


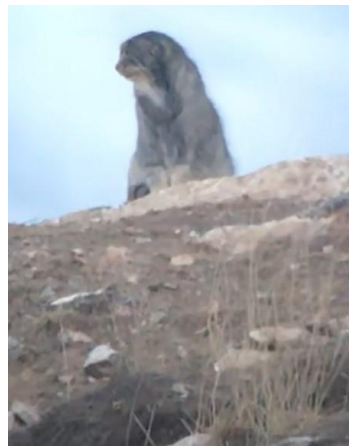
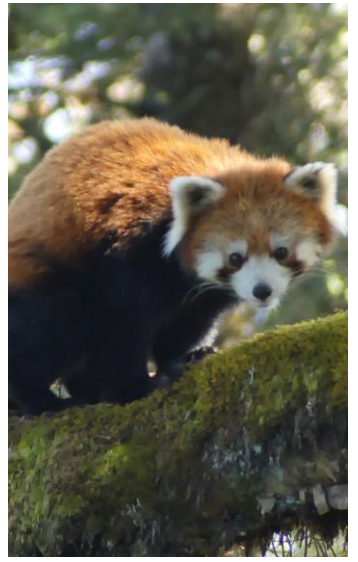


Sichuan Mammal Tour

Destination: Sichuan, China **Duration:** 15 Days **Dates:** 9th – 23rd March 2018

-  Having incredible views of 3 Pallas's Cat and 3 Chinese Mountain Cats
-  Enjoying the expertise of some of China's best guides & panda reserve rangers
-  Great sightings of Blue-eared, Blood, Koklass's & Golden Pheasants
-  Trekking & camping deep inside Wolong, home to more Pandas than anywhere
-  Enjoying close views of four Tibetan Wolves close to the road during the morning
-  Seeing a huge number and diversity of Raptors in Rouergai grasslands
-  Sighting Northern Hog Badger along with 9 other nocturnal species in Tangjiahe
-  Spotting and observing an impressive 34 species of mammals throughout
-  Incredible views of 2 Red Pandas sun bathing in the morning sun in Wolong NNR
-  Finding very recent evidence from a mother Giant Panda and her cub



Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
Wolong Reserve Rangers & local porters
Sid (Rouergai & Tangjiahe Guide)

Participants

Mr. William 'Monty' Ross
Mrs. Roberta 'Bobbie' Borowski

Overview

Day 1:	Chengdu / Wolong
Days 2-8:	Wolong
Days 9-11:	Rouergai
Days 12-13:	Tangjiahe
Day 14:	Chengdu
Day 15:	Home



Day by Day Breakdown

Overview

Thinking of China and associating it with wildlife will most likely lead to images of Giant Pandas, the black and white bamboo munching bears have become as much an icon of China as they have conservation. They are in the wild doing quite well, after years of protection and some recent reintroductions the numbers of wild giant pandas has increased to around 2,000. Still a low number but much higher than previously estimated. However seeing one is incredibly difficult. Not just are they elusive, live high up in near inaccessible mountains and surrounded by incredibly thick bamboo; but the Chinese have consciously clamped down on people visiting reserves where pandas inhabit on specific panda trips. In fact the best place in the world (Foping) is closed and has been since 2006.

But there is so much more than giant pandas in China, the mountains, grasslands and forests of Sichuan are a treasure trove of wildlife particularly mammals.

This tour focuses on 3 areas, the first being a camping trip which heads deep into the heart of Wolong National Nature Reserve. This huge protected area is the largest panda reserve in the world and is home to more giant pandas than anywhere else in the world. We would begin our mammal trip here, camping in a couple of different locations high up the slopes to see what we could see. The huge reserve has some interesting species known from it including 6 species of cats and 2 species of bears. However seeing any of these species would be tough. But what a great way to start our Chinese mammal trip.

From here we would head to a very different habitat, that of the border of Sichuan and the Tibetan Plateau, higher in elevation than anywhere else on this trip we would be searching the vast rolling grasslands for wildlife such as Tibetan foxes and most intriguing the funny looking Pallas's cat and its cousin the Chinese mountain cat.

Our final destination is the wonderful forested hills of Tangjiahe, here a wealth of life from flying squirrels, leopard cats, serow, hog badgers and many more wonderful species can be seen.

Travelling around these three very different habitats and spending days and nights searching for elusive mammals we aim to showcase a part of China that many people do not associate, wild China, remote and rugged China, the kind of China where the pandas and other animals still have their home and live out their lives oblivious to the ultra-modern mega cities and massive urban sprawl that is enveloping the country at some a rapid rate. But the development of China has one potential and little thought about benefit for the wilderness areas, as China becomes more and more westernised, people are flocking to the cities in huge numbers and hopefully if managed correctly this could lead to protected rural areas increase their areas.



Day 1 Chengdu / Wolong NNR

Arrival & Travelling

Today Monty and Bobbie arrived from North America via Beijing at around 21:30, they were met at the airport by Sid and transferred the 2.5 – 3 hours out of the city and into the forested valleys of Wolong National Nature Reserve until they arrived at the small hotel owned by our Wolong guide. Martin had arrived earlier today and they would all meet up for breakfast after getting some sleep and trying to overcome the jet lag as soon as possible.

Day 2 Wolong National Nature Reserve

Trekking & Wildlife Watching

Today we woke up and met for breakfast whilst our hiking and camping team was assembled in the nearby town. We then went to get some last minute supplies as well as getting registered with the local police station and the local forestry department. We then went to meet our team, we had a small group of porters and some of rangers from the reserve at the end of the road.

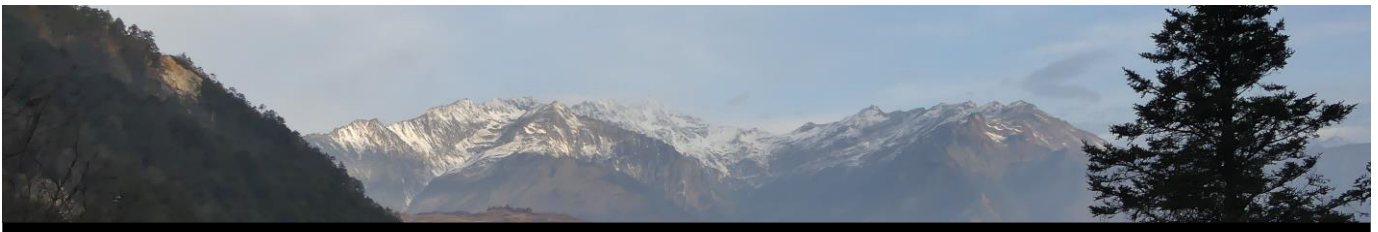
From here we loaded our packs and began our walk. The hike itself was around 4-5km but after a gentle start along a stream we began to climb and the terrain became harder and steeper. The hike was around 3 hours in total and we ended up around 2,600m up in the forest. We walked through the lowland forest first, spotting a mountain hawk-eagle soaring above us in a narrow canyon. We then gained elevation and entered the pine forest, the trees dominating here being larch which had shed their needles. We arrived at our first bamboo zone after around 1 hour



of hiking. This is the umbrella bamboo and not particularly favoured by the pandas. They eat this bamboo but mostly after the die offs of their preferred species (arrow bamboo) and this is the only bamboo around in large quantities. The trees started to change from larch to smaller more twisting and winding trees and of course the beautiful rhododendrons (however not in flower at this time of year).

A small flock of stripe-throated yuhinas greeted us as we arrived at the campsite at around 14:00. The camp was established and lunch prepared as we all took a little rest. At around 16:00 as the mist began to close in from the mountains we headed out for a walk. We headed further up behind the camp and towards the arrow bamboo zone. The signs of life here were greater than before, we quickly found evidence of satyr's tragopan, tufted deer, Sichuan takin, porcupine and then a panda track. We were officially and definitely in panda habitat. Thick with bamboo and at the snow line (even now in mid March the snow was still on the ground here) and as the terrain became even steeper. We decided to skirt the edge of the arrow bamboo for this afternoon, we would head further up and into the bamboo forest proper tomorrow and the day after. It was getting very misty and with daylight hours running down we decided against fumbling around here in the dark. Entering the bamboo and coming back out as we navigated the only trails here (made by deer and pandas) we found more evidence of deer as well as some panda dung, firstly from around 1 month ago, then a week and then some slightly fresher. We had been shown pictures from Wan and his team of a mother and 7 month old cub who had been seen around here just 10 days ago. So we hoped for a lucky encounter. We were certainly in the right place with so much activity and we were not even in the best places as we didn't have time to get there today. Tomorrow we would try in the bamboo forest proper which was still around 1 hour hike up the mountain.

So we returned to the camp and had dinner and got warmed up by the fire before retiring to our tents to prepare for our full day hiking around tomorrow.



Day 3 Wolong National Nature Reserve

Wildlife Watching

This morning we arose after a rainy night to mist all around and the forests above us (around 100m above us in elevation) covered in frost. We had breakfast in the camp and then headed out as the sun threatened to make an appearance. We departed between 8:30-9:00am and headed straight up east and to the bamboo behind the camp. As we were leaving the huge mountain peaks to the west of us were showing themselves, breaking through the clouds. Wolong has 101 peaks over 5,000m and we could see a number of them in the Drumooshan range this morning. It is amazing to be in one protected area that has both giant pandas and snow leopards recorded.

On our hike up the slope we quickly reached the snow line and walking through the huge rhododendron forest towards the arrow bamboo forest and panda habitat we found several species of birds. A pair of feeding female crimson-browed rosetinches and a white-tailed robin being the highlights. That was until we had a view (albeit a brief view) of a male Temminck's tragopan in a small open area.

Carrying on up through the snowy bamboo we found several other pheasants including a pair of stunning Koklass pheasant which flew past. We also had flew byes from a pair of Temminck's tragopans and a male Chinese monal. We also found some tracks on the snow from a red panda, they were from yesterday, further along before we reached the summit we found several dung patches from red pandas. At the summit we were met by incredible views over the mountains that seemed to stretch out indefinitely, we were on the border of the arrow bamboo forest and after a quick break we left to head deep into the bamboo. Walking along the main deer trail we found lots of red panda dung and tracks as well as some older giant panda dung.

Hiking along and walking up and down the ridges and to areas where Yang could scan out for wildlife we did have some good views of a male Chinese monal (one of the most brightly coloured pheasants in the world) as it flew and landed on the snow on the next ridge over from us. We found evidence of Asiatic black bears in the small nests they build in the trees, during the summer they feed on the berries up in the trees and build nests from broken and bent branches to support their weight whilst they fed. We also found plenty of dung of takin, tufted deer and of course both giant and red pandas.

Day 4 Wolong National Nature Reserve

Trekking & Wildlife Watching

This morning was chilly, the night sky had remained clear and so the heat had been lost overnight. We had a frost on the ground around our tents and we had stunning views of the surrounding mountains. We headed out after breakfast for a hike around some lower elevation arrow bamboo around 200m away from the camp. We walked past an 80 year tomb of an old soldier, the mound had been completely taken over by the forest now and you



wouldn't know anyone was buried there at all. We were also shown some of the study areas that the Wolong NNR staff are working with, excluding cattle from areas of bamboo to see the impact of over grazing in panda habitat. We climbed up around 300m above our camp and went deep into the nearly impenetrably thick bamboo, using deer and panda trails as the only means to navigate around. But we did quickly find some panda dung that was only 2-3 days old. This was possibly dropped whilst we were in the area. For the rest of the morning we hiked, scanned and hoped for a sighting. We did see various birds around here, including some great views of spotted nutcrackers, stripe-throated yuhina and great parrotbills all feeding and foraging around the trees. There was so much panda dung around here, it was obvious that at least one panda spends a lot of time around this area, but not today it seemed. We also found more evidence of sambar deer around here too, including a shed antler and a dust bathing wallow.

We then returned to the camp for lunch and to pack up the tents and camp, to try another ridgeline and another forest for the next few days. So we walked back down the slopes and along the stream and back to the road, we then drove the short way to the village and back to the hotel for a hot shower and an excellent Sichuan spicy fish stew with the panda tracking crew.



Day 5 **Wolong National Nature Reserve** *Trekking & Wildlife Watching*

This morning was beautiful the sun was out and the mountains looked majestic and imposing as we had breakfast. The rest of the crew arrived for breakfast and after a bowl full of Sichuan spicy noodles we were all set for our hike up to our second camp. We collected some more essentials and then drove higher up along the mountain road than we had the previous hike and met the rest of our porters. We all loaded up the gear and set off, most of the hike today would be through pasture. We would be going up to around 2,800m today. We started by walking through small stands of naked larch trees, their small pine needles all shed on the ground. During one of our breaks around here we had a nice view of an upland buzzard landing in a nearby tree and being mobbed by an angry Eurasian jay, in fact we saw several raptors during this hike, being in the open grasslands is better habitat for raptors. However it is a sad indictment that we had to walk for so long and so high to get to the panda's preferred habitat. All of these pastures would have been forest and covered in bamboo until people came and burnt it to create grassland for their sheep, yaks and ponies (all of which we saw many on our hike).

The walk was mostly open but we did enter some small areas of pine and rhododendron forest along the way. We reached the first summit after around 2.5 hours of hiking and from now it would be rolling grassy knolls. They seemed to stretch on indefinitely, we stopped for lunch in a large open area. Here we saw another upland buzzard, a juvenile golden eagle and a lammergeyer all gaining height on the same thermal above us. This was followed by a crested goshawk rushing down low to the ground nearby us, it stooped before missing whatever its target was and then disappeared over the edge and away from sight. Then close to where we stopped and made our campsite for the next three nights we had a pair of northern goshawks displaying in the sky for a few minutes.

We had set up the camp at around 14:30 and then it started to rain, we were all a little tired and with a walk up to the panda habitat on the other side of the nearby ridge we all just rested this afternoon and would be fresh for 2 full days searching for wildlife again.

Day 6 **Wolong National Nature Reserve** *Trekking & Wildlife Watching*

This morning was very clear and cold, there was a frost over the ground but the views out over the mountains and valleys were just exceptional. Today we could see Mt Balang, which is the most famous peak in Wolong and is home to one of the highest roads in the world on the way towards Tibet. After breakfast we headed into the forest again, we hiked up the grassland dotted with rosehip bushes as we climbed up to the ridge. Along the way we found another northern goshawk, almost certainly one of the pair we saw yesterday and we realised their major prey source as nearly every rosehip bush had at least 2 slaty-backed flycatchers flitting about in and around them.

After around 30-40 minutes we arrived at the ridge and immediately the rhododendrons welcomed us into the thick bamboo, the views out on the north side of the ridge were incredible as this is where most of the Drumooshan mountain range is. So we started our hike and before long we were once again encompassed by arrow bamboo.

There was so much giant panda dung around, including some just 2 days old and then whilst navigating a descent through thick bamboo Martin spotted a beautiful red panda lay down looking at us from a branch. The panda was basking in the only spot of sunlight in the branch. It was horizontal and because of our descent at eye level with us.



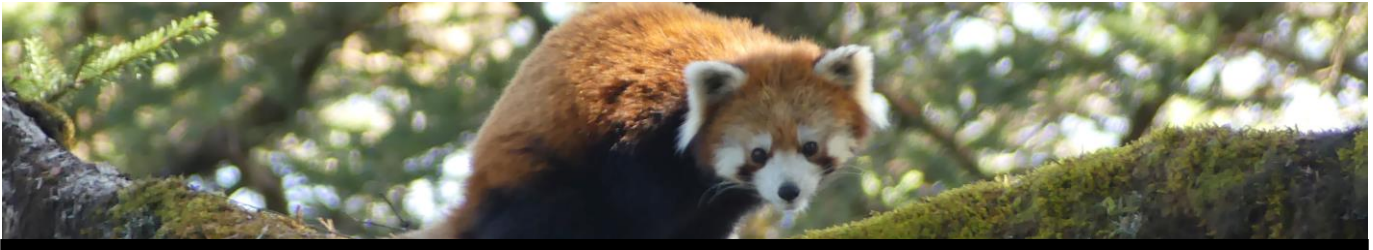
We couldn't have placed the panda in a better photographic position. It was a little under full adult size and may have been a youngster or a sub-adult female. It intently stared at us as it repositioned itself along the branch to take in as much sun as possible. We watched for around 15-20 minutes before deciding to leave the panda in peace and we continued on our quest down the slope.

We stopped for lunch near we well used giant panda scent marking tree and close to here we found very fresh dung from a mother and cub panda. From the size of the youngsters dung Yang estimated it as around 1 year old. It was so fresh that the dung was still steaming, considering it was deposited in the shade this was very fresh.

As we moved along the gullies and to a small opening of open water along a frozen stream we saw the tracks from several pandas as they regularly come here to drink. A Swinhoe's striped squirrel was spotted here foraging on a tree trunk before disappearing into the bamboo.

Following the valley floor we came to a very sunny narrow gully, climbing up we had some wonderful bird sightings including grey-headed parrotbill, aberrant bush warbler, winter wren and coal tits but no panda. As we closed into the gully that would take us back to our valley and camp we met the rest of our team who had scouted out another area in another valley. They had seen some panda dung but none fresher than around 1 week old, but they did have some views of a troop of around 10 golden snub-nosed monkeys.

We arrived back at the camp at around 16:00 and had a short rest before dinner and then chilled out for retiring to our tents for a well deserved rest.



Day 7 Wolong National Nature Reserve *Trekking & Wildlife Watching*

This morning was another gloriously clear day with the views stretching out over to Mt Balang well in the distance. After breakfast we headed up the grassy hillside to the ridge, we went the way up that we came down yesterday, we would be trying a part of the same valley as yesterday. We then walked along the ridge, the contrast between the deforested grassland on one side and the rich and dense rhododendron, wild cherry, birch and bamboo forest on the other being a constant reminder that people have a major impact on the survival of the forests here. Of course you lose the forests and then you also lose the species that are very dependent on these forests such as the giant and red pandas, which are completely dependent on the bamboo at these elevations.

It was whilst walking down one of the snowy gullies that line this valley that Martin spotted his second red panda in two days. This was a much younger individual than yesterday, being around two thirds of the size and having a much smaller, rounder face and smaller ears that didn't seem as pointed and triangular as yesterdays. We spotted it whilst it was still asleep, perched at the top of a dead branch of a rhododendron tree. As we all moved a little close (to around 30m away) on a ridge that gave us eye level views but allowed the panda to realise that it was still a good distance away from us as the thick bamboo ravine stood between us. The panda woke up and seemed oblivious to us, we watched in the bamboo as it stretched and then walked down the tree, using its flexible ankles which can switch backwards allowing the panda to climb down a vertical tree trunk head first. As soon as it reached the ground and the thick bamboo it disappeared. We couldn't even hear it as it moved through the bamboo and away into the forest.

We then carried on down the gully and over the valley floor to the other side. Climbing up through the arrow bamboo we didn't see any fresh giant or red panda dung, we saw many different ones but none from the last couple of days. We moved to the top of the ridge and still nothing fresh. This ridge was stunning, the views through the pine trees on the other side stretching out to the large mountains of a section of the Drumooshan mountains we hadn't seen yet. We scanned and searched the bamboo down below us on both sides and also the opposite slope and the trees but it wasn't to be. We started our descent and then climb back up to our camp site. We arrived back in the late afternoon and rested again. The accumulated fatigue of the previous few days hard hiking taking its toll on us all.

Tomorrow we would head back down to Wolong, have our final meal with the awesome and hardy team of rangers we had with us and then we would then head out with Sid to two major hotspots for wildlife in Sichuan and hope to see some of the more common and at least less elusive species this part of China has to offer.

Day 8 Wolong National Nature Reserve *Trekking*

This morning we awoke to the sound of rain on our tents, it had been raining for most of the night and whilst it was lighter now than it had been for most of the night we were still not looking forward to the long walk down the mountains if the rain persisted. However by the time we were up, packed up, had had breakfast, the rest of the



porters had arrived and they had eaten the rain had abated and we set off. It was still very misty and cool today, but it remained dry for the walk down.

We went a different direction, more direct over the grassland, which is easier to go down than up and made it to the road in around 2.5 hours. We spotted some ravens, an Eurasian magpie and a nice upland buzzard on the way down too.

We arrived at the hotel at 13:30 and quickly showered and changed and then had a celebratory lunch with the trekking team in the hotel before bidding our farewells to them. The rest of the day was spent relaxing, reorganising our bags for the next stage of our tour, when Sid would collect us and drive us high onto the Tibetan Plateau.



Day 9 Rouergai

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

So this morning we said goodbye to Wolong and left with Sid for the long drive to Tibet. On the way we spotted a giant panda in a tree around 200m off the main road up the slope of the valley into the forest! We were amazed, however our joy was short lived, this is a captive panda belonging to an old (but still used) panda breeding centre, whilst it was very difficult to see, there was a fence around the panda and alas our last chance in Wolong for a wild panda had come and gone. However not to be too downhearted we carried on and drove along the valley of the Mingjang River for many miles, before turning off the road to Chengdu and heading northwards towards the edge of the vast Tibetan Plateau and our home for the next 3 nights.

At around 12:30 we stopped in the town of Songpan for lunch and then continued on, occasionally stopping for birds which included hill pigeons, Himalayan buzzard, red-billed chough, black-eared kites and then when we arrived on the plateau a pair of golden eagles close to the road and perched on a pylon. First just one and then as we watched a second joined, then shortly after here one of the first migratory black-necked cranes flew low over the car as they make their way back to the Plateau after wintering further south in places like Bhutan. Another avian highlight of the drive was a large flock of enormous black vultures flying over a ridge and circling on a thermal to gain height and then disappearing over the horizon. This usually solitary bird must be gathering in flocks for migratory reasons and it was great to see so many in one place.

We arrived at the hotel at 16:40 and then checked in, we planned to leave at 18:00 to begin our first night drive of the grasslands around here and try some of the sites that Sid has nailed down for some elusive and wonderful species over the years. Along the main road we had some views of a northern harrier, a large black-lipped pika colony (which are everywhere here and the main reason for the abundance of raptors and mammal predators here) which was still active despite it being nearly dark, white-rumped snowfinches and a nice upland buzzard sighting.

As we began to start our first spotlighting the snow started to fall, it was very misty and with the wind lashing the snow into our faces the spotlighting was hard going. But we persevered and found this area teeming with Tibetan foxes, they were all quite distant with the closest sighting being around 80m away, however the snow was hindering us and many of the species we targeted wouldn't be very active in weather like this. So we left this area and its 8 Tibetan foxes to try another road on the other side of town. However the snow was increasing in severity and the roads were becoming more and more treacherous and we called it early, with just a woolly hare (albeit a nice sighting of one) our sole find on this road. We hoped for significantly improved weather tomorrow morning.

Day 10 Rouergai

Wildlife Watching

At 6am we went out into the grassland, just before dawn, we only went to the nearby road as the passes would likely be blocked by trucks which had given up in the snow and ice from last night and could be blocking the roads. We didn't want to risk getting stuck behind these and so headed out around the grasslands nearby the town. The snow was very thick and the wind was biting. This affected our spotting and we only found a couple of woolly hares here this morning. So after here we decided to go to the other areas, now the sun was up and some of the snow was beginning to thaw out the trucks were moving again. Along the way we found a merlin chasing a flock of small birds just over the road, the mixed flock of white-rumped snowfinches, horned larks and Eurasian tree sparrows all flying in different directions until the merlin had gone away. The wind was very fierce coming down from the hills and lowering the temperature significantly. We did however find some Tibetan gazelles hunkered down in the snow as well as steppe eagle, red-necked snowfinch and a saker falcon with a freshly caught pika. We watched as the falcon tore the fur off and flung it away and then began to eat the flesh. Throughout the morning the



temperature continued to drop and ice began to build up on the road, the pikas were hardly out and as a result most of the animals we aimed to see (the predators of the pika) were not very active.

Trying different roads for the rest of the day we saw more and more raptors including a lot of upland buzzards and another saker falcon, this one hunting birds. It tried 3 times to stoop and catch a rosetfinch before giving up. On the ground was a huge herd of red-billed choughs feeding on grain from nearby grain stores, the wind most of blown some of the seeds off and the choughs were here en masse to feed. We did find many more gazelles, several groups of them on the hillsides including one large herd of around 20 individual moving along the slope not far from us. As it approached midday the sun was coming out more and the wind was dying down. We had higher hopes for the evening if the weather held like this.

On our way to town and for lunch we found a pair of Eurasian hoopoes feeding on the ground next to the road, in the distance was a pair of immature lammergeiers, one of which had found a carcass and was eating it. Nearby to these birds was a small number of black-necked cranes too. We also briefly checked out one of two quarries, these quarries are the best sites for the two species of cats we hoped for. We wanted to check if it would be accessible this evening. As we arrived at the quarry we spooked a pair of red foxes which got up and ran off and away. But the really good news is that we would be able to come here tonight, the snow had not negatively affected this region.

So after lunch and a rest back at the hotel we went back out at 16:30, on the way to the road we would try we had a male northern harrier flying parallel with the road and an immature steppe eagle on a ridge. Driving before dusk we didn't see much the snow was still quite deep here and it was only as we were leaving the area that Bobbie and Martin spotted a Pallas's cat as it ran away from us on the ridge line and out of sight. We tried to find it again but couldn't and instead went to see what we could find at the quarries.

As we entered the quarry we found a saker falcon and some distant Tibetan gazelles and as we scanned the slope we found a pair of Tibetan foxes and then sat on its haunches looking right at us was a Chinese mountain cat. We had some great views of this large male cat before it got up and walked away and down into the quarry. We then walked towards quarry and scanned and spotted along the way. We wanted to see if we could see the Chinese mountain cat better in the quarry. As we walked along we had an unexpected bonus of a Pallas's cat in almost the exact same place as the mountain cat. It was just sat and staring at us and around the quarry. For around 10 minutes we watched the Pallas's cat before it slunk down and stalked away from us and into the quarry. 3 species of predator all seen pretty much on the same rock within 15-20 minutes of each other, what an incredible place.

We looked into the quarry but the cats were nowhere to be seen, we did have a fleeting view of a little owl before we left and walked back to the car. We scanned along the way and found a second Chinese mountain cat walking along the boulders and in and out of the rocks before disappearing, we had a red fox sighting here too before going back to the car and driving to another road for some more spotlighting. This was quiet once again with the only animal seen being an amazing Chinese mountain cat (a third seen) and seen very well as it walked along the grassland searching for food.

What a night, 2 Pallas's cats and 3 Chinese mountain cats, not a bad day considering it started so badly with snow and wind that it could have been written off completely.



Day 11 **Rouergai**

Wildlife Watching

This morning we went out again at 6am and travelled to the nearby coniferous forest of Baxi. Baxi is found full of birds, some of the more common ones including black-eared kites, carrion crows and white-rumped snowfinches but also some very nice birds such as the endemic white-browed tit, plain laughingthrush and Elliot's laughingthrush. Driving the roads and waiting for the sun to come up further we found a male and female blood pheasant on the road foraging. Then as the sun rose high enough to penetrate into the depths of the valley a large flock of blood pheasants were feeding in the open and then next to them were 3 much larger and more beautiful blue-eared pheasants feeding, digging away the snow to get to the soft earth and seeds beneath. We watched for a while until they all left and went back into the forest.

We then had breakfast in the field before walking into the forest, the snow was heavy here, the sun had not melted it off yet and we struggled for birds. The Thomas's pika which is a forest living cousin of the abundant black-lipped pika was not to be seen. We saw tracks of one animal but they have underground larders of food to make it through tough times and inclement weather. So we didn't hold much hope of seeing one, however we did find more blood pheasants in the forest and we also found another endemic bird the Sichuan tit.



Leaving the forest and getting back in the car we drove further along around here as the sun continued to melt the snow, we were struggling to see Siberian roe deer and sika deer which are usually common species on the hillsides and ridges here; but we dipped on these species.

There were more great birds including the common pheasant, Kessler's thrush, golden eagles, Himalayan griffon vultures and pink-rumped snowfinches before we turned around and started to head back to the town for lunch.

On getting out of Baxi and back to the plateau we spotted a Himalayan marmot which was sunning itself and then darted back into its hole. A few more were seen on the sunny slopes and these were the first marmots of the year, emerging from their hibernation as the snow melted away and the sun warmed the air. Before getting to town we also found a male and female pair of black-necked cranes with their year old chick foraging along the banks of a small stream not far from the road. There were more and more cranes arriving here for the summer, along with the marmots it was great to be here at the turn of the seasons (winter ending and spring starting) and seeing the different animals migrate away, migrate here and come out of hibernation.

After lunch and a small rest we headed out again at around 17:00 and wanted to head towards a narrow canyon we hadn't been down because the road was not accessible earlier. On the drive there we found a pair of black-necked cranes displaying their courtship dance and nice views of close Tibetan foxes before coming across a migratory steppe eagle flock. There were dozens of steppe eagles around, on the ground and posts as they gathered in the pika colonies to feed and roost before starting their migration northwards to their breeding grounds in Mongolia. As we were watching the steppe eagles a sakar falcon came whizzing past low to the ground next to the car, we followed it as it perched on one of the posts.

Then we made it to the road we would be going down as far as we could today, some Tibetan gazelles greeted us as we drove down, including close views of a mother and her calf. We crossed the high pass and started to descend the road down into the canyon, the mountains here reaching over 5,000m and the terrain looking more and more like snow leopard territory than the plateaus. Despite being some of the most spectacular landscapes we had seen in China so far we didn't see much and we were unable to get deep inside the canyon (a sheet of ice lay on the road and stopped our progress) and to the forest were an unidentified species of flying squirrel had been seen. So we turned around, spotlighted a couple of red foxes before entering the grassland again. Here we had numerous Tibetan foxes and some woolly hares before the highlight of the day, in the middle of the grassland, out in the open and around 50m away was a Pallas's cat. Laying down and looking directly at us, we watched for a few minutes and then it got up and walked in the typical Pallas's cat fashion (low to the ground) away from us and spooked a Tibetan fox which bolted away. What a great sighting and a fantastic way to end the day. We then went back to the hotel for the night.

Day 12 Tangjiahe National Nature Reserve *Travelling & Wildlife Watching*

This morning we left at 6:30 and bought some steamed bao buns for breakfast and went over to Baxi to see if we could see any of the so far elusive deer species. We failed with the common deer but had incredible views of 4 Tibetan wolves, including one on the road just 40m away and then the other three parallel with the car. In typical wolf fashion they didn't hang around long and continued moving the whole time and off and away out of sight, moving in their efficient trot quickly over the ground.

We then started the long journey to Tangjiahe, along the way we stopped in a town near Pingwu for lunch and continued our journey through the rugged and imposing terrain of Sichuan to our final wildlife destination of the trip. Entering the reserve there is a long drive through the forest, alongside the river to get to the accommodation, along this road we spotted several of the abundant Reeve's muntjac feeding on the sides of the road as well as a few of the much larger and stranger looking Sichuan takin. It began to get dark as we drove this road and spotlighting we found Chinese goral on the rocky slopes on the far side of the river as well as nice but brief sighting of a Himalayan palm civet on the rocky river bank, heading in and out of the rocks, possibly looking for food or a place to hide from our spotlight. There was a second Himalayan palm civet closer to the accommodation, most likely feeding from the bins and other manmade refuse left around all habitation and in between we had very brief and poor views of a complex-toothed flying squirrel in a distant tree on the far side of the river.

On arrival we checked into the very elaborate and grand accommodation (which we had to ourselves) and split into two groups with Monty and Bobbie deciding to stay at the accommodation and rest and Sid and Martin heading out to see what else we could find. We drove the length of the road again and found many of the same species we had already seen, plus some bats flying around, Confucian niviventers running alongside the road, Sid had brief views of red and white flying squirrel; but our highlight was a pair of tawny fish owls perched at eye level on a large branch close to the road.

After an almost inhuman amount of hours driving today Sid turned around after getting to the bottom of the road and we headed back to the hotel. No further sightings of note were made and we went to bed for a short sleep before getting up and seeing what animals we could find on a pre-dawn drive.



Day 13 **Tangjiahe National Nature Reserve**

Wildlife Watching

This morning we were out at 5:45am and spotlighting back down the main road towards the entrance to the reserve. Once again we many Sichuan takin and the much much smaller Reeve's muntjac. But there were no other species seen this morning, when we got to the end of the road we got out and walked some of road and trails around here. We saw many redstarts around including white-browed redstarts, plumbeous water redstarts and Daurian redstarts around the river, some of the large yarn carp could be seen in the clear water, but we were not lucky enough to see any otters or fish eagles which are the main predators of the carp (along with the very rare and next to impossible to see Chinese giant salamanders).

Coming back to the hotel we walked around the grounds and some other trails here in search of more mammals and birds, being the only tourists here at the moment the usually abundant and confident Tibetan macaques were not around at first. However later this morning we had a small group hanging around the carpark and raiding the bins as well as feeding on fresh spring buds on the trees next to the road. Also seen around here was a busy Pere David's rock squirrel, the squirrel was running around on the rocky river bank foraging in the early morning sun. We scanned the surrounding hillsides for golden snub-nosed monkeys which are sometimes seen in the forests around here, but without any luck. But there were many birds around including large groups of red-billed blue magpies and some close up views of Daurian redstarts.

We then walked the 8km up the road behind the hotel and found more wildlife, including slaty buntings and great views of a male tufted deer feeding on grass on the other side of the river. We watched him feeding for a good while before carrying on. Nearby here was a feeding Pere David's rock squirrel just next to the road, a small cave was full of nut shells showing that this busy squirrel is regularly here and regularly feeding. Our only other sighting of note this morning was a pair of brown dippers diving in and out of the river looking for aquatic invertebrates.

We then came back to the hotel for breakfast and a break during the middle of the day. During the early afternoon Monty went for a walk around some of the close trails and had nice views of crimson-breasted woodpecker and crested kingfishers as well as a tufted deer. It was the same male that was making its way down the river from where we saw him to the hotel. This male is distinctive with many scars from fights with other males on his body, he is also regularly seen and not too bothered by people.

Later this afternoon we all went back out again, passing a large troop of Tibetan macaques climbing into their roosting trees and rocky ledges on a cliff face for the night. As the sun began to fall behind the rugged mountains we found a few single Eurasian wild pigs as well as the commonly seen Sichuan takins and Reeve's muntjacs. We did have our first good views of a Chinese serow feeding on a grassy slope opposite us. Then walking just after dark we flushed a pair of Chinese goral out and they ran off and over the river away from us. We also found a takin on foot, but luckily (as they are quite unpredictable up close) we didn't spook him and he ignored us. We then spotlit a northern leopard cat very briefly. The small cat was just about seen by Sid before it disappeared silently into some thick grass just off the road. Returning toward the accommodation we had many Reeve's muntjacs and Sichuan Takins a fantastic close view of a Chinese serow, many Chinese goral and a Himalayan palm civet walking across the lawn of our hotel. We did find one new species tonight, we had two views of the same northern hog badger. Quickly moving around the steep slope to the side of the road as it went in search of food, nose to the ground and foraging for edible morsels in between the rocks and vegetation.

We then returned to the hotel for the night, we would have one more early morning drive tomorrow before beginning our journey back to Chengdu tomorrow.

Day 14 **Tangjiahe NNR / Chengdu**

Wildlife Watching & Travelling

This morning was our last trip out into the forest and at 5:45am the pre-dawn drive didn't result in any new mammal species. We had great Sichuan takin, Reeve's muntjac sightings once again and of a smaller number of Chinese goral in the distance. As the dawn broke we went for a small walk to look for one of the most attractive bird species here (as Monty and Bobbie have a personal interest in birds and this one in particular) the golden pheasant.

After playing calls and listening to the bird replying in the dense bushes for a few minutes the beautiful golden pheasant came out and into view. After watching the pheasant walk back into the vegetation and out of view we returned to the hotel, had some breakfast and then packed up.



The drive back to Chengdu is a long one and we stopped for lunch along the way before arriving in the city and at the airport hotel

Species List

Sichuan's Mammals Tour

Mar 2018

Mammals (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Giant panda	<i>Ailuropoda melanoleuca</i>
2	Red panda	<i>Ailurus fulgens</i>
3	Northern hog badger	<i>Arctonyx albogularis</i>
4	Sichuan takin	<i>Budorcas tibetana</i>
5	Tibetan wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>
6	Chinese serow	<i>Capricornis milneedwardsii</i>
7	Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
8	Tufted deer	<i>Elaphodus cephalophus</i>
9	Chinese zokor	<i>Eospalax fontanierii</i>
10	Chinese mountain cat	<i>Felis bieti</i>
11	Malayan porcupine	<i>Hystrix brachyura</i>
12	Woolly hare	<i>Lepus oiostolus</i>
13	Tibetan macaque	<i>Macaca thibetana</i>
14	Himalayan marmot	<i>Marmota himalayana</i>
15	Asian badger	<i>Meles leucurus</i>
16	Reeve's muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>
17	Chinese goral	<i>Naemorhedus griseus</i>
18	Confucian niviventer	<i>Niviventer confucianus</i>
19	Plateau pika	<i>Ochotona curzoniae</i>
20	Thomas's pika	<i>Ochotona thomasi</i>
21	Pallas's cat	<i>Otocolobus manul</i>
22	Himalayan palm civet	<i>Paguma larvata</i>
23	Red-and-white flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista alborufus</i>
24	Northern leopard cat	<i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>
25	Tibetan gazelle	<i>Procapra picticaudata</i>
26	Pearson's horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus pearsonii</i>
27	Golden snub-nosed monkey	<i>Rhinopithecus roxellana</i>
28	Pere David's rock squirrel	<i>Sciurotamias davidianus</i>
29	Eurasian wild pig	<i>Sus scofra</i>

March													
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30	Swinhoe's striped squirrel	<i>Tamiops swinhoei</i>
31	Complex-toothed flying squirrel	<i>Trogopterus xanthipes</i>
32	Asiatic black bear	<i>Ursus thibetanus</i>
33	Red fox	<i>Vulpe vulpes</i>
34	Tibetan fox	<i>Vulpes ferrilata</i>

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Birds (* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Rufous-faced warbler	<i>Abroscopus albugularis</i>
2	Northern goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
3	Crested goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>
4	Oriental skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
5	Chinese spotbill duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>
6	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
7	Steppe eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>
8	Little owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
9	Upland buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>
10	Himalayan buzzard	<i>Buteo refectus</i>
11	Pink-rumped rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus eos</i>
12	Common rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
13	Red-fronted rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus puniceus</i>
14	Red rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus puniceus</i>
15	Crimson-browed rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus subhimachalus</i>
16	Red-rumped swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
17	Bar-tailed treecreeper	<i>Certhia himalayana</i>
18	Hodgson's treecreeper	<i>Certhia hodgsoni</i>
19	Brown-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus</i>
20	Golden pheasant	<i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>
21	White-tailed robin	<i>Cinclidium leucurum</i>
22	Brown dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>
23	Northern harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
24	Daurian jackdaw	<i>Coloeus dauuricus</i>
25	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
26	Hill pigeon	<i>Columba rupestris</i>
27	Great parrotbill	<i>Conostoma oemodium</i>
28	Black vulture	<i>Coragyps atratus</i>

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