

Project Update: July 2014

With my teammate Du Ke from the Chengdu Bird Watching Society, we arrived in Palyul Township on May 16th 2014. From middle of May to the middle of June 2014 it is the caterpillar fungus collecting season here on the plateau. After discussing with our local partners from Nyanpo Yutse Environmental Association, we decided to start working with understanding grazing impacts on bird habitats in seasonal pastures. We will carry out the household interviews from late June 2014.

To understand pasture management impacts on bird habitats, we have sampled winter and summer pastures which bear different levels of grazing intensity. Meanwhile, we sampled plots with different vegetation covers, i.e. degraded grassland, grassland, grass-shrub mixed pasture and shrubland. From May 20th 2014, we sampled on average eight plots each day usually from 7:00 AM to 11.00 AM. The observation will continue to cover around 120 plots which cover the major types of avian habitats in the region. At the moment, we assume that it is the heterogeneity in a landscape, including human-made structures that maintains the high richness of alpine bird species. It is interesting to observe that high vegetation cover doesn't often correlate with high species diversity.

We've also examined some key habitats for local flagship species, e.g. Tibetan bunting, white-tailed rubythroat, Przevalski's finch etc. We used play-back technique to identify the breeding habitats for the concerned species. We doubt that a certain grass-shrub mixture structure may be important for those flagship species'. However, the study is still going on and we are not able to make any concrete conclusion at this moment.



Left to right: Habitat for white-tailed rubythroat on Omtso summer pasture; measuring alpine bird richness; winter pasture fencing in a Tibetan bunting habitat. Photos by Li Li & Du Ke.