

## Trip report China, Sichuan

*'in search of Red panda, Pallas's cat & more'*

**30 September – 19 October 2017**



Dear reader,

I completed my big cat list with clouded leopard in Malayan Borneo 2016. All the world's 6 big cats: lion, leopard, tiger, jaguar, snow leopard and clouded leopard (except the mainland split of clouded leopard) I had now seen and photographed (see previous trip reports). Happy me 😊

So now a new goal had to be found. Since cats still don't disappoint me, it was actually quite easy and only a short search: '*just continue and try to see all the worlds wild cat species*'. Obviously this goal is much larger because there are far more than 6 species and some of them are probably also even more difficult to see... Anyway with this new goal it was more easy to make new plans and there are more destinations to go look for them.

But not only cats have my interest most bigger mammals like monkeys and ungulates I will look for too. So a best new trip option would be a place where you can see a new cat species and some other interesting mammals. Last winter I read quite some recent reports from trips to China on [www.mammalwatching.com](http://www.mammalwatching.com). They mostly reported some cats: *Pallas's cat*, *Chinese mountain cat* and sometimes *leopard cat* and also not to mention the least: *Red panda*.... Well this region got my very interest, I was thinking what to do and how to organise a tour.

Luckily at that same time there was a post on the mammalwatching forum from Andreas Jonsson, a Swedish man from Goteborg. He asked for travel mates for a China mammal trip with special focus on cats and red panda, huh... time for me to respond 😊 Such a trip would totally suit with my expectations and with someone with same interest and goals.

Well it would work out just as expected and hoped for. We had a successful and pleasant trip in China. Our guide was Roland Zeidler ([wstourix@gmail.com](mailto:wstourix@gmail.com)) who works together with the famous in other reports from mammalwatching mentioned 'Sid Francis' ([chengduuk@hotmail.com](mailto:chengduuk@hotmail.com)). Roland is a devoted to nature German man who lives now in China for 20 years. He did a very good job in our tour working hard, making long hours, driving safe all the tour in his jeep. He organised our hotels and spotted lots of mammals and birds. His close connection with Sid was handy to exchange details about spots and sightings. I would certainly recommend Roland as your guide.

I specially want to thank Andreas for his initiative, great spotting and good company for this cool mammal trip to China!

Since photography is my passion I always try as best to make a good picture of any mammal and most birds I see during the trip.

I hope you will enjoy this report and feel free to commend or ask questions!

At last always thanks again to [www.mammalwatching.com](http://www.mammalwatching.com) for presenting such worth full trip reports. For me it was of great use and guidance.

Best regards,

Janco van Gelderen

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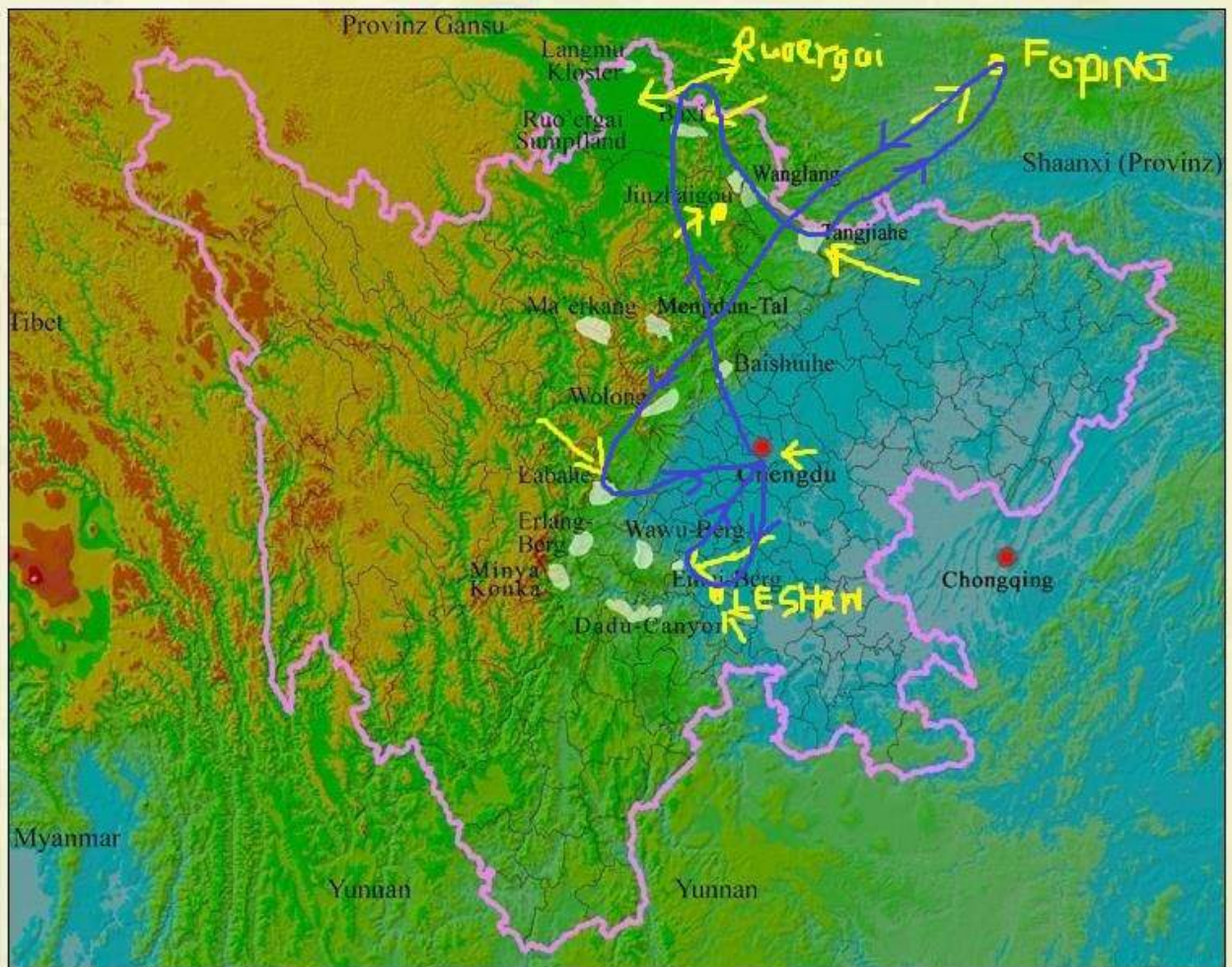
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## Trip itinerary & Places visited (from Roland)

### Remarkable Bird Watching Areas in Sichuan



#### *Official mammal tour 12 days:*

- **Rouergai** 3 nights
- **Baixi** one morning
- **Panda Valley** 1 night (I don't remember exact, somewhere between Rouergai and Tangjiahe)
- **Tangjiahe** 3 nights
- **Foping** 1 night
- **Labahe** 3 nights

#### *Culture part (Previous 5 days before and 1 day after the mammal tour. I travelled by myself)*

- **Chengdu** (culture) 2 nights before and 2 nights after tour.
- **Leshan** (culture) half day
- **Emei Shan** (culture + nature) 2 nights

## Introduction

I arrived on the international Chengdu airport Saturday 30 sept and would have 5 days for myself to travel since our special mammal tour would start only before Thursday 4 Oct. I decided to fill these days with more cultural and photographic focus because this was my first time China. Also we would have a fully mammal focussed 12 day tour after that. Although I obviously would pic all birds and possible mammals on these cultural visits.

## ***Cultural part, a short description of places visited prior to the official mammal tour***

### Chengdu

If you like big cities with loads of high scraper buildings than Chengdu is your place. I never have seen such a forest of endless big flats (maybe Sao Paulo is getting close). Quite a shock to see how big and crowded city life can become. On the other hand to this shock China is quit organised and also rather clean compared to other big cities around the world. Everywhere people are whipping the streets, not only in cities, even on the most off beaten tracks there are still men and women busy cleaning the road. Chengdu's touristic sites are mainly temples and parks and these are quit pleasant and nice to bring a visit. Specially morning group singing and Tai Chi dances in the people's park are interesting to see. Another good thing is that in the parks, temple gardens and around the river you can look for birds.

In the larger trees of the gardens of the Wuhou temple I saw my first and only city mammal: a **Pallas's squirrel**. I stayed in a hostel across the park entrance and made a relaxed morning stroll in the park between all people doing their tai chi exercises.

Chengdu's famous *panda park* is also a nice visit if you have time and would like to see loads of very lazy *Giant panda bears* and a few *Red panda*. Birding there is quite good too.

A more disappointing thing of Chengdu is the constant greyish haze of air pollution over the city and around.

### Leshan & Emei Shan

After two days in Chengdu I went by bus to the **Leshan Buddha** for half a day. This is a nice cultural site with a huge Buddha statue cut from rocks in the riverside. Around is a park with temples, a pagoda and lots of walks. I think if you can visit here early mornings there will be some good birding in the park. You can take a look from the river from one of the many little or bigger boats to see the whole Buddha in one view. It gives a good impression of the huge size of it.

I continued after my short 4 hour visit by bus to **Emei Shan** (Shan = Mountain) which is a famous Buddhist mountain in the western part of the Sichuan Basin. Here I had two days, I had to choose between birding in the lower forest or visiting the famous '*golden summit*'. I choose for the last although the weather was rainy when I arrived here in Emei town. *Tibetan macaques* were on my target list here as well. The weather continued being mostly rainy and foggy, as it seems quite often in this place this time of year.

Emei Shan is very touristic but therefore also well organised for tourist. I happened to be here during 'Chinese holidays', a period of which *the lonely planet* says 'don't ever visit China during Chinese holidays' ☹️. Indeed it was crowded, especially at the golden summit, but this also gave an experience to see how so many people live together in China. Next morning I took the tourist bus direct to the highest parking stop on the mountain. From here you can start a 500 meter climb on a stairs walk to the summit (*beware of the altitude 2500 meter ASL*).

You also can take a cable cart here to the summit but I didn't.

Around this highest bus station I saw my first **Tibetan macaques**. They were next to the first temple on the edges of the steep cliffs and also along the walking tracks. I can confirm the stories I red before in *lonely planet*: these macaques are indeed *dangerous pickpockets or better just robbers...* So please really be careful.

I did see an iPhone being ripped from a girl and it, after some chewing on it, being dropped down from the cliffs ☹️ Do not underestimate these monkeys and better don't keep any loose things in sight. On the other hand you can make some nice pictures of the macaques if you are careful.

*The golden summit* has indeed some nice cultural buildings and it is definitely quit high so walking up is a bit hard job. The bus rides up and down to here, the hike up and down and some looking around the summit took most of my day. I would recommend a visit.

The last morning I visited two temple complexes on the base of the mountain, just an easy walk from Emei-tourist village. Along the little stream and in the forest I saw some nice birds like fork tail.

## ***Mammal tour, a short description of places visited***

### **Rouergai**

Previous trip reports tell that Rouergai has changed quite some bit over time. There is more and more human cattle herding activity. We can confirm that, we did see *Yak & sheep* herds everywhere, even at the most highest grasslands in the mountains. Roland is rather worried about this development. On top of that the actual building of a high-speed railroad straight through this area will give even more disturbance. Just days before our visit a good spotting point for *Pallas's cat* and *Chinese mountain cat* was spoiled by the railroad workers, to our frustration of course! (Other groups had seen both cats in this area just days before ☺) But beside all this bad news Rouergai is still a place of beautiful wide views and if you work hard also still a place to find most of your target mammals like: **Pallas's cat, Chinese mountain cat, Tibetan fox and wolf**. We did find these in three days. We made here long (night) drives, walks and some scanning.

### **Baixi**

This woodland on steep hills just on the sides of the Rouergai plateau shows a big difference compared to the plateau itself. We were not so lucky with the weather, rather cloudy and foggy. Scanning the open places on the hillsides was difficult and we had only some brief views of **sika deer** and **roe deer**, but at least we saw both species. We also had a short walk and looked for some birds.

### **Panda Valley**

We made on our way towards **Tangjiahe** a short one-night stop-over in this 'panda' area. Roland said there would maybe be a chance for *Giant panda*. Next morning we made a rather difficult, slippery and steep hike to the higher bamboo forest but were not lucky to see one. Personally I think chances are very slim to really see one here. But it is a nice misty forest..

### **Tangjiahe**

This place is more or less a big valley with a 15 km long road along the rather wild river. From this road you can spotlight both sides although some parts are very steep and covered with dense forests. The rocky riversides are quite good to check as well. Along the road there are two main more open field parts after a few km from the entrance. We soon called them '*Muntjac fields*' and '*Takin fields*' since we saw these animals here most of the time we passed. We drove these roads multiple times per day mostly in the dark, usually seeing different mammals and amount of animals every time we checked.

From the hotel I made the short hike on the other side of the river across the bridge and saw here Tibetan macaques and wild boar in daytime.

We also took one day the park bus (organised by Roland) to visit the (normally closed) valley on the other side of the park and to look here for pheasants and squirrels. This valley is more narrow but still nice. We saw a **goral** here on the cliffs. We made the hike from the final bus stop to the high pass and saw here *golden pheasant* and *blood-pheasant* on the way.

**Tangjiahe** has by far the best chances to see most different mammals in a trip. But it is also at the same time not very easy to see them all. We stayed here 3 nights, this was enough for us since it also starts being a bit boring driving up and down the same road all the time. I guess if you stay long enough there are still quite some more mammals to be seen. We were happy with the targets we got: **masked palm civet, Chinese serow, Chinese goral, Chinese takin, hogbadger, Reeve's muntjac** and a bonus **leopard cat**.

### **Labahe**

Here we stayed 3 nights. Although we would have liked to start the tour here we changed the itinerary. So Labahe became the last place of the tour instead because of Chinese holidays. Sid told us it was very busy in Labahe on Oct 5 and he strongly recommended to go here later. Although we hoped to maybe win a day in Labahe in our original itinerary in case we would see red panda very soon. We missed that chance.

In Labahe the focus is mainly on *red panda*. We drove direct to the higher area up the mountain where they normally should be around in the fruiting trees. We were not so lucky... it took us quite long to get our first view of a **Red panda**. Luckily Roland found this animal again next day and we had a good view, not for very long because it went down in the bamboo. I think it depends quite on the weather and luck here. Most other groups see more red pandas in three days. Anyway we had one good view ☺. We also made some little hikes here and saw some (not original) **red deer, Tibetan macaque** and **goral**. Also during spotlighting on the high river cliffs **Red-and-White flying squirrel** were easy to find. A final **Malay porcupine** was a nice bonus.

**Total trip list and pictures from next page.**

## TRIPLIST MAMMALS

- **Chengdu** = CD
  - **Emei Shan** = ES
  - **Rouergai** = RO
  - **Baixi** = BX
  - **Tangjiahe** = TJ
  - **Foping** = FO
  - **Labahe** = LA
- 
- **Tibetan Macaque** *Macaca thibetana* **ES:** +- 10 on cliffs and along walking track, **TJ:** a group of 20+ in the hotel walk across the river, 3 near the river on rocks from the road. **LA:** 3 on bridge near entrance and 4 in trees across river from hotel.
  - **Golden Snub-nosed Monkey** *Rhinopithecus roxellana* **FO:** 20+ at the first viewpoint 2 km from the park entrance. This is like Sid said 'a thousand percenter' you'll find out yourself when you get there...
  - **Pere David's Rock Squirrel** *Sciurotamias davidianus* **TJ:** 3 along walking track to the pass in the closed area.
  - **Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel** *Tamiops swinhoei* **LA:** 1 in the same tree as where we saw red panda. They are very quick runners!
  - **Pallas's Squirrel** *Callosciurus erythraeus* **CD:** 1 in high trees of the gardens of the Wuhou temple complex.
  - **Red-and-White Flying Squirrel** *Petaurista alborufus* **LA:** Common (10+) on riverside cliffs on all night drives.
  - **(Grey-headed Flying Squirrel)** *Petaurista elegans* **Labahe:** possible 1 seen in Labahe (we at least saw one different type of squirrel, but could not identify exact)
  - **Woolly Hare** *Lepus comus* **Rouergai** – **RO:** 3 during night drives in the area near the more mountainous part
  - **Plateau (Black-lipped) Pika** *Ochotona curzoniae* **RO:** – abundant, easily to see. Although Roland said some parts are poisoned and there they are not.
  - **Himalayan Marmot** *Marmota himalayana* **RO:** daily and rather common in Rouergai on certain spots.
  - **Tibetan Gazelle** *Procapra picticaudata* **RO:** a view singles seen on different places while scanning or spotlighting. One group of 15+ animals while walking scanning a far hillside.
  - **Confucian Niviventer** (Chinese White-bellied Rat) **TJ:** Probably encountered most nights with most unidentified rodents likely to have been this species.
  - **Pallas's Cat** *Felis manul* **RO** – 3 individuals on a rocky outcrop, a mother and two cubs. Seen quite well but distant. Seen on two different days.
  - **Chinese Mountain Cat** *Felis bieti* **RO:** – two sightings of probably the same individual while spotlighting in the same mountainous area of where we saw the woolly hare. Although the distance between the two places was quite far (3-5km) we think it was the same animal.
  - **Leopard Cat** *Felis bengalensis* **TJ:** One seen very well on the road while spotlighting at Tangjiahe just after dinner on the 3<sup>rd</sup> night. It sat down for some seconds in a forest opening and then crossed the road to disappear in the riverside. (*trip highlight!*). Also a roadkill on the way up to Rouergai, quite high in the mountains. It had a ticked fur, not nice to see this beautiful cat this way.
  - **Tibetan Wolf** *Canis lupus* **RO:** One on the second nightdrive in the same area of the Mountain cat and woolly hare. It was searching in the muddy side of a little stream for some hidden food apparently as it was digging in the mud and also ate something we could not see clear what it was.
  - **Tibetan Fox** *Vulpes ferrilata* **RO:** Seen on all days in daytime and during nightdrives with daily counts of 10+.
  - **Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* **RO:** 10+ seen a bit less than Tibetan fox in the first days but in the end more or less same counts 10+ daily
  - **Red Panda** *Ailurus fulgens* **LA:** one individual seen on two days in the same tree. Watched it for 15 minutes before it went down in the bamboo. Quite a disappointment that we didn't see more animals, although we were very happy seeing this one!
  - **Hog Badger** *Arctonyx collaris* **TJ:** One on the first drive and one a bit better on the third (photo).
  - **Asian Badger** *Meles leucurus* **RO:** 3 animals far away from where we saw the Pallas's cat, great spotting of Roland.

- **Malay Porcupine** *Hystrix brachyura* **LA**: one seen well by Andreas at close range during spotlighting another nice bonus!
- **Himalayan (Masked) Palm Civet** *Paguma larvata* **TJ**: 10+ times seen while spotlighting all along the road and riversides and also in trees.
- **Reeve's Muntjac** *Muntiacus reevesi* **TJ**: Up to 15 each day along the road, both dusk and night. Most seen in the grassy parts.
- **Red Deer** *Cervus elaphus* **LA**: Up to three per day in Labahe (releases from the aborted introduction scheme).
- **Sambar Deer** *Rusa unicolor* **LA**: Up to 10 each night at Labahe and in the garden/salt lick of the hotel at night. Only one daytime view.
- **Sika deer** *Servus nippon* **BX: 2** from the viewpoint scanning the clearing in Baixi, only brief, because of fog and bushes.
- **Roe deer** *Capreolus pygargus* **RO**: 4 +2 during night drive on the lower parts in the mountainous area on the forest edge. **BX**: one individual in the clearing while scanning.
- **Chinese Takin** *Bodorcas taxicolor* **TJ**: rather common at Tangjiahe with 10+ being seen on each drive. Although they seem to travel a bit since we saw groups on both sides of the river but not at the same time.
- **Chinese Serow** *Capricoris milneedwardsii* **TJ**: Great views of at least 4 individuals while spotlighting.
- **Chinese Goral** *Naemorhedus griseus* **TJ**: 10+ some individuals each night, one daytime view on the cliffs in the closed valley from the buss. **LA**: some individuals on the cliffs at night and a daylight one in the park.
- **Wild boar** *Sus scrofa* **TJ**: 2 individuals in daytime on the walk across the river. Two singles during night drive in the grass fields.
- **Korean fieldmouse** *Apodemus peninsulae* **TJ** 1 roadside during nightdrive (photo)
- **Irenes mountain vole** *Neodon irene* **RO** 1 during nightdrive roadside
- **Chinese zokor** *Eospalax fontanierii* **RO** 1 digging one of the piles of them turned out to a quick rebuilt giving a short show in his ground hole when it closed it. Must be thousands of them there underground.
- **Rodent** beside the ones we described above we have seen some more unidentified rodents mostly crossing the road at *Tangjiahe* and *Labahe*
- **Bat** at least one seen flying, **TJ** unidentified
- **(Mountain Weasel)** *Mustela altaica* **RO**: one road kill.



Two **Pallas's cats**, mind the second one in the upper back just above the rock



Two **Pallas's cats**, left and right (I didn't see the rightest one at first)





**Tibetan wolf**



**Chinese mountain cat**



**Himalayan Marmot**



**Plateau pika**



**Red fox (above) Tibetan fox**





Another picture of the **Tibetan wolf**



**Siberian roe deer** at night



**Sika deer (just in the middle)**



**Woolly hare**



**Siberian roe deer (see the white tail/back)**



**Tibetan gazelles**



**Red fox**



**Three Asian badgers**



**Red panda**





**Pere David's Rock Squirrel**



**Pallas's Squirrel**



Funny looking, but quit dangerous **Tibetan Macaques** (*Emei Shan*)





Sambar (above) & red deer





Leopard cat, trip bonus ☺



**Malay porcupine**



**Hog badger**



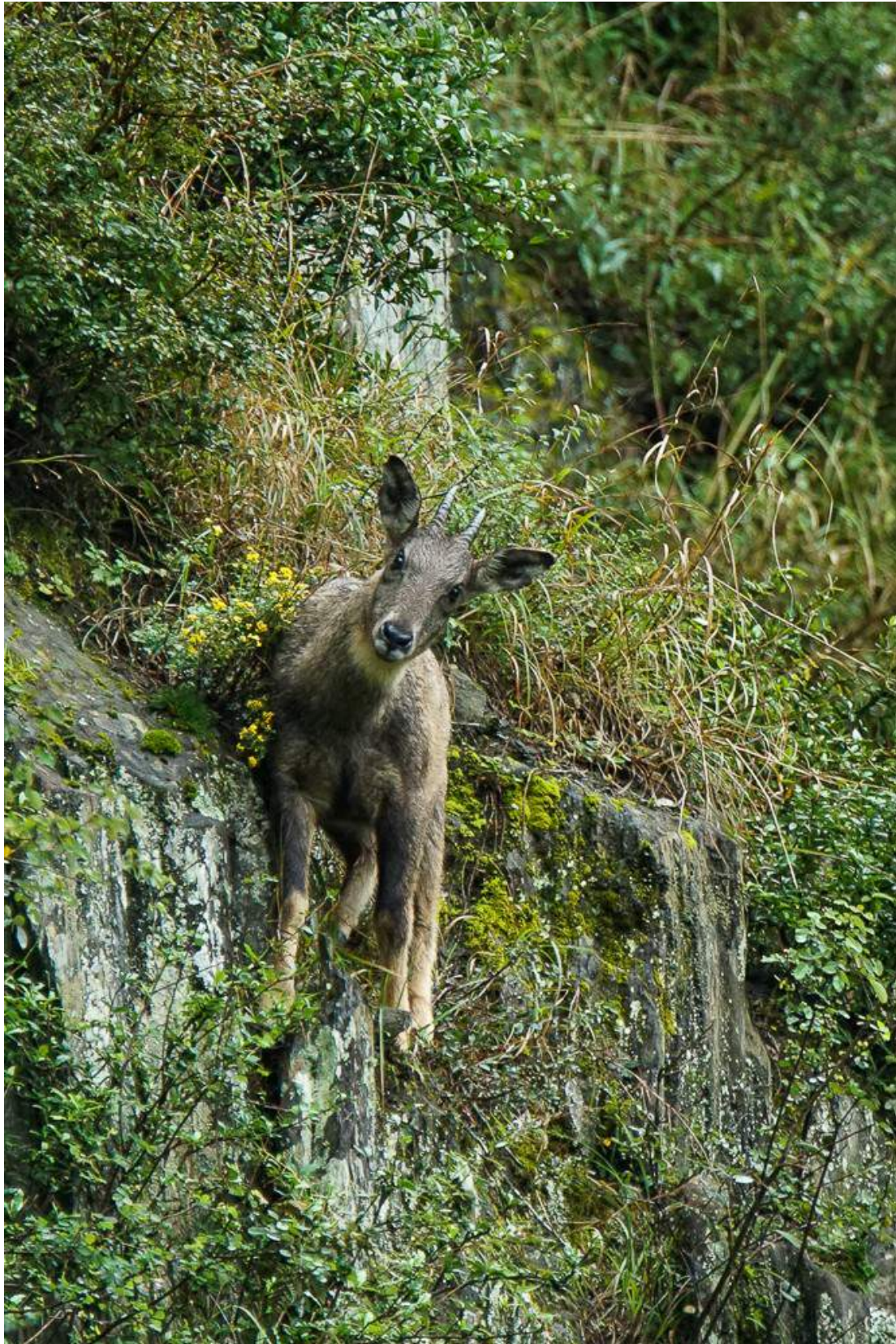
Chinese serow





**Chinese Takin**





**Goral**





**Korean field mouse (probably)**



**Masked palm civet**



**Red-and-White Flying Squirrel**



**Wild boar**



**Golden snub-nosed monkey**





**Golden snub-nosed monkey**





More friendly **Tibetan Macaques** in Tangjiahe





**Lady Amherst's Pheasant( above) & Golden Pheasant (bonus birds ☺)**





**Himalayan Griffon**







**Tibetan Snowcock** (took me a very steep hike to get this pic)