

Teesmouth Bird Club Newsletter



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Thanks to the contributors to this issue:- Mike Leakey; Chris Sharp; Brian Ward. Photographs by Brian Clasper.

All unsolicited copy will be most welcome, ideally sent by email, or on 3.5" computer disk, using word processing software, but typed and handwritten copy is equally acceptable. Any topic concerned with birds or the local environment is grist to the mill.

MONTHLY SUMMARY by Chris Sharp

JANUARY

As usual year tickers had a busy day on 1st. The large Waxwing flock remained around Barclaycard Stockton from 1999 with at least 89 birds present. Other birds from the previous year included a Bittern at Haverton Hole, Red-necked Grebe on Seal Sands, the usual Mediterranean and Glaucous Gulls at Hartlepool and Slavonian Grebe in the fish quay. Rarity of the day was the Spotted Crake flushed on Dormans Pool. A Black-throated Diver was on the sea off Steetley on 2nd on which day a Smew was on the Reclamation Pond. By the month's end the numbers of Smew had increased to 5. The Wheatear at South Gare which had first been seen on 18th December was also reported to be still present. The Black-necked Grebe reappeared in Jackson's Landing (9th) having been absent since Christmas. Some 72 Great Crested Grebes were between Hartlepool and Seaton Carew (12th) and it was possible at this time to see all 5 species of Grebe in the county. In strong northerly winds Arctic and Great Skuas both passed Hartlepool (19th). The following day saw 2 Lapland Buntings on Seaton Common, an increasingly rare visitor to Cleveland in winter. A Black-throated Diver was present at Scaling Dam from 16th and 2 Bean Geese flew over Crookfoot on this date. White-winged Gulls were in evidence late in the month with an adult Iceland seen on 2 dates at Hartlepool, first and second winter Glaucous Gulls at South Gare together with a second summer Mediterranean Gull. Up to 5 Bearded Tits were recorded from Haverton Hole and Albert Park held up to 21 Goosanders.

FEBRUARY

The Slavonian Grebe remained in the fish quay until the 5th. Up to 4 Smew were on the North Tees Marshes throughout the month. Small numbers of Twite were on Greenbella Marsh and Jack Snipe were recorded on Cowpen Marsh (2) and at Haverton Hole (6). Eight White-fronted Geese were at Crookfoot (from 16th). Red necked Grebes were off Newburn (2nd) and around Seal Sands (from 25th), along with a Long-tailed Duck.

MARCH

Early in the month 2 Brent Geese were off the Power Station along with 4 Long-tailed Duck. A pair of Bearded Tits remained at Haverton Hole throughout the month and Jack Snipe continued to be seen regularly here. The first summer visitors were recorded from 11th with both Sand Martin and Wheatear seen on this date. Later in the month passage waders included Spotted Redshank and Little Ringed Plover at Saltholme from 25th. A Red-Crested Pochard was on Seal Sands (26th) and Black Redstarts were at Boulby (26th) and Scaling Dam (27th). Several Water Pipits were seen around at Saltholme late in the month and 3 Waxwing were seen at Guisborough (27th).

APRIL

A Black Redstart was at South Gare (5th). Having been absent during the winter in Cleveland 22 Whooper Swans were at Scaling Dam (6th) with 2 on the Reclamation Pond the same day. A summer plumaged Red-throated Diver was on Saltholme Pool at the same time. The first Garganey of the spring were seen from 9th with 2 at Scaling Dam and 1 at Haverton Hole. The following day saw a summer plumaged Black-Necked Grebe on the Reclamation Pond. Light onshore winds in mid-month saw a sprinkling of migrants at the coast with up to 8 Ring Ouzels and 3 Black Redstarts at South Gare during this period and Arctic and Great Skuas passing Hartlepool headland. The first Marsh Harrier of the spring was on Dormans Pool (13th) and a Great Grey Shrike was on the Long Drag from 15th. An Osprey flew over Wilton (18th) and a Little Egret was present briefly on Greenabella Marsh (22nd) on which date an Iceland Gull was at Hartlepool and Glaucous Gull at South Gare. An early Pied Flycatcher was at South Gare (24th) and a Tawny Pipit was seen by one fortunate observer at Boulby the same day.

A small fall of migrants (26th) included at Hartlepool 6 Lesser Whitethroats, 4 Whitethroats, 20 Wheatears, Whinchat and Black Redstart. A Hobby flew over Coatham Marsh (27th) and the last day of the month produced a calling Quail at

Kirkleatham, 3 Whooper Swans on the sea at Seaton Carew and a Short-toed Lark at South Gare which stayed into May.

MAY

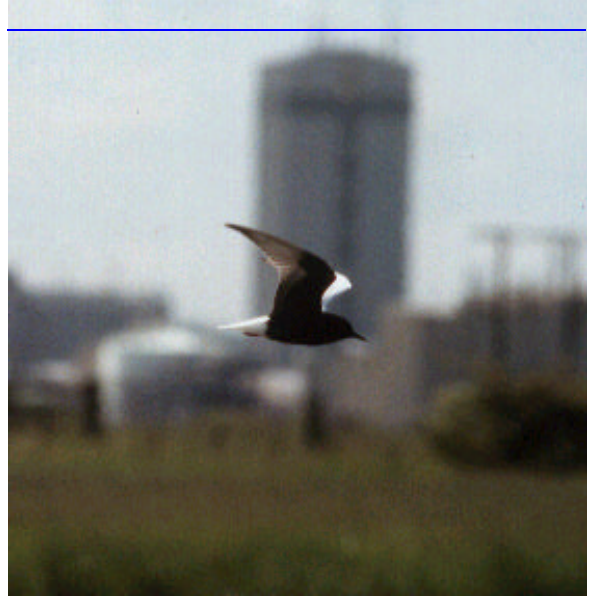
Fortunately for the Teesmouth Birders in China May 2000 will be remembered as one of the poorest for unusual species in Cleveland for some years. The Short-toed Lark remained at South Gare (to 4th), an American Wigeon was on Saltholme Pool (6th to 7th) and a Montagu's Harrier was over Cowpen Marsh (11th). A Wood Sandpiper was on Greenabella Marsh (7th) on which date a Black Tern was on Saltholme. Temmincks Stints were on Saltholme Pool (14th) and Greenabella Marsh (18th). A Little Stint was on Brinefields (15th). One or two Curlew Sandpipers were on Seaton Snook. Two Black-necked Grebes were on Saltholme Pool (13th) with another bird there (29th). A Hobby was in Hargreaves Quarry (18th), a Little Egret was at Greatham Creek (21st), a Quail was heard at Cowpen Marsh (22nd) and two or three Garganey were on the marshes (from 22nd).

Away from the North Tees Marshes a Shore Lark was at Hartlepool (7th), 3 Black-necked Grebes were at Long Newton Reservoir (8th) and a Pied Flycatcher was at South Gare (9th). A Crane flew over Coatham Marsh (14th), a Black Redstart was at Hartlepool (18th) and a Quail was heard at Crookfoot (19th) where an Osprey was present (31st).

JUNE

One or two Garganey were around Saltholme early in the month. Light north-easterly winds and mist and rain for the first few days of the month produced ideal fall conditions. At Hartlepool a male Red-Backed Shrike was in the Doctor's Garden from 4th along with Black Redstart and several Spotted Flycatchers. 2 Red-Backed Shrikes were at South Gare the following day along with female Red-breasted Flycatcher. The same day saw a Marsh Warbler trapped at Saltburn and another Red-backed Shrike on Hartlepool Golf Course.

A Spotted Crake called nightly at Saltholme from 7th. A Montagu's Harrier flew in from the sea at Saltburn (8th) and the following day 2 Marsh Harriers were at Haverton Hole and both Red-footed Falcon and Hobby were seen in Hargreaves Quarry, the Red-foot still being present the next morning. A Great-white Egret was present for a few hours on Coatham Marsh (12th). This is the 3rd consecutive year that this rarity has occurred in Cleveland. A drake Scaup was on Saltholme Pool from 10th and 2 Roseate Terns were on Bran Sands on 17th. An Alpine Swift flew over Greenabella Marsh towards Seal Sands (21st), seen only by one observer. The only twitchable bird in Cleveland, the October 1985 bird at Boulby, now seems like a distant memory. More obliging was the stunning summer plumaged White-Winged Black Tern which toured the North Tees Marshes (25th). Small numbers of waders began their return passage late in the month with the North Tees Marshes holding six Black-tailed Godwits, 4 Common Sandpipers, Wood Sandpiper and Greenshank. 4 Spoonbills were on Dormans Pool (29th) departing the next day.



White-winged Black Tern - North Tees Marshes, June 25th



White-winged Black Tern - North Tees Marshes, June 25th



Short-toed Lark - South Gare, April/May

A TICK OF THE TAIL by Brian Ward

(With apologies to Genesis fans)

Having returned to birding in the mid 80's when I needed a hobby to replace golf, which became too expensive and time

consuming for a newlywed. I found myself a member of the Teesmouth Bird Club by marriage as my in-laws lived in Thornaby and my wife wanted to see them whenever she could having moved to Cumbria to be near my work. This meant I had plenty of time to get out as she could go shopping with her sister and mother. I was also a member of the new Cumbria Bird Club and met a few people in my native county but found I still knew more people on Teesside when it came to birding. I was an avid reader of both Bird Reports and loved the rare birds seen, especially Bluethroat. I decided that this was the bird to see and started to plan its downfall. Cumbria had six records up to 1987 so this was not the place to look. I had my full set of Teesmouth Bird Reports with a round up report from the late 60's. It seemed that it was moving from an autumn vagrant to a spring vagrant. Whenever I was in the northeast on my rest days I would be out looking for Bluethroats and never getting a sniff.

By 1990, I had decided to use computer technology to track down this mythical creature. I put all the dates from the bird reports on a database and made a histogram showing that mid-May was THE time. Now to get leave from work and hit the road. I went out every day to South Gare, being the most regular location, and saw nothing. Arriving home on the 19th of May I phoned Birdline and found Hartlepool had had 2 that day. Was I disappointed, no of course it is all part of the fun of birding wasting a weeks holiday and dipping. 1991 came around and the birth of my son put paid to any leave in May. 1992 was another year when I put leave in and came over for a week. Northwesterly winds and rain all week. I go home, rain stops, easterly winds I don't need to go on. It is now nearly ten years, a decade, of not seeing this bird, I AM NOT PARANOIC. 1993 a classic Bluethroat year and I am on Teesside for my birthday on the 15th of May. Birdline tells me there has been loads of Bluethroats and there is still 1 in Locke Park, a stunning male and 2 at Hartlepool, a male and female. I could hardly sleep that night and woke every half hour finally getting up at 5am and going to Hartlepool thinking 2 must still be there but after a couple of hours they had obviously gone. Never mind I'll cross the Transporter and be in Redcar in half an hour. No, the Transporter has broken down, so it is nearly an hour later I arrive at Locke Park determined to find this "stunning male". I scoured the park and I am sure I saw a tail with rufous sides going into a bush never to be seen again. I did not tick this, as I was not looking for a Rufoustail but a bloody Bluethroat! No more were seen that year and I returned home a bitter man. Could I tick the back end of a bird, or should I wait until I get really stunning views of a Bluethroat.

1994, my son starts school and I am confined to Cumbria during May and what a surprise it is a great year for Bluethroats. There is even the 7th record for Cumbria, a male in a back garden in Kirby Lonsdale for an hour. 1995 and my 10 day rest period is in the middle of May and my wife decides to take my son out of school so that Grandparents can see son and new daughter and her demented husband can stop nagging about seeing some stupid bird. There wasn't a sniff of an easterly wind all week and I returned home a sad man. I went in to work and my mate who has a pager says there are

easterly winds bringing birds onto the East Coast and there a some Bluethroats amongst them. He very nearly had a black and blue throat but I couldn't get over the table to get a grip of him. In 1996 my son started to come out with me and I now enjoy my birding seeing all sorts of birds like Sedge Warblers as "lifers" and I don't even think about seeing that unmentionable bird. I do still take a sneaky look at the weather forecast in mid-May and wonder when there are easterly winds, what birds might be coming in. Please don't feel sorry for me when you are seeing Bluethroats every year, just nail it's foot to the floor and give me a ring. One day you might see a lunatic pensioner doing cartwheels with a teenager looking bemused but I wouldn't bank on it.

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2000 SUMMARY

Full sector coverage was achieved in every month. Of the wildfowl, all species bar Shelduck and Mallard occurred in above average numbers. For Shelduck, the peak count (351, April) was virtually average, and it is worth noting that the long term decline in the Teesmouth winter population is not reflected in spring. Both Little Grebe (41, April) and Great Crested Grebe (16, April and May) set new WeBS seasonal records, as did Pochard (58, April and May) and Tufted Duck (166, May). Maxima of Cormorant (154, June), Teal (393, April) and Coot (346, April) were all well above average.

For the second successive spring, the May count yielded relatively poor figures for our two most important wader species at this season, Ringed Plover and Sanderling (411 and 365 respectively). In the former species' case, the count date fell fractionally too early to coincide with a concentrated period of passage in the third week of May, during which over a thousand were counted on Seal Sands alone on 18th (together with over 500 Dunlin). For Sanderling, this was the poorest spring peak since 1991.

Grey Plover (3, April and May) were once again notably scarce this spring, as were Ruff (3, April). Both Lapwing (376, June) and Snipe (37, April), on the other hand, returned their best seasonal maxima for a decade. Dunlin (260, May), Purple Sandpiper (137, April), Curlew (399, April) and Redshank (1034, April) all produced peaks of average magnitude.

The Sandwich Tern maxima (231, June) was the best in spring since 1993, while for Common Tern this was comfortably the best spring on record (613, June).

Following this series of counts, Tees and Hartlepool Bay WeBS Site remains of national importance for both Ringed Plover and Sanderling in spring.

MIKE LEAKEY, Local Organizer - Tees and Hartlepool Bay Wetland Bird Survey

WETLAND BIRD SURVEY TEESMOUTH SPRING 2000 SUMMARY

	April 16	May 14	June 18	Spring 2000 maximum count expressed as % of average peak count over previous five springs
Little Grebe	<u>41</u>	23	10	145%
Great Crested Grebe	<u>16</u>	<u>16</u>	15	200%
Cormorant	48	81*	<u>154**</u>	155%
Mute Swan	16	22	<u>38</u>	105%
Shelduck	<u>351</u>	313	213	99%
Teal	<u>393</u>	4	47	183%
Mallard	<u>182</u>	154	129	82%
Shoveler	<u>57*</u>	43	42	143%
Pochard	<u>58</u>	<u>58</u>	51	158%
Tufted Duck	<u>166</u>	115	115	139%
Eider	33	49	<u>64</u>	147%
Coot	<u>346</u>	282	341	151%
Oystercatcher	<u>615</u>	502	386	93%
Ringed Plover	12	<u>411**</u>	23	92%
Golden Plover	<u>59</u>	3	0	128%
Grey Plover	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	2	17%
Lapwing	154	98	<u>376</u>	192%
Knot	<u>81</u>	52	5	224%
Sanderling	123	<u>365**</u>	3	52%
Purple Sandpiper	<u>137*</u>	4	0	103%
Dunlin	11	<u>260</u>	9	105%
Ruff	<u>3</u>	1	0	41%
Snipe	<u>37</u>	1	2	363%
Bar-tailed Godwit	<u>20</u>	12	0	114%
Curlew	<u>399</u>	170	207	106%
Redshank	<u>1034*</u>	44	69	102%
Turnstone	<u>258</u>	35	13	92%
Sandwich Tern	0	44	<u>231</u>	167%
Common Tern	0	335	<u>613</u>	174%
Little Tern	0	23	<u>24</u>	62%

Underlined counts indicate Spring 2000 maxima.

* Denotes count of >50% of national significance for that species

** Denotes count of national significance for that species

NB 'Teesmouth' includes Hartlepool Bay

TEESMOUTH BIRDERS AT BEIDAIHE

by Chris Sharp

Beidaihe's reputation as a world-class migration watch point moved up a notch or two this spring, apparently one of the best for dramatic falls of regular Siberian migrants and for rare, scarce, and unseasonal species. Nine members of the Teesmouth Bird Club joined about 20 other keen birders on the 'Wildwings' organised trip to this famous birding hot-spot.

The trip was led by Tony Marr, Chairman of the B.O.U and we were there between 4th and 21st May. The first couple of days were spent around Beijing birding around a local park, the Summer Palace and Fragrant Hills together with a bit of sightseeing. We then took the train to Beidaihe and spent the next fortnight watching all or most of the Asian rarities we had dreamed of. Whilst at Beidaihe we had a 5 day trip to Happy Island and the areas nearby.

The main reason for the outstanding results this year was the unsettled weather which persisted throughout our two weeks in Beidaihe with a lot of cloud and haze, and a number of wet and windy days. There were few days of continuous warm sunny weather which had been a feature of recent springs. The maximum species total was 258.

New species for the province or the Beidaihe area appear to be **Asian House Martin** (Lotus Hills on 10th); a new species of **Golden Spectacled Warbler** *Seicercus Burkii* since the split into five species recommended in 'ibis' (1999) in the small wood at Lao Yu Jian on 14th and identified as a **Grey-crowned Warbler** *Seicercus Tephrocephalus* and a **Rufous-Faced Warbler** *Abroscopus Albogularis* at the Yang Ho Estuary on 10th. In addition two **Long Tailed Minivets** were seen at the Summer Palace, Beijing on 6th, a species not recorded on previous 'Wildwings' trips.

Other notable records this year included two **Red-crowned (Japanese) Cranes** *Grus Japonensis* flying south over Radar Marsh on 17th, about two months later than usual; a **Fujian Niltava** *Niltava Davidi* at Lotus Hills on 10th; two different **Mongolian Larks** *Melanocorypha Mongolica* at the Yang Ho lagoons and Sandflats on 16th and 17th (a third was reported by other observers at Happy Island at the same time); a **Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella Brachydactyla* on the Jin Shan Field on 11th; an Upland Buzzard *Buteo Hemilasius* over Lotus Hills on 10th; a **Saker Falcon** *Falco Cherrug* taking an **Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia Orientalis* a few feet from the observers by the Yang Ho lagoons on 16th; at least 4 **Koklass Pheasants** *Purcraasia Macrolopha* calling and two briefly seen at Old Peak on the 18th and 19th; an **Asian Yellow Rail** *Corturnicops Noveboracensis* and a **Collared Scops Owl** *Otus Bakkamoena* in the small wood near Lau Yu Jian on 14th; single **Greater Painted Snipe** *Rostratula Benghalensis* on 16th (Yang Ho Lagoons) and 17th (Radar Marsh); 650 **Great Knot** *Calidris Tentuostri* on Happy Island and another 100 in the harbour at Lao Yu Jian on 15th, with 240 **Asian Dowitchers** *Limnodromus Semipalmatus* also on Happy Island

a **Grey Tailed Tattler** at Da Pu He on 16th and up to 5 **Relict Gulls** *Larus Relictus* in the harbour at Lao Yu Jian.

Passerine highlights included unusual totals of 7 **Pechora Pipits** *Anthus Gustavi*, 6 **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla Citreola* and 5 **Ashy Minivets** *Pericrocotus Divaricatus*, a **Lesser Cuckoo-Shrike** *Corancina Melaschistos* at Lighthouse Point on 19th and 20th; a good selection of thrushes which, among the scarcer ones, included 6 **Grey-sided** *Turdus Feae* at Old Peak, 7 **Grey Backed** *T.Hortulorum* mostly at Beidaihe, 1 **Pale** *T.Pallidus* at Beidaihe and 2 **Blue Whistling Thrushes** *Myophonus Caeruleus* on Happy Island, one with a black bill (the nominate race) and one with a yellow bill (from distribution more likely to be of the race *eugenei* rather than *temminckii*); a dozen **Stub-Tailed Bush Warblers** *Urosphena Squamieps* on the coast with a further dozen at Old Peak; an extremely skulking **Spotted Bush Warbler** *Bradypterus Thoracicus*; a **Japanese Marsh (Swamp) Warbler** *Locustella Pryeri* at Radar Marsh on the last day; the anticipated **Chinese Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus Sichuanensis* and **Chinese Nuthatches** *Sitta Villosa* at Old Peak; **Tiger Shrikes** *Lanius Tigrurus* and **Bull-Headed Shrikes** *Lanius Bucephalus*; **Hair Crested Drongos** *Dicrurus Hottentottus* at Old Peak; and an extraordinary flock of some 60 **Japanese Hawfinches** *Euphona Personata* on Happy Island on 15th.

As happens every year, migrants poured through every day regardless of the weather conditions, but this year's unsettled weather on several days resulted in some of the most dramatic falls. None of the memorable falls in the past years apparently rival that of 14th May this year, when we spent the whole day in two woods just inland from the harbour at Lao Yu Jian, the port of Happy Island.

Previously known as 'The small wood' and 'The big wood' the former was so incredible on that day that it was renamed '**The Magic Wood**'. On our early-morning arrival on a dull, misty day with a light south-westerly wind, it was immediately obvious that something unusual was happening – the trees, bushes and low ground cover were crawling with birds. That phrase really meant what it said – as did others, often used but seldom justified – such as "coming down with birds", "alive with birds" and "heaving with birds". As we walked into the wood, migrants just burst out of every vestige of cover- not individuals, but mixed flocks – and soon everybody had a story to tell of how many Siberian rarities they had seen in one field of view of their binoculars. *Phylloscopus*, *Locustella* and *Acrocephalus* warblers, buntings, flycatchers, thrushes, rubythroats, blue robins, shrikes and rosefinches were the principle constituents of this fall of falls. There were some extraordinary sights - a loose flock of 7 Woodcock coming in from the south and passing low over the woods, two Japanese Quail and 5 Yellow-Legged Button Quail flushed from among the trees, and two Striated Herons flying about through them; an Asian Yellow Rail climbing an earth bank at the edge of the trees and disappearing northwards over the top; and single Collared Scops Owl and Oriental Scops huddling close to tree trunks to appear invisible, with two more unidentified Scops

Owls seen in flight only. Overhead two White-throated Needletails powered northwards, while in the wood itself were an Oriental Cuckoo, 2 Black-capped Kingfishers, a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker, 8 Daurian Starlings, 2 Bluethroats, 3 Red-flanked Bluetails, 3 Grey-Backed Thrushes, 2 Stub-Tailed Bush Warblers, 2 Eastern Crowned Warblers, a Grey crowned Warbler (a split from Golden Spectacled Warbler as described earlier) and a Manchurian Bush Warbler – *inter* very many *alia*.

Things were less frenetic in **The Big Wood**, and clearly by the time we reached it in the late morning many birds must have moved on. Nevertheless, we found another Oriental Cuckoo and Oriental Scops Owl; a Grey Nightjar; two more Needletails passed over, there were three Rufous-bellied Woodpeckers and a Wryneck; 10 Olive-backed, two Richard's and a Blyth's Pipit; a Forest Wagtail; three Oriental Great Reed Warblers, 3 Grey-streaked Flycatchers, 3 Chestnut-flanked White-eyes, a Chinese Penduline Tit, a Bull-headed Shrike and 150 Common Rosefinches including a flock of 130.

But it was the huge numbers of more regular Siberian migrants which were so impressive. In both woods together we estimated the following minimum total in this one day:- 4 Rufous-tailed Robins, 250 Siberian Rubythroats, 250 Siberian Blue Robins, 4 White-throated Rock Thrushes, 24 White's Thrushes, 7 Siberian Thrushes, 48 Eye-browed Thrushes, 9 Dusky Thrushes, 3 Chinese Song Thrushes, 8 Lanceolated Warblers, 13 Black-browed Reed Warblers, 28 Thick-billed Warblers, 30 Two-barred Greenish, 4 Arctics, 600 Pallas's, 36 Yellow-browed, 3,200 Radde's, 800 Dusky, 3 Pale-legged Leaf, 55 Blyth's Leaf, 8 Yellow-rumped Flycatchers, 4 Elisae's, 95 Red-throated, 5 Asian Brown, 25 Black-naped Orioles, 115 Brown Shrikes, 10 Chinese Hawfinches, and single figure totals for Black-faced, Chestnut-eared, Little, Chestnut, Yellow-breasted, and Tristram's Buntings. One observer counted 150 Radde's Warblers passing him in 10 minutes at one point in The Magic Wood.

The Magic Wood is only about the size of a football pitch and The Big Wood about three times that size. In these two woods on that day there were some **6,500 birds of 111 species**. And half of those were Radde's Warblers.

The whole trip was extremely well organised and I'm sure all the participants would highly recommend a spring visit to Beidaihe. Unfortunately a lot of development has taken place along the 100 kilometre stretch of coast between Beidaihe and Happy Island and habitat destruction continues apace. Hopefully some areas can be preserved and I for one would love to return one day.