hotel area gate, back to the research station, and then back to the hotel gate again. The addition to the list during this time was a fantastic Chinese Serow standing right beside the road. Three more mammals on the list! That night Dr. Zhu Lei showed us photos from his recent 3 months in Zimbabwe, Africa and talked about wildlife and human interaction.

Night Drive list:

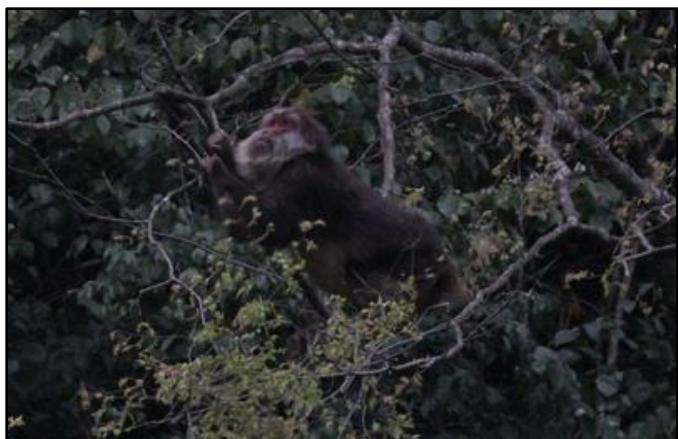
Takin – 2
Reeve's Muntjac – 10
Goral – 2
Chinese Serow – 1
Tibetan Macaque – 5
Wild Boar – 1



Chinese Goral



Wild Boar



Tibetan Macaque

One student joined me for the 6:15 morning bird walk the next day. Our plan was to cross the other pedestrian bridge out of the hotel area and walk part ways up the mountain there into a coniferous tree area. This changed abruptly with presumably the same Takin as the morning before crossing the river right in front of us and heading up our trail! Instead we walked up the river away from the hotel and eventually ended up around the housing area for workers. This place is located up a paved road on the left along the main road as you walk up from the hotel (before the waterfall on the left). There was one patch of bamboo surrounded by medium sized trees right in front of the main building there that was loaded with birds and provided close views with a little pishing. The list below includes birds found only in that area:

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Hoopoe

Red-billed Blue Magpie

Large-billed Crow

Long-tailed Minivet

Green-backed Tit

Buff-throated Warbler

Red-billed Leothrix

Vinous-throated Parrotbill

Mrs Gould's Sunbird – a pair

Grey Wagtail

White-capped Water Redstart

Plumbeous Redstart



Mrs Gould's Sunbird



Red-billed Leothrix



Brown-flanked Bush Warbler



Takin

After breakfast we headed up the trail behind the waterfall to go and check/retrieve our camera trap. Sadly, the only photos on it were from a few tourists walking past ☹. Birds seen on this walk included:

Crested Kingfisher

Great Spotted Woodpecker

Hoopoe

Red-billed Blue Magpie

Large-billed Crow

Long-tailed Minivet

Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher

Blue Whistling Thrush

Daurian Redstart

Plumbeous Redstart

White-capped Water Redstart

Green-backed Tit

Sooty Tit

Buff-throated Warbler

Claudia's Leaf Warbler

Chestnut-crowned Warbler

Elliot's Laughingthrush

Pgymy Wren Babbler – heard only

Red-billed Leothrix

White Wagtail

Grey Wagtail

Little Bunting

Brown Dipper



Chestnut-crowned Warbler



Crested Kingfisher



Little Bunting



Long-tailed Minivet

Lunch was followed by down time until supper at 5:15 but most of the students went birding/mammal watching by themselves around the tennis court for an hour in the late afternoon while I worked on this report. By 6:00 we headed back up to the research station where we had seen the Chinese Gorla the previous night. This same slope didn't disappoint again with a nice Tufted Deer feeding out in the open just before dusk. There was also a calling Spotted Bush Warbler across the river there. Once dark, we drove the entire way back down past the hotel to the fish owl site. Animals between the research station and the hotel included a brilliant Leopard Cat that showed well running along the river bank rocks in plain view, a couple Reeve's Muntjac and Takin, and another Tufted Deer. The road between the hotel and owl site added more Takin and Muntjac but also a Chinese Serow feeding across the river, a Wild Boar, a Masked Palm Civet, a Hog Badger, and a Chinese Goral. Nine mammal species in one night all along only a 20 km piece of road → Tangjiahe at its finest!

Mammal List from night drive:

Leopard Cat 1



Chinese Serow

Reeve's Muntjac 6

Takin 12

Tufted Deer 2

Masked Palm Civet 1

Wild Boar 1



Leopard Cat

Hog Badger 1

Chinese Serow 1

Chinese Goral 1



Tufted Deer

The next morning we packed up and left in our mini-bus for Chengdu. We saw 30+ Tibetan Macaques on the road and rocks on the way out. At the exit gate we had to stop for some reason and I picked up two new birds around the gate area: Black-faced Bunting and Eurasian Wren. On the last two trips we've stopped at the crest of a mountain pass for leg stretching approximately 45 minutes to or from the Tangjiahe entrance gate. The birding is great there each time at a big area beside the road to enjoy views of the surrounding lower mountain areas. This time we stopped there for around 20 minutes and saw the following:

White-collared Yuhina – 1

White-browed Laughingthrush

Japanese White-eye

Russet Sparrow – 1

Ms. Gould's Sunbird – 1

Vinous-throated Parrotbill

Brown-flanked Bush Warbler

Collared Finchbill

Yellow-streaked Warbler – 1 calling

Daurian Redstart



Black-faced Bunting



Japanese White-eye



Tibetan Macaque



Russet Sparrow

The drive back to Chengdu took 7.5 hours including a 45 minute lunch and two other brief stops. It was rather uneventful except for playing some card games and adding Spotted Dove, Crested Myna, and Sand Martin to the trip list. We stayed at a Home Inn Plus close to the middle of Chengdu and the students enjoyed Sichuan hot pot yet again for supper. The students have divided themselves into groups to create presentations about what they have learned on this trip. The plan is to make each of the presentations in both Mandarin and English for different audiences in the next couple of months which will include other Dalian Maple Leaf International School students as well as a local public middle school.

I am writing this in the back of the bus on the way from our hotel to the Chengdu airport to leave. I have just asked the students for some quotes of the trip. See the responses below.

Jimmy – “I enjoyed whistling the same sounds as the birds. I hope all the birds are still there the next time I come” “We should have a plan for cutting down trees, 2nd growth forests have less animals”

Pearl – “It was so awesome that it seems unreal, definitely worth it” “look carefully, there is probably a Takin right next to you” “I heard about woodpeckers when I was in kindergarten but didn’t see one until I was 18”

Ivy – “Humans and wildlife can live together as long as we respect each other” “don’t be afraid of the animals because they are probably more afraid of you.”

Kevin – “Everyone belongs to a family called nature, we should show respect to every species” “the smallest birds can give you the best surprise”

Jemma – “The best “zoo” is freedom” “It takes a much longer time to protect it than to destroy it”

Helen – “we still need to try harder to protect animals”

Naomi – “don’t carry bags of food near monkeys”



Some students and Dr. Zhu Lei looking at animal tracks near the tennis court.



Seeing Great Spotted Woodpecker along the trail near the tennis cour.

This was followed by asking them for one thing they have learned on this trip.

Jimmy – 2 species of birds can be together (in reference to the Dipper and Plumbeous Redstart we saw on the same small rock). Night time in the forest is quiet.

Pearl – always look behind you when outside of the bus at night time.

Ivy – how to “pish” birds. Don’t take selfies with the class camera because later they will be on the big screen!

Kevin – how to find animals at night, how to identify animals based on their scat

Jemma – Try to stay away from a Takin

Helen – don’t take selfies with animals

Naomi – don’t underestimate animals



Picture show from Dr. Zhu Lei's recent Africa trip



Having fun along the trail



Lunch



At the place where we saw two Chinese Goral

Favorite moments of the trip:

Pearl – when Jimmy missed his mother (in reference to his eyes tearing up from the spicy food.)

Kevin – when I found the first Takin

Ivy – When we saw the group of 30+ monkeys right beside our bus

Jemma – the first night when we saw the Wild Boar on the road

Helen – Hot pot!

Jimmy – seeing the two Masked Palm Civets on the tree right beside the road at night

Naomi – when we saw the monkeys on the road and the buckets full of Snickers chocolate bars on the bus



Our table after devouring Sichuan Hot Pot in Mianyang.

Lunch place in the village just outside Tangjiahe.



Birding near the hotel grounds



River near the Tawny Fish Owl site.

Acknowledgments:

Dr. Zhu Lei (Robbi) for the arranging of our trip. Robbi organized the bus, hotel and food at Tangjiahe, and shared his wisdom on a variety of wildlife topics with the students. He is a good friend of mine but also got along superbly with the students. His guiding was fantastic. I personally enjoyed his knowledge of local leaf warbler calls ☺ Phone: 8618583975792 Email: robbizhulei@gmail.com

Pearl and Ivy (two of the students on the trip) for their huge help in organizing the logistics of the trip. They booked the airplane and fast train tickets in addition to finding and booking the hotels on the first and last night (in Mianyang and Chengdu).

Sid Francis – A British guide based just outside of Chengdu. Sid is legendary in Sichuan and was a huge help in the previous two visits about where, when, and how to find mammals at Tangjiahe. He is a sought after guide for birds and mammals in that special area of the world. Email: chengduuk@hotmail.com

Bird list from entire trip (driving from Mianyang to Tangjiahe, 4 days at Tangjiahe, driving from Tangjiahe to Chengdu):

27. Common Pheasant	1. Japanese Tit
28. Great Spotted Woodpecker	2. Yellow-bellied Tit
29. Common Kingfisher	3. Green-backed Tit
30. Crested Kingfisher	4. Black-throated Tit
31. Eurasian Hoopoe	5. Sooty Tit
32. Pacific Swift	6. Sand Martin
33. Spotted Dove	7. Asian House Martin
34. Common Buzzard	8. Red-rumped Swallow
35. Little Egret	9. Barn Swallow
36. Black-crowned Night Heron	10. Brown-breasted Bulbul
37. Wallcreeper	11. Chinese Bulbul
38. Eurasian Jay	12. Collared Finchbill
39. Common Magpie	13. Mountain Bulbul
40. Red-billed Blue Magpie	14. Brown-flanked Bush Warbler
41. Thick-billed Crow	15. Buff-throated Warbler
42. Carrion Crow	16. Golden Spectacled Warbler
43. Long-tailed Minivet	17. Chestnut-crowned Warbler
44. Grey-Canary Flycatcher	18. Bianchi's Warbler
45. Blue Whistling Thrush	19. Claudia's Leaf Warbler
46. Daurian Redstart	20. Spotted Bush Warbler (heard only)
47. Plumbeous Redstart	21. Yellow-streaked Warbler
48. White-capped Water Redstart	22. Chinese Leaf Warbler
49. Verditer Flycatcher	23. Greenish Warbler
50. Blue and White Flycatcher	24. Elliot's Laughingthrush
51. Common Stonechat	25. Red-winged Laughingthrush
52. Crested Myna	26. White-browed Laughingthrush

53. Eurasian Wren
54. Pygmy Wren babbler (heard only)
55. Red-billed Leothrix
56. David's Fulvetta
57. White-collared Yuhina
58. Vinous-throated Parrotbill
59. Ms. Gould's Sunbird
60. Japanese White-eye
61. Russet Sparrow
62. Eurasian Tree Sparrow
63. White Wagtail
64. Grey Wagtail
65. Rosy Pipit
66. Oriental Greenfinch
67. Common Rosefinch
68. Black-faced Bunting
69. Little Bunting

Mammal List Totals:

1. Rhesus Macaque – 2
2. Tibetan Macaque – 35+
3. Pere David's Ground Squirrel – 5
4. Leopard Cat – 1
5. Masked Palm Civet – 6
6. Hog Badger – 3
7. Wild Boar – 4
8. Tufted Deer – 4
9. Reeve's Muntjac – many
10. Takin – many
11. Chinese Serow – 2
12. Chinese Goral – 3

Others:

One unidentified dark blueish skink among rocks at the first research station