

Hello all,

The sun appeared today. It has been mostly cloudy and raining since I arrived in China. Apparently the monsoon season started right about when I arrived. Today I surveyed the last cluster of plots necessary to finish one set of surveys. I studied birds' Chinese names and their calls, as I have every day for the past two months, and I studied Chinese and Dai for a while. I then spent the afternoon bush-wacking through the dense jungle with my friend Ai Hanliu searching for Silver Pheasant, likely the biggest bird reputed to still inhabit the reserve. (I have yet to find a Silver Pheasant).

My travels to Man'e took a bit longer than expected. Buses in China can be frustrating. The 8AM bus from Kunming to Jinghong should have taken 7 hours. Our driver drove about 30mph the whole way and stopped by the side of the road for almost two hours waiting for people to come load freshly harvested fruits into the baggage compartment below the bus (I wondered why there seemed to be no room for the passengers' bags—in fact it was all being saved for the extra side jobs the driver had arranged). We arrived in Jinghong too late to take a bus to Menglun. So I was stuck midway in my journey. It was definitely a lesson in making the best of an unexpected situation. I found a cheap room and used the next morning to visit the Yunnan Tropical Crops Institute, a kind of botanical gardens and research center where I saw many life birds, including a pair of Coppersmith Barbets and my first Brown-throated Sunbird.

In fact, I have devoted my time in the village almost exclusively to studying the birds. I studied all of the 150 some species resident in the township prior to arrival, but still every day brings great learning experiences, particularly in learning songs and calls. I have mostly mastered the few birds found in rubber plantations. The villagers think I am ridiculous doing surveys in these plantations. Some plantations are so sterile that I can stand there for a full ten minutes and not detect a single bird within the tiny boundaries of the 50X50m plot. When I do, it is usually a Common Tailorbird or Pin-striped Tit-Babbler. Less common finds in rubber plantations are Speckled Piculet (look up a picture, it's like the cutest miniature woodpecker you've ever seen) and Hill Blue Flycatcher (look up their song—it's spectacular). But I really prefer studying birds in the nature reserve. Today I saw Blue-winged Leafbird there with Ai Hanliu.

Spending everyday out birding, I feel like I'm not working. It's great that birding *is* my work, as an avian field technician. Still, the birds on my surveys are so sparse I often feel like I'm not even doing real surveys—yet I suppose that is the point. We want to see that there is a significant improvement in birds after planting the intercrops. I think that from this situation, anything will be an improvement. Luckily there are tons of absolutely gorgeous butterflies to look at when I'm not seeing birds. In fact, the old people are out in force with long butterfly nets to catch them to sell live in local gift shops as far away as Beijing and Shanghai. It's causing the loss of the prettier species.

There's lots to learn about wildlife exploitation in the village. When I'm not working on bird surveys for Green Rubber (which may in fact occupy almost all my time for the next couple weeks), I will be piecing together a clearer picture of wildlife exploitation in the village—

hunting, fishing, trapping, insect collecting, etc. Originally I was primarily interested in hunting. I gave myself only two weeks to identify all the hunters in the village before trying to find a way to encourage sustainable hunting. First of all, it seems that there are not enough animals left for any hunting at all to be sustainable. Hunters kill indiscriminately, so even allowing limited hunting of wild pigs would put other animals at risk. And there are so few big mammals left that I'm not sure if anyone from this village is actually out there hunting anymore. The two most likely hunters, Ai Hanliu and his father, no longer hunt. Yet there are gunshots in the forest and I was served wild pig at someone's house last December. Apparently villagers buy wild meat from hunters in other villages. It important to be adaptable in my project. I clearly don't really understand the situation like I thought I did, so I must first strive for a more holistic and fair understanding—that will be an accomplishment in itself. It will require keeping my eyes and ears open and being extra inquisitive all the time. It will also shed light on whether current activities are indeed as unsustainable as we suspect they are. Perhaps the next step is to instill a conservation ethic, and getting people into birds might do that. I've already taken Ai Hanliu birdwatching (a mix of birdwatching and checking his snake nets actually), and he is as sharp a birder as any I've met. Other villagers know birds fairly well as well—just put a field guide in front of them and they'll tell you every bird in the region somewhat accurately. I'll see where I can take this.

The wildlife exploitation project is part of my internship with Dr. Alice Hughes. Other parts of that internship, like bat catching and biodiversity surveys, will not happen until she returns from a month of international conventions.

I'm also learning some Dai, which is a difficult language to learn. Only the oldest people still know how to read and write it, so I just use English letters to spell out words phonetically. But Dai has 46 sounds (consonant sounds my mouth has never made before) and eight tones. It might take a while.

I have learned quite a bit already here, yet I cannot surpass two pages in this narrative, otherwise I may lose my audience Check out the accompanying photos for more. I always appreciate hearing how people are doing back home. Shoot me an email if you get a chance!

Cheers,

-Francis



This is where Mangoes come from



My homestay father and his friends have converted an entire side of the basketball court into a workshop building furniture for sale. In my time here they have already produced three sofas, a wine cabinet and a coffin



There is Democracy at the local level in China. This is an election for the people representing a division of the township and those who serve as the intermediaries between the people and the communist party.



Asian Barred Owlet chicks taken from the nest. Some villagers really like raising birds. It is definitely not ideal for the animals. At least they are released when they can fly.



Ai HanLiu keeps several snakes, including four big cobras. Here are it's fangs.



Ai Hanliu puts hundreds of meters of snake nets in the forest in hopes of catching cobras to sell.



Usually I don't get a selfie with a butterfly



Last year I didn't see a single bike in the village. All of a sudden biking became hugely popular. Everyone wants to show off their nice new mountain bikes.



This is the house I'm staying in



This is the village I'm staying in



This old guy caught a very pretty butterfly. He was super happy about it. They only sell for a couple cents each, so I think he really just hunts them for fun.



I've eaten tons and tons of bitter bamboo shoots from the nature reserve this week. They are very bitter.





Crazy cool insect



The Spider is as big as my hand and it put its web right in the middle of the trail.



Apparently the guy got it from a friend.



One of my helpers measuring out 10m markers in a rubber plot. I will use these markers to estimate distance of birds during my point counts.