

**SEARCHES FOR THE BLUE-CROWNED
LAUGHINGTHRUSH**
Garrulax courtoisi simaoensis
IN SOUTH YUNNAN, SOUTH-WEST CHINA

by He Fen-qi, Lin Jian-sheng, Laura Gardner, Mary Richardson
and Roger Wilkinson

Background

The history of the discovery of the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush began with a British topographical surveyor, Colonel Godwin-Austen, who described a new species of laughingthrush, *Garrulax galbanus*, based on skins he obtained in February 1873 in the Munipur Valley, eastern Assam, India (Godwin-Austen, 1874a, 1874b). Later on, in 1923, M. A. Ménégaux, the President of the Société Ornithologique de France, recognised another species of laughingthrush, *G. courtoisi* (Ménégaux, 1923). This was based on two skins that had been collected in September 1919 from Wuyuan in south-east China by a French missionary Père A. Rivière and sent to Ménégaux by Père F. Courtois. The distance from Munipur to Wuyuan is at least 2,000km (approx. 1,250 miles), and no record of either of the two laughingthrushes had been reported at any site between these two localities at that time. *G. courtoisi* was nevertheless soon afterwards relegated to the status of a subspecies of *G. galbanus*, i.e. *G. galbanus courtoisi* (La Touche, 1923).

In early 1956, the Chinese Academy of Sciences organised a survey to Xishuangbanna, a tropic rainforest area located in far south Yunnan, near the border with Myanmar (Burma). On March 6th that year, Mr Tang Rui-chang, a zoologist from Wuhan University in central China, collected three birds, one male and two females at a locality called Shitoushan. The skins collected there were later identified as *G. galbanus courtoisi*, the same subspecies of the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush found in Wuyuan (Cheng Tso-hsin, 1958). It was only much later on in 1982, after checking the skins of *courtoisi* in the collection of the French National Museum of Natural History in Paris, that Cheng and Tang (1982) described the birds collected at Simao as a new subspecies, named at that time as *Garrulax galbanus simaoensis*. Hence, there were then three subspecies - *G. g. galbanus*, *G. g. courtoisi* and *G. g. simaoensis* (Cheng et al. 1987). Recently it has been proposed that the Chinese forms be considered again as a full species, named the Blue-crowned Laughingthrush *G. courtoisi* (to include *courtoisi* and *simaoensis*), leaving the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *G. galbanus* as a monotypic species (Collar, 2006).

Recent discoveries

Since the type specimen of *G. c. simaoensis* was first collected in 1956, several field surveys and birdwatching excursions have been undertaken in Simao and Xishuangbanna. However, no further individuals of this subspecies were recorded from this region during these surveys (Cheng & Cheng, 1960; Hu & Han, 2002; King & Han, 1991; Lei & Zheng, 2004; Wang, 1991; Wilkinson et al. 2004; ИВАНОВ, 1959, 1961).

G. c. courtoisi had similarly eluded scientific records until 2000, when breeding populations were found at its type locality in Wuyuan. After this the priority of our survey work began to focus on the rediscovery of *G. c. simaoensis*. Thus, in 2002 the search began in Yunnan for Shitoushan near Simao, known to be the type locality of *G. c. simaoensis*.

In early April 2002, He Fen-qi and Hong Yuan-hua made a first visit to Simao. In Chinese, Shitoushan means stone-hill or stone-hills. When looking at a map, they found a bus stop called Shitoushan 16km (approx. 10 miles) south-west of Simao. On visiting the area they found it to be a small basin surrounded by low hills and almost totally denuded of trees. Upon further investigation it was realised that access to this site during the 1950s would probably have been extremely limited and the expedition could not have taken place in one day, with the mission having been situated 150km (approx. 95 miles) south of Simao. Therefore, this seemed unlikely to be the



Forested hillside at Shitoushan.

Shitoushan where the birds had been collected originally. During that visit to Yunnan, two days were spent in Caiyanghe Nature Reserve located 40km (approx. 25 miles) south of Simao, in the hope of searching the surrounding area. As there is some bird trade in the area, bird markets were visited and local dealers and bird keepers were asked if they recognised the bird. Unfortunately, none of these proved successful.

A second search for *simaoensis* was made in early May 2004, at which time He Fen-qi and Laura Gardner discovered a second site called Shitoushan, near Simao Airport. This second locality of that name (roughly 22°47'N & 100°57'E) seemed to be a much more likely candidate for the type locality of *simaoensis*, in being far closer to Simao and with much better access. The hill itself covers less than 1sq km (0.386sq miles) with an elevation of about 1,340m-1,430m (approx. 4,400ft-4,700ft). Much development has occurred in the area since 1956 when the skins were collected. The old town of Simao was located at the north-east corner of the current city, and covered a total area of less than a fifth of the current city. The airport was not built until 1958, the development of which reaches right to the foot of Shitoushan. Far from being detrimental to the vegetation in the area, the presence of the airport has in fact been beneficial in that it has prevented the destruction of the large mature trees. The vegetation on the hills surrounding Simao consists mostly of young secondary evergreen and deciduous forests, mixed with plantations, predominantly of Simao Pine *Pinus kesiya* var. *langbianensis*. The large mature trees that still exist at Shitoushan, can be found at few other places in the region. There were though no sightings of *simaoensis*. During the May 2004 visit to Simao, an elderly bird hunter was interviewed, who lived just outside the newly located Shitoushan. He recognised the Blue-crowned Laughingthrush pictured in the field guide, but said he had last seen it 20 years previously, some distance south of Simao. The site was visited the following morning and although some tall trees remained there was no sign of the birds. A little further down along the roadside, land clearance was going ahead as part of the building of the new Simao Highway (Wilkinson et al. 2004).

In early March 2005, He Fen-qi, Lin Jian-sheng and Apache Lau, spent a week in and around Simao, mostly at the second Shitoushan. Whilst surveying the hill one morning, a small group of birds was observed in dense bushes. The sound and appearance of these birds were very similar to those of *G. c. courtoisi* in Wuyuan. It was therefore assumed that these could have been the elusive *simaoensis*. In an attempt to confirm this brief sighting, another visit was made in May 2005. On that occasion, He Fen-qi, Lin Jian-sheng, Apache Lau, Mary Richardson, Roger Wilkinson and Simon Dowell visited Shitoushan and the surrounding area. However, despite searching and playing recordings of the calls of *courtoisi* made in Wuyuan,

simaoensis was not seen or heard and the sighting made earlier in the year could not be confirmed.

The most recent visit took place in mid-August 2006, thanks to generous financial support from the Avicultural Society. He Fen-qi travelled to the area alone and spent a week at Shitoushan, during which time he surveyed some of the areas of north and north-west Simao. Once again, despite intense effort, no evidence could be found of the presence there of this elusive laughingthrush. A list of other bird species recorded in the course of four visits to Shitoushan is included in an Appendix.

Future aims

G. c. simaoensis remains enigmatic and from the timing of observations, it may be asked whether the laughingthrushes collected at Shitoushan were wintering in the area or passing through, rather than breeding there. We know that *G. c. courtoisi* in Wuyuan appear at their breeding sites between early to mid-April and leave there in July and August, but are uncertain as to where they spend the remainder of the year (Wilkinson et al. 2004). This may suggest that future surveys for breeding *simaoensis* should be outside this area and further surveys at Shitoushan should be planned for the first week of March, or even earlier in the year, in case they might winter there. Some leaflets have been produced with photos and illustrations of captive Blue-crowned Laughingthrushes and these have been distributed to people in areas of Yunnan, with the request that anyone who recognises this bird or knows anything about it, should contact Prof. He Fen-qi.

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Dr Roger Wilkinson is Head of Conservation and Science at Chester Zoo, Upton-by-Chester, Chester CH2 1LH, UK. E-mail: R.Wilkinson@chesterzoo.org.

Laura Gardner is Curator of Leeds Castle aviaries, Leeds Castle, Maidstone, Kent ME1 7PL, UK. E-mail: lauragardner@leeds-castle.co.uk

Appendix

Birds recorded at Shitoushan

	May 03-10 2004	March 02-07 2005	May 01-08 2005	August 12-21 2006
Great Barbet <i>Megalaima virens</i>	+			
White-throated Kingfisher <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>				+
Common Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	+		+	+
Common Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	+			
Large Hawk Cuckoo <i>Hierococcyx sparveroides</i>		+	+	
Green-billed Malkoha <i>Phaenicophaeus tristis</i>	+	+	+	+
Geater Coucal <i>Centropus sinensis</i>	+	+	+	+
House Swift <i>Apus nipalensis</i>	+	+	+	+
Black-shouldered Kite <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		+		
Crested Serpent Eagle <i>Spilornis cheela</i>		+		
Crested Goshawk <i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>			+	
Common Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>	+			
Common Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	+	+	+	
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	+	+		
Amur Falcon <i>Falco amurensis</i>		+		

	May 03-10 2004	March 02-07 2005	May 01-08 2005	August 12-21 2006
Chinese Pond Heron <i>Ardeola bacchus</i>	+	+		
Cinnamon Bittern <i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>	+		+	+
Asian Fairy Bluebird <i>Irena puella</i>	+			
Tiger Shrike <i>Lanius tigrinus</i>		+		
Brown Shrike <i>Lanius cristatus</i>		+		
Long-tailed Shrike <i>Lanius schach</i>	+	+	+	+
Grey-backed Shrike <i>Lanius tephronotus</i>			+	
Red-billed Blue Magpie <i>Urocissa erythrorhyncha</i>	+	+	+	+
Short-billed Minivet <i>Pericrocotus brevirostris</i>		+	+	+
White-throated Fantail <i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>		+		
Black Drongo <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	+	+	+	
Ashy Drongo <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	+	+	+	+
Spangled Drongo <i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>		+		
Asian Paradise-flycatcher <i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>		+		
Great Iora <i>Aegithina lafresnayei</i>	+			
Comon Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>		+		
Scaly Thrush <i>Zoothera dauma</i>	+			
Pale Blue Flycatcher <i>Cyornis unicolor</i>		+		
Siberian Rubythroat <i>Luscinia calliope</i>		+		
Oriental Magpie Robin <i>Copsychus saularis</i>	+	+	+	+
Common Stonechat <i>Saxicola torquata</i>	+	+	+	
Pied Bushchat <i>Saxicola caprata</i>	+			
Grey Bushchat <i>Saxicola ferrea</i>	+			
Black-throated Tit <i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>	+	+	+	+
Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	+	+	+	+
Black-crested Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>	+	+	+	+
Red-whiskered Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	+	+	+	+
Brown-breasted Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus xanthorrhous</i>		+	+	+
Red-vented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	+	+	+	+
Sooty-headed Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus aurigaster</i>			+	+
Mountain Bulbul <i>Hypsipetes mccllellandii</i>			+	
Grey-breasted Prinia <i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>		+	+	+
Plain Prinia <i>Prinia inornata</i>	+	+	+	+
Japanese White-eye <i>Zosterops aponicus</i>	+	+	+	+
Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler <i>Cettia fortipes</i>			+	
Dusky Warbler <i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>	+	+	+	
Yellow-browed Warbler <i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>		+		

	May 03-10 2004	March 02-07 2005	May 01-08 2005	August 12-21 2006
(Blue-crowned Laughingthrush <i>Garrulax courtoisi</i> ?)			?	
Puff-throated Babbler <i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	+	+		
Rufous-capped Babbler <i>Stachyris ruficeps</i>		+		
Grey-cheeked Fulvetta <i>Alcippe morrisonia</i>		+		
Long-tailed Sibia <i>Heterophasia picaoides</i>		+		
(Purple Sunbird <i>Nectarinia asiatica</i> ?)	?			
Black-throated Sunbird <i>Aethopyga saturata</i>			+	
Crimson Sunbird <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>		+	+	
Forest Wagtail <i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>	+			
White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	+	+	+	
White-rumped Munia <i>Lonchura striata</i>	+	+	+	+
Scaly-breasted Munia <i>Lonchura punctulata</i>		+	+	+
Black-headed Munia <i>Lonchura malacca</i>				+

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GODWIN-AUSTEN'S LAUGHINGTHRUSH

Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen (1834-1923), who collected the first Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus*, amassed a collection of 3,582 bird skins, mainly from the Naga and Khasia Hills, Manipur and the country bordering Assam, but after retiring to England got into financial difficulties and was obliged to sell his collection to the British Museum (Natural History), according to Barbara and Richard Mearns in their book *The Bird Collectors* (Academic Press, 1998). It has a photograph of him on p.167. In some old atlases the Himalayan peak K2 was shown as Mount Godwin-Austen, Godwin-Austen having been the first topographical surveyor to see the mountain at close range and fix its position and height.

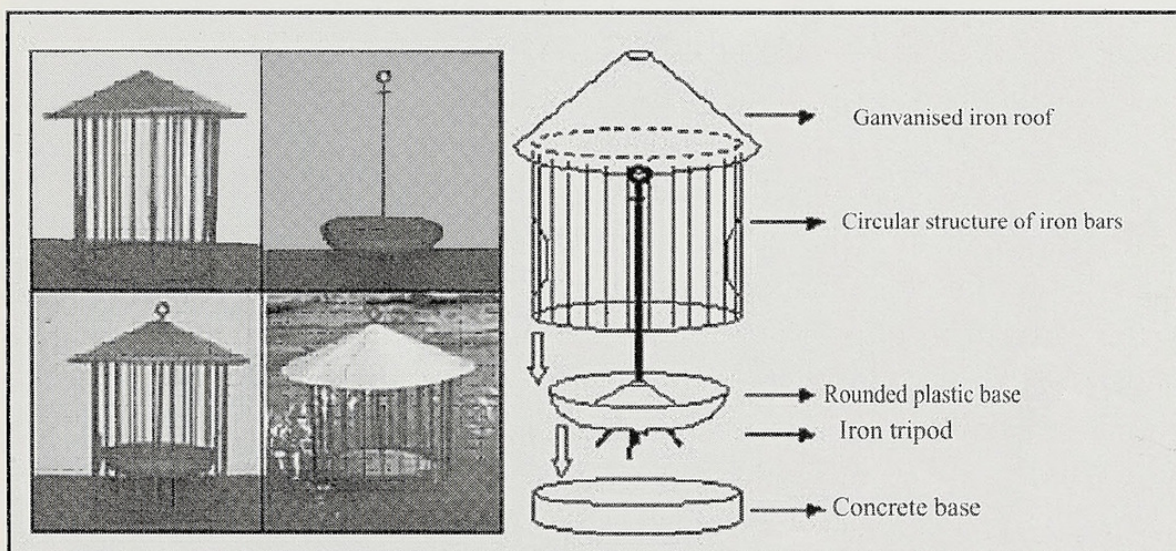
DETERRING SINANTROPIC ANIMALS: TWO BIRD FEEDERS FOR THIS PURPOSE DEVELOPED AT BELO HORIZONTE ZOO

by João Bôsko Ferraz, Cristiano Schetini de Azevedo
and Ângela Bernadete Faggioli

Introduction

Sinantropic animals are considered to be those that live in and around human environments and can transmit diseases to humans (Anvisa, 2003). Sinantropic animals achieve rapid population growth in areas where they can find food easily, along with places to nest and shelter, and where there is a lack of natural predators (Ribeiro et al., 2000; Oro et al., 2004). Diseases such as salmonellosis, histoplasmosis, cryptococcosis and chagas can easily be transmitted from sinantropic animals to humans and domestic animals (Ritchie et al., 1994; Nunes, 2003).

Zoos and other institutions and collections that maintain animals in open exhibits suffer invasions of sinantropic animals, such as pigeons, rats and mice. These can cause serious economic losses to zoos and other institutions and collections, once they start to eat large quantities of food, and can transmit diseases (Wall, 1990; Nunes, 2003).



A new feeder developed by staff of the Bird Section of Belo Horizonte Zoo for Anseriformes and Phoenicopteriformes birds. It was developed to deter sinantropic animals, mainly pigeons.

In an attempt to deter sinantropic animals from reaching the food of birds in open exhibits on the Bird Section at Belo Horizonte Zoo (Belo Horizonte is the capital of the state of Minas Gerais, south-eastern Brazil), two new feeding devices have been created, one for ducks and geese (Anseriformes) and flamingos (Phoenicopteriformes), and another for ibises (Ciconiiformes/Theskiornithidae). Both of these feeding devices are cheap to make, easy to install and clean, and are portable.



Fen-qi, He et al. 2007. "Searches For The Blue-Crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulax Courtoisi Simaoensis* In South Yunnan, South-West China." *The Avicultural magazine* 113(2), 78–85.

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